

Cities of Refuge

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Study given by W.D. Frazee—April 17,

The New Testament tells us that whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope (Romans 15:4). So from the following Old Testament record we draw a New Testament lesson:

“The LORD also spoke unto Joshua, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spoke unto you by the hand of Moses: That the slayer that kills any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither: and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood. And he shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the high priest that shall be in those days: then shall the slayer return, and come unto his own city, and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he fled” Joshua 20:1-6.”

It was Dr. Adams Clark, the famous Methodist commentator, who once stated that the entire Gospel might be taught from this wonderful outline of instruction concerning the cities of refuge.

In those ancient times it was the custom that the nearest relative of a man who was killed was to avenge the murder. God did not see fit to abolish this altogether, but sought to safeguard things. He gave clear instruction that in case of intentional, deliberate, malicious murder, the murderer must pay the penalty with his life. But in case of accidental manslaughter, or in case a man should suddenly do something under provocation but without malicious intent, provision was made for his protection.

Six cities of refuge were provided in Israel after the settling of Canaan. Three were east of the river Jordan and three were west. Among these were such well known cities as Shechem and Hebron and Ramoth-gilead. These cities were the cities of the Levites. It is significant that the very cities in which the ministers of God were located were selected as places of refuge.

Here is a man who had been out with his neighbor chopping wood. The axe head came off and struck and killed his neighbor. The relatives of the man that has been killed think it was murder. They go after the man that caused the death. What could he do?

There is only one thing he could do, and that was to flee. He couldn't wait to have a farewell party. He had to be on his way to a city of refuge.

We are told that these cities were located so they were within a half day journey of any Israelite's home. The roads had to be maintained well. There had to be signs along the road in plain letters pointing to the city of refuge. God did everything He could to let them see how they could escape the sword of the avenger.

It was, of course, a very literal illustration in the case of the man that needed protection. All through it Jesus was seeking to teach them the Gospel.

It is interesting that when that man came to the city he had to stop at the gate. The elders were called together and he stated his case. If they felt that he was within the provision of the plan, "they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them."

I wonder if they had a locating committee. You can imagine the watchman looks down the road and sees a man running. He sees another man coming behind in pursuit. The first man comes, and they give him a hearing. They protect him from his avenger, if he is within the provision. They tell the avenger he has to go.

But then begin the problems. Where is he going to live? Who is going to feed him? How is he going to make a living? These are practical problems. It is interesting what you can read between the lines when you have some experience in this kind of work. But you can see there is nothing imaginary about it. It had to be. It says "they shall give him a place that he may dwell among them."

A whole series of problems began as soon as that man came in the gate. He had to dwell in that city until he stood before the congregation in judgment, or until the death of the high priest. The high priest might live for years, so they took on a problem. But the Lord told them that it was their business if they lived in Hebron or Ramoth-gilead, or Shechem.

When the man came in, what do you suppose would happen if the people said, I doubt if there are any vacancies. The hotel is full. The inn is full. Things are rather crowded. Turn him out. Let the avenger of blood cut his head off. That will relieve everybody of the problem. We won't need to find a place for him then.

Isn't it a wonderful thing to have such a vision of the Lord's work that we recognize part of our work is to be bothered?

Let's look at what all this represents. First the city of refuge represents Jesus. If you are taking notes (and I hope you are) put down these texts:

"I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress:
my God; in Him will I trust" Psalm 91:2

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present

help in trouble” Psalm 46:1.

“The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runs into it, and is safe” Proverbs 18:10.

Jesus lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly;
Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee.
Cover my defenseless head
With the shadow of Thy wings.”

Each of us may see himself in that fleeing man. Each of us may see Jesus in that city of refuge. Thank God there is a refuge. Aren't you glad?

But we better run, and we better hide in Him. In this case our High Priest isn't going to die, but is He going to finish His work? Is He going to finish His term of office? And when that is over, can we go home safely? Yes.

All of this is a representation of Christ, but Christ has various agencies He uses in practical ways.

“The church is God's fortress, His city of refuge which He holds in a revolted world” *Acts of the Apostles*, page 11.

The church is God's city of refuge. Do you believe that? Well why not wreck it then? Why not blow it to pieces? Why not pull it to pieces? Why not introduce termites that will eat away the timber?

The church is the city of refuge. I want to ask you something. If you believe that, where will you be? If you believe that, what will you try to get other people to do?

You will be in the church, and you will try to get other people to come into the church. Why? Because it is a place of refuge.

You were fleeing from the avenger of blood, and he was following hard, and you looked over your shoulder and he is just a quarter of a mile away. You know you have to get to that city.

Suppose somebody comes and says, “Where are you going?”

I am going to that city of refuge.

You had better not get in here. There are too many rascals in there.

But your life is at stake. God told you if you wanted to live, flee to the city of refuge. Who but the Devil would try to scare people away from God's city of refuge? Do you know who the Devil is? He is this man who is trying to kill you. He is the one who is following hard on your track, trying to destroy you. And do we discern it?

We are the lawful prey of the enemy, but thank God there is a refuge in Jesus and in His church. You can't separate those two. Don't try it. The union is so close it is like the head and the body. The Bible says Christ is the head, and His church is the body.

Don't let anyone fool you with the thought that you can be on good terms with the head, and what the body thinks about you doesn't make any difference. The Devil himself is inspiring men with the thought that just so you have your name in heaven it doesn't make any difference if you have it on the church book on earth. I want to declare that for what it is. It is a lie of the Devil to keep people from getting into the city of refuge.

I need a refuge. The avenger of blood is after me. He would like to kill me. He would like to ruin my soul for time and eternity. I read here that, "The church is God's fortress; His city of refuge which He holds in a revolted world." Let's get in the city of refuge and stay there. And let's try to get other people in who need a refuge. Let's not join with anyone who wants to wreck the city.

God has within His church various institutions. He has sanitariums, and schools, and other agencies. Every one of them is to be a city of refuge.

For example, I read in *Education*, page 293, "Every school should be a city of refuge." Should this campus be a city of refuge? Yes.

What is a city of refuge for anyway? If I understand anything about the people who were in those cities back there, if you had gone up and down the streets and taken a census you would have found two classes of people in those cities, whether in Hebron or Ramoth or Shechem. You would find some people who had gotten there because they fled for refuge. You would find some people there to provide the refuge; to build the houses and keep them up; to maintain the services and facilities that were necessary for looking after the refugees.

I wonder how many other classes of people were there. I hope there weren't any. When you have a lifeboat, there are just two kinds of people you need in that lifeboat. Some people that are being rescued and saved from drowning, and some strong men to pull the oars.

Suppose somebody would say, I think I would enjoy the ride out to the wreck and back. Can't I ride along?

What? You mean you want to take the space a man could sit in who could pull an oar?

Yes. I would like to go along for the ride.

In this program there are too many people that want to go along for the ride. If I step on somebody's toes when I say that, then I beg you, get out of the way of God's arrows. Get out of the way of God's convicting Spirit. Ask God to forgive you for that selfish spirit to want to go along for the ride.

There are only two reasons for being here. If you have come as a refugee to get help, thank God, our hands and arms are wide open. We are here to help you, and we hope you get the help you have come to get. And if you have gotten help, will you join us in providing the facilities and services that make it possible for us to take in refugees? Will you do that? If not, will you please, for Jesus' sake, get out of the way and make room for those who need help and want it, and those who have the help to give?

I speak plainly in order that we may understand the seriousness of the hour we are in. Every time there is a big fire in a city the firemen have no end of trouble with people who want to watch. They are not people who need help, and they can't help. They are not running the hose or ladder. They just like to be around watching. There are people who like to be around watching what is going on here.

My dear brother, either get busy and help us, or get out of the way. We have a job to do. A tremendous job to do. Souls all over this world are dying for physical help and spiritual help. Thank God we have a city of refuge, but we need every bed in it. We need every space at the table for two kinds of people—people who need help and those who are willing to give it to them.

Am I saying that too strong? You wouldn't think so if it were your boy who needed to be rescued. You wouldn't think it was too strong if it were your girl who was fleeing for her life. Suppose somebody had to say, Sorry, you have run a long way, but we can't take you in. We are full and overflowing. We have a number of people who just want to sit by and watch, and because of that we can't take you. If that were your boy or girl you would say, Brother Frazee, and the rest of you, why don't you keep busy on the job God gave you?

God wants not only every church and every institution to be a city of refuge, He wants your individual home to be a city of refuge. Did you know that? Some of you live in the community around this campus. Your home is to be a city of refuge. If you live next door or ten thousand miles away, your home is to be a city of refuge.

“Our homes should be a place of refuge for the tempted youth” *Ministry of Healing*, page 354.

“If you have a pleasant home, invite to it the youth who have no home” *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 348.

Yes. The youth who have no home, and perhaps the aged who have no home. There are the weary and worn, the sick and the discouraged; those who need to learn this message. There are many classes of people who need to be invited to a Christian home to share the hospitality of that home for a meal, a night, a week, a month, a year; for whatever time it takes to rescue them and get them to heaven. What a destiny we have.

If half of what I am saying is true, what is there to live for except this? I don't see anything else to live for. I thank God I see nothing else worth living for in this dying world. This is a time of emergency. Believe me, the last opportunity to do

anything along these lines is just over the hill; just around the corner. We could almost measure the time in hours.

Eternity stretches before us, but eternity will not be filled with opportunities like this. There will be no cities of refuge in the heavenly Canaan, for there will be no danger or peril. Everything will be safe from one end to the other. But here and now danger is all about us. What shall we do about it?

Will you make yourself, your home, and this institution, a place of refuge? Let us respond with all our souls and say, Yes. Thank God, this is my business. I live for nothing else.

What is there to flee from anyway? Do you see anything to flee from? Yes, the Devil. Anything else? Sin. The New Testament again and again uses the expression, "the world." John says:

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" 1 John 2:15.

Do you know what is the matter with the world? The Devil is at the head of it. The Bible calls the Devil the prince of this world, the god of this world. Do you feel like fleeing from this world? Are you trying to get out of this world, or get as near to it as you can? Which?

A city of refuge presupposes that somebody needs to flee and wants to get away from something. The world is in league with the Devil. Thank God that He has in this world cities of refuge. But they are like islands in a vast ocean of sin and crime and vice and wickedness. Are you inside, or outside with the world?

At the end of the thousand years at the final judgment all the righteous are going to be in the city with Jesus. Outside, across the great gulf will be all the millions and billions and trillions of lost souls from Cain down to the last one who tries to lift his hand against the remnant church. That will be the great city of refuge. Right now God's church and your home can be cities of refuge like that.

The important thing about this refuge is what is inside and what is not inside. Inside is sustenance, support, help. Outside is the avenger, the murderer who would try to destroy your soul. I pray the Holy Spirit will be very close to us.

If I am a refugee or a Levite, how much do you think I ought to drag of the world as I come into this city of refuge? Would it be possible to take the houses and buildings in the city of refuge and fill them full of the things that would make it just the opposite of a refuge? Has it ever happened? Oh, it has happened so many times that heaven weeps over it.

If I stopped right now everybody would say, Amen. If I go on another ten minutes everybody is not going to say, Amen. But I must meet you at the judgment, and I am more interested in what you will say then than what you will say when you

meet me after this meeting. I must declare the whole counsel of God, so I want to ask some questions.

If the church is God's fortress, His city of refuge, do you think people, either refugees or Levities, ought to drag heresies into the church?

“When men arise, claiming to have a message from God, but instead of warring against principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, they form a hollow square, and turn their weapons against the church militant, be afraid of them” *Testimonies to Ministers*, page 22.

The Lord has not given them any such message to bare. But I want to tell you something. Our greatest problem is not with those men. Our greatest problem is with their sympathizers. Our greatest problem is with people who try to say good Lord and good devil all at once, and try to be friends with all parties who think they are too sweet and too Christian to make an enemy.

But Jesus made enemies. Paul made enemies. And if you stand for truth in this crisis hour, you will make enemies, my friends. Now we should not go out of our way to make enemies, but we should not go out of our way to keep from making enemies. I say the hour has come when God lays upon your soul the responsibility of showing that you do not approve the efforts made to destroy the unity of God's church.

I mean you, my brother. Don't get involved in a lot of hair-splitting theological arguments. That is not the problem. The problem is very simple, and let no one confuse your mind. The problem is whether this is God's true church and is going through, or whether this church is to be rebuked and reproached and rejected and fought against by those who think they have a message from God. That is the issue. If any of you need any help on that, and want it, you can find it in this city of refuge.

When a soul comes trying to get help, and they are pulled off to one side and little things poured into their ears to keep them from getting the help God brought them to get, how much of that do you think we ought to have? None. If you will do your duty we will not have it. If you see things like that, do what the Word of God says by making it a matter of earnest prayer. Then go and reason with the man or woman who dares to drag in those heresies, those criticisms. Plead with their souls. And if they will not listen, take one or two more and carry it through. Then the camp of God can be cleansed from all that.

As God's ambassador I lay that upon our hearts. Let's have a city of refuge, not a camp of seduction. What do you say?

I said if I had stopped awhile ago everybody would say, Amen. If I stopped now there would be more. But I must not stop, because the thing I have just mentioned is not the only peril.

I was greatly cheered when the pastor of the largest church in the Southern Union conference (pastor of the Collegedale church) came out with a two page letter to all his members dealing with the scandalous dress fashions of the present hour. Some of you have seen that letter. If any of you haven't and would like a copy, I will be glad to furnish you with one.

I want you to remember that all through the church today there are men and women who are burdened, and who weep and pray before God over the scandalous styles from head to foot that are being followed. The Spirit of Prophecy tells us plainly that the Devil invented fashions, that fashions are deteriorating the spirituality of our people, and doing more than any other cause to make our members backslide from God.

When the Lord brings someone from the world to a city of refuge, do you think that person ought to have a refuge? It makes my heart bleed when I see in the providence of God some young woman brought to the city of refuge and in some cases made more like the world after being in the city of refuge for several months than she was when she got there. My brethren and sisters, these things ought not to be so. What do you say?

Will you do something about it? Some of you who are very much anxious to do something about the first point I mentioned would be very timid about doing anything about the second point. But I want to say to you that the Devil does not care what road we take just so we fail to reach heaven.

I ask this simple question, if the fashions of the world in 1964 are all right for Christians to follow, why are men and women of God in various places weeping their hearts out over this thing? Shall we have a city of refuge, or shall we have a city of seduction? Shall the young people who come to the city of refuge look more like the world or less like the world as they linger with us? This is something to pray about and weep about, and something for somebody to carry a heart burden about.

I come to another point. It is a very practical point. Some of the things people are fleeing from are tobacco and alcohol. Of course, the reason we need to flee from tobacco and alcohol is because of the influence they have on the body and the mind. But are tobacco and alcohol the only things that have that influence? There are literally thousands of things today that are making it difficult for people to get to heaven. So in His providence God has arranged that there shall be cities of refuge where people may come and get away from tobacco and alcohol, and away from these other things.

I was very much impressed with the current issue of *News Week*. The medical section has a two page article named *Tranquillity and After*. It reviews the past decade of tranquilizers. I glean a few statements from this. Dr. Gainer, who is a member of the American Medical Association Counsel on Drugs says:

"In general I think tranquilizers have caused about as much trouble as they have abolished. . . .

“Another disturbing characteristic of the tranquillizer is that contrary to widespread belief they can be addicting. If a pill-driven society populated by people is made relaxed, sober, cheerful, uninhibited, brave, and brilliant by prescription sounds pleasant, it also makes some observers a bit anxious” *News Week*, April 20, 1964.

I was thinking about it in a practical way. We are about to have some evangelistic meetings downtown. If we knew people could take a certain pill that would make them more likely to accept the message, would we get that pill and pass it around? Anything that will get the people in? What do you think?

Here is the most significant sentence in the whole article. It is tremendous. This is from a doctor who has to do with one of the big drug laboratories of the country. Look how their minds run:

“Even the normal mind could use help. We need a drug that will free our minds from the tyranny of inhibition and self-consciousness” *Ibid*.

When they get these pills made, should we have a lot of those in the city of refuge? My dear friends, I pled with your hearts. How much whiskey should we smuggle in? How many cigarettes shall we have available? Can't we get more people in the city of refuge if we will have cokes in the waiting room?

If a poor soul comes into a city of refuge burdened and heavy laden, distressed and anxious, how much criticism and fault-finding and dissatisfaction do you think he ought to hear? Will it help him? Will that be a refuge?

I know some of you hear criticism. I am being very frank and practical. I want to ask two question. People who run in and out again and tell you all of what is wrong with this place and its program, have they ever gone out and demonstrated how to carry on an institution that is a city of refuge and made a success of it? Do they know of any place they think is doing the kind of job that ought to be done?

If they do, they ought to be there helping do it. Right? And if they do not, but they are sure they know how to do it and have already done it successfully, they ought to be out running a lifeboat, getting people and bringing them in.

Years ago I heard a little proverb. Any dog that will bring a bone will carry one. Whoever told me that the first time explained it, and I have heard it a good many times since.

Don't be flattered when somebody comes from Texas, or Michigan, or California, and begins to tell you all the faults of some other place. Remember that it is only a matter of weeks or hours until they are off to some other part of the world telling about your faults and the faults of this place. Don't fool yourself on that at all. And don't join in the cannibalism.

Let's have a city of refuge where poor tempest tossed souls can come and find peace and rest and not be harassed with dissatisfaction and murmuring and criticism. Our business is to be sure that this is a city of refuge.

The latest idea is that if we could get the furniture expensive enough and the facilities expensive enough, and everything comfortable enough that would make it a better city of refuge.

I want to tell you that some of these refugees are fleeing from the complexity and luxury and heart burdens that the things of this world are causing. They are looking for a quiet place in the hills like Enoch had. That is not fifth avenue brought to the mountains, and don't think it is. I read:

“Those who are influenced against the truth by a lack of extravagance in house, in furniture, in dress, show that they are incapable of understanding the merit of truth. God is dishonored when those connected with the work, which is to prepare a people to stand the test in the time of trouble, forsake Him to follow the fashions of the world. Those who believe the truth will never be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus. You are not to seek that popularity which is left far away from the simplicity of Christ. The principles of truth are to pervade our institutions. And then as those who have followed the customs and fashions of the world shall, in their suffering, come to these institutions, they will see a simplicity that will charm their senses. They will feel the unseen presence of the heavenly angels” *Medical Ministry*, page 167.

It is not right and fair to take the facilities that have been provided by the money, the sweat, the tears, and the blood of those who believe in these principles of reform, and use those facilities in exactly the other direction. Not at all. The world is wide and opportunity beacons on every hand.

The honest thing for the man to do who thinks the way to run a city of refuge is to drag in some of these things is to go out and find a place, finance it with his own money, or the money of those who agree with that theory, and let those who believe that God wants a place free from all those things continue to carry on a place so those who want a place absent from the world can find what they are looking for. Oh, the Lord grant it.

Now I know that unless the Lord helps us in a special way someone is going to wish I had left out part of this sermon. I am sure of that. But I want to tell you something. The part you would leave out is the very part someone else said Amen to. And it could be that the very part you would like to have left out is the part you need more than any other part of this sermon. That could be, dear brother, dear sister.

Let no one sit in judgment on his brother. But I appeal to you, go to your knees and ask God what this means to you. Ask Him what it means to have a city of

refuge in a world that is almost all gone with the Devil. Ask Him what it means to have a place that is like a boat in the water, but the water not in the boat.

That is the way the church is to be in the world. It is to be in the world, but the world is not to be in the church. Ask Him what it means to you personally to be a part of a city of refuge.

I come back now to what we looked at. There are two kinds of people in a city of refuge. There are people who come to find refuge, and people who are there to help them find it. Will you fill the place of one or the other? And will you ask God to make your home a place where men can find refuge from sin and the world; a place that gets them ready for heaven?

Students, is your bedroom a refuge? When some other young person drops in for a little chat, is it a refuge? Is there prayer? Is there a lifting toward God? I thank God that in many a room on this campus that is exactly what is happening among our young people.

I thank God for the loyal hearts of those who are burdened for conditions in Israel. I am praying God will help us all, old and young, to move into line, and come up on any points we are weak on. I am praying He will help us to plead with God and one another until every bit of heresy, every bit of worldliness, every bit of criticism is banished from our hearts and homes, and from every square inch of this campus. Will you join me in that prayer?

Remember, if there is some point you do not see any light in, please do something about what you do see light in. If you will get busy about that, you will soon see light in the rest. Let not what you do not see keep you away from what you do see. And if you think I need help on anything I have said, will you come and help me?

Brothers and sisters, I say what I have said from a burdened heart, but with a hopeful heart. I know that Jesus is running a city of refuge, and I know that His Spirit witnesses with every effort to make a place where people can find a refuge from the storm.

Remember that to establish a city of refuge in this world and in His church Jesus gave His own life that we might be free from the avenger of blood. Christ took the stroke upon Himself.

I am so glad that the One who died for us lives for us, and that it is His hand that beacons to the gate of refuge.

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