

Christ Our Refuge

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Preacher: Tom Holland

[0 : 00] This morning we're actually going to examine a physical example of Israel in Israel of ancient times!

I was introduced a number of years ago to the ministry of Ray Comfort. I don't know if he remembers it, but Bill Humphries introduced me to his ministry, and I've been forever blessed. He's a really neat guy, a nice little guy. He's about 5'3", 5'4", small in stature. He would go to a large city, lived in a large city in California, and he'd go to a plaza where there's a lot of people, and he'd stand up on a soap box and preach and gather a crowd, and sometimes hostile, and they would yell at him. One guy yelled at him one time, he said, are you on a soap box? And he looked down, he said, yes, I am on a soap box, and he was. But he would engage various individuals, and often in that ministry, he would ask them how many of the ten commandments they could name. And most people that he dealt with could name two or three, and then it got pretty shaky. After naming two or three, they began to struggle.

But it was interesting that almost everybody would mention the sixth commandment, which they quoted as, thou shalt not kill. And we're all familiar with that. It is actually a Hebrew word word in that particular language that the Bible, the Old Testament was written in, that technically says, thou shalt not murder. And we need to obey that, all of us. This was a protection against premeditated, wanton killing of an individual, or murder in the heat or passion of a moment.

You get in an argument with your neighbor over the fence line, and you get so mad that you kill him. Well, that was, that would fall under that commandment, thou shalt not murder over a fence line.

There were certain individuals it didn't apply to. It did not apply to Israeli soldiers protecting the land during a time of war or invasion. In our day, according to Romans chapter 13, and I tell my officers under my command this often, that God has given the sword to a branch of government.

And that's law enforcement and the military. A police officer protecting himself or others from serious bodily injury or death may on occasion take a human life. We've done that 11 times in Bartlesville, that far as I can count since 1897, including one last fall. But it does happen on occasion.

[3 : 36] It would be a protection against some guy driving his chariot in ancient Israel down the road, and some guy stumbles out of a bar. I don't know if they had bars then, and he runs out in front of the chariot and is killed, and then the family wants to seek revenge. Well, that was not premeditated. That was an accident.

That's why we call them to this day, accidents. And of course, the problem was many family members in those circumstances want to take revenge. They would search for the person who had killed a family member, even in an accident, in order to take their life. Well, God came up with an astounding remedy for this.

And we're going to read about that in just a few moments. But I want you to recall that Israel in ancient times, God, as you know, delivered them from bondage in Egypt.

And of course, they got out, and they murmured against God, and they murmured against God, and they murmured against God. And this trip, which straight line would take about 11 days, took 40 years.

40 years. It's a long time. And I just celebrated our 40th anniversary. She'll tell you, that's a long time. And so they were out in the wilderness 40 years, and throughout their trek through the wilderness, they were able to gaze upon various types of God, their Savior.

[5 : 32] Savior. We know his name as the Lord Jesus Christ. They had a name for him, which they wouldn't pronounce, for fear of violating one of the commandments, Yahweh.

But they gazed upon representations, if you will, of their Savior. When the Hebrew arose in the morning, the desert was a brilliant white.

This was from the best expression we have is dew that came down. It appeared almost like frost in this very hot region of the world.

This was manna that God sent down from heaven to feed Israel. They didn't have any food out there in the desert, and God sent manna.

And behind the physical feeding of the nation, the righteous Jew knew there was spiritual application.

[6 : 43] Someday, the Jew knew that God would send heavenly manna down to the nation. it would be the Messiah, the heavenly manna.

And they looked for him for 1600 years. Of course, when he appeared, largely through the religious oppression of the religious elite, they ended up killing him, turning him over to the Romans for execution.

We won't deal with that today. But manna came down and fed the nation. Manna was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ who would one day come to feed his people and save them from their sins.

And I would submit to you, Jesus is still feeding his people. He is at present in heaven interceding for us and for believers everywhere.

And he's feeding his people. Now, this wilderness was quite arid. I've been in that part of the world. Very hot, very dry, practically no water.

[7 : 59] by divine miracle, God sent a rock or a boulder, if you will, to travel with the Israelites.

Pretty astonishing they'd wake up and we'd say, didn't we see that rock yesterday when we were 40 miles away? Yeah. Yeah. When the rock was smitten, water gushed forth and when I was in vacation Bible school as a little lad, I had this picture of like a water fountain and then I realized as I got older they were watering two and a half million people.

That would be a long line for a water fountain. Obviously, that's not going to work. Water gushed forth so that two and a half million people could drink life-sustaining water and this rock it was a rush of water.

It was a river, if you will, of water and this water coming forth from the rock is an example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The rock was Christ and as Isaiah said, he is as rivers of water in the dry place. when a Hebrew would awake in the middle of the night, he might raise up on one elbow and look toward the tent wall to be reassured because there was a glow on the tent wall coming into the tent and he was reassured by that glow of light, if you will, on the wall.

[9 : 57] The glow was produced by a pillar of fire that traveled, that appeared at night to the nation out in the wilderness and gave light to the camp, chased off any enemies.

I would certainly have fled if I'd been an enemy of Israel and the light was there, the pillar of fire was there all night long. The pillar of fire was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Micah would later write, when I sit in darkness, and let me tell you the deserts are dark. I've been in several. They are very dark and Micah said, when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me.

When Israel entered the promised land, all of the types of the Savior were withdrawn. The manna ceased to fall.

The water followed them no more. The pillar cloud actually returned to the Holy of Holies where it resides and one day will reappear at the triumphal entry of Christ as he returns first for his church and later to establish his millennial reign.

[11 : 24] But God provided a new type of Christ, if you will, and we're going to read about that this morning in Joshua chapter 20.

And I talked to the elders this morning and I think this is going to be very regular when Mike gets here, so why don't we stand at the reading of God's word. I'm going to read the entire chapter, all nine verses.

Joshua chapter 20. Then the Lord spoke to Joshua, tell the Israelites, select your cities of refuge as I instructed you through Moses, so that a person who kills someone unintentionally or accidentally may flee there.

these will be your refuge from the avenger of blood. When someone flees to one of these cities, stands at the entrance of the city gate and states his case before the elders of that city, they are to

bring him into the city and give him a place to live among them.

And if the avenger of blood pursues him, they must not hand the one who committed manslaughter over to him, for he killed his neighbor accidentally and did not hate him beforehand.

[13:01] He is to stay in that city until he stands trial before the assembly and until the death of the high priest serving at that time. Then the one who committed manslaughter may return home to his own city from which he fled.

So they designated Kadesh and the hill country of Naphtali and Galilee, Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, Kira Arbor, that is Hebron in the hill country of Judah, across the Jordan east of Jericho they selected Bezer on the wilderness plateau from Reuben's tribe, Ramoth in Gilead from Gad's tribe, and Golan in Bashan from Manasseh's tribe.

These are the cities appointed for all the Israelites and the aliens residing among them, so that anyone who kills a person unintentionally may flee there and not die at the hand of the avenger of blood until he stands before the assembly.

May God bless the reading of his holy word. You may be seated. These six cities, known as the place or the cities of refuge, remind us of the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior, who is our refuge.

refuge. There is no other refuge in the universe, save the Lord Jesus Christ.

[14:54] In ancient times, an aged Israelite could sit with his children or his grandchildren and point out at least one of the six cities of refuge.

refuge. It is said in the ancient rabbinic writings that at least one city in Israel was always in sight from any location in Israel.

The cities were intended to set forth Jesus, the Messiah, as our one true refuge.

refuge. And these cities, these physical cities have much in common with our Lord and Savior. They were like Christ, first of all, in their nearness.

They were near. The six cities were centrally situated. Picture Israel as sort of like Washington County, where you're in right now, and not too much bigger.

[16:08] But picture the Jordan River running down the very middle of Washington County. I'm sure a little cleaner than the Caney.

But it's running down the middle. These six cities, there would be three on one side of the Jordan and three on the other. Two of the cities would be in the north, two centrally located, and two in the south.

And they were always in view. In Israel, no Hebrew and no visitor, and we will learn the cities of refuge applied also to Gentiles that were visiting Israel.

They were never any further than one half day's journey from a city of refuge. refuge. They were all near depending on where you were at in the country.

Christ Jesus is like these cities. He is always near. For the unbeliever, he is a mere prayer away.

[17:25] For the believer that wakes up at three o'clock in the morning and is looking at that dark ceiling, and it seems like the world's caving in. He's a prayer away.

And I've said many times, he has VBE, very big ears. He can hear the slightest whispered prayer in the middle of a dark, dark night.

He is always near. We do not have to journey far to find him and enter in. If you happen to be lost here today, you're welcome.

We're glad you're here. Let me tell you that Christ is near. And he can be nearer still. He can actually be so near that before this day is over, he can even take up residence in your heart.

That's good news. these cities were like Christ because they were conspicuous. Five of these cities were on hilltops or on mountains.

[18:34] And people in the valley could see them and they could point. The sojourner said, I need to get to a city of refuge. That's it, right over there, or there's one over there. They were conspicuous.

One was located in a flat desert area, but the city itself rose out of the desert, so it was elevated and very conspicuous.

And these cities were all, from a standpoint of geography, lifted up. They were lifted up. So too is Christ.

He is lifted up. He is our lifted up Savior. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man has been lifted up on the cross.

Whenever and whoever looks at the cross may be saved. Isaiah had this to say, look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth.

[19 : 44] Quoting the Messiah. Isaiah. That's why Isaiah is often referred to as the fifth gospel. Look unto me and be saved.

Doesn't matter where you're at on this earth. And I've been to 46 countries. I always find believers wherever I go. The gospel is so powerful, it will find a way to penetrate the darkest countries on the face of this earth.

And I've always found believers everywhere I go. Any sinner may flee to Christ for refuge. we can flee from the coming wrath. And wrath is coming. And people say, well, what am I fleeing to Christ for?

Because God has wrath for the unsaved. And we need to be in Christ. The Father needs to look at us and see Christ, the imputed righteousness of Christ.

[20 : 55] He imputed to himself our sins. he imputed us his righteousness. That's another message for a later day. These six cities had ease of access.

The Jewish rabbis wrote that the roads leading to the city of refuge were always kept in good repair. They had special workmen who took care of those roads. I feel confident they were not like Interstate 35 in Oklahoma and Texas as we tried to journey down there to see Diane's mother. They're always in disrepair with major delays. There were no delays on these. There were no delays. They were kept in good repair so people could get there quickly.

The roads were wide and the roads were level. Because remember many people traveling that road were fleeing from being killed.

[22 : 01] There was an urgency in their heart. They didn't want to die because they accidentally took a life. They could flee to these cities without delay and without hindrance.

Isaiah spoke of a highway in the desert. And he called it the highway of holiness. That speaks of Christ doesn't it?

We're going to be studying the holiness of God here I think I'm up in September or August. Lee's got that all memorized. He's going to tell me. But we're going to be talking about the holiness of God.

And Isaiah spoke about this highway in the desert. And it was the way of holiness. Surely we all know that is a reference to Christ. There is no hindrance to those who seek him truly.

He doesn't put up any road blocks. He puts up no road blocks. The doors of the church are to be flung open. We're going to get to that. Jesus stands at the door of the church and he yells at people on Highway 75 come all you who are weary and heavy laden.

[23 : 15] Enter in. Enter in. There's no hindrance. A child will find nothing over which to stumble on the road to our refuge.

In fact, a little child travels the road best for of such is the kingdom of God. refuge in Christ Jesus. There is no other name under heaven by which we are saved. And the Bible says that these roads to the cities of refuge had on them waymarks set up.

I had no clue what a waymark was. I had never heard that term before. They're signs. We're all familiar with those, aren't we? They were signs.

And they called them waymarks. The word of God is the greatest waymark because it points to Jesus in every verse old and New Testament.

[24 : 30] We talk about the last book being the revelation of Jesus Christ. This whole book is the revelation of Jesus Christ. And these waymarks were set up. The Messiah is the great waymark.

He is the great sign that God loved us so very much that he gave his only begotten son and that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

The great waymark is Jesus Christ. And we are commanded to follow the signs. You show me a man or a woman who will one day perish and I will tell you they determined to perish.

Paul said in Romans you can go out at night and look up and know there is a God. And if you have trouble doing that in town come out to the farm we'll turn out all the lights including the inside and outside lights and you will see the fingerprints of God.

I promise you. The cities of refuge had gates big gates. gates. Now why they built them I'm not sure because these gates were always open.

[25 : 58] There was never a time when the gates were closed. Other cities had gates and they were closed at night for safety and security reasons.

But the gates in the six cities of refuge were continually open. Isaiah said the gates shall be opened.

And John the revelator comes along in the last book of the Bible and says the gates to heaven shall never be shut. They will never be shut.

So it is with Christ. so it is with our Lord. He is open to receive sinners night and day.

He's always open for business. You will recall that Nicodemus came to him at night and found him to be an open savior.

[26 : 59] Jesus didn't say you know Nicodemus it's bedtime what are you doing here? I mean go home get some rest come out tomorrow. He didn't do that. He was an open savior and whether you come to him early or late you will find Jesus open for business.

How do we know that? He was open for business on the cross. The thief on the cross minutes from death found Christ.

He was open and a willing savior to hear his confession. Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Today you will be with me in paradise. No one who has ever sincerely come to Jesus for refuge found the door shut.

That door is open. Jesus said in John 6 37 he that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.

[28 : 14] He is not in the business of casting out those who come to him. There was also safety in the city of refuge.! You were in danger.

You were in danger outside. You had to make it to the city of refuge. You were being hunted.

People knew that. You were being hunted.

But once inside no one could harm you there. you were under the protection of the city of refuge.

And the people and the elders protected you. Gave you a house to live in. Gave you a house to live in. Once in Christ no one can touch you.

Now you say wait a minute. Persecution. There's believers that die every day. Not outside the permissive will of God. What happens to them? They receive a crown of righteousness.

[29 : 25] They are ushered in to be remembered for eternity. To be remembered for eternity. No one can snatch you out of the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I find this really amazing. The city of refuge were for both Jews and strangers.

The Bible sometimes calls them sojourners. These were people from outside Israel. These were Gentiles. Gentiles. So it is with Christ.

Whosoever may come. Whosoever may come. There are going to be men and women in heaven of every country, every tribe, every language, every age.

And there are going to be people there who have committed every conceivable type of sin. that's who's going to be in heaven.

[30 : 45] Christ seeks those that he can save. He came to seek and save the lost. And even those who spent a good part of their life on this earth as a wretched Christ hater have the possibility of being allowed into the refuge.

their one prayer away. A prayer of genuine repentance. In Psalm 34, the Word of God says this.

I'm not going to read the whole Psalm. Verse 8, Taste and see that the Lord is good. How happy is the person who takes refuge in him.

Isn't that an amazing verse? And I discovered that there's 10 or 12 verses throughout the Psalms that talks about taking refuge in him.

God is very serious about taking refuge in him. And here David says we are happy when we take refuge in him.

[32 : 10] And then David closes that Psalm and he says the Lord redeems the life of his servants. And then he says and all who take refuge in him will not be punished.

And some say will not perish. Will not perish if you've taken refuge in him. the question this morning that we need to answer is this.

Have you taken refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ? I'm confident most of you have. But I'm concerned that there may be some here who have not.

Stop looking for any other refuge. stop looking at your good works. Paul says you don't have any.

Say well I'm going to seek God later in my life.

No. Paul said no one seeks God. Well I'm not going to go astray forever. Paul says all have gone astray.

[33 : 28] There's none righteous not even one. We lean on a Savior. The Lord Jesus Christ who is our strength and he is our refuge.

Take refuge in him today if you have not done so. Thank you.