

The Cities of Refuge, or the Sinner's

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon emphasizes God's love for sinners and the provision of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which offers a security that is divinely arranged, justly secured, and eternally guaranteed.

Scripture: Joshua 20:1, Hebrews 6:18

Topics: "Grace", "Salvation"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes God's provision for sinners through the cities of refuge, illustrating how these ancient sanctuaries symbolize the grace and mercy available in Christ. He highlights that just as the cities were accessible and safe for those in need, so too is the Gospel open to all who seek refuge in Jesus. Simpson underscores the importance of fleeing to Christ for salvation and remaining within the safety of His grace, while also stressing that true sanctification should lead to a deeper compassion for the lost. The sermon calls believers to actively engage in the mission of seeking and saving the lost, reflecting God's love and justice.

Transcript

"Who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." (Heb. 6: 18; Josh. 20.)

This chapter describes the arrangements in ancient Israel for the protection of persons accused of murder or manslaughter. It was no unusual thing in ancient times to provide asylums for such persons. It is said that the city of Rome was originally peopled by refugees from all countries, who were promised immunity by Romulus, and who came to the asylum established for them, and afterward became citizens of Rome.

The arrangements made by God through Moses and Joshua were of a much wiser and more righteous character. It is very significant that God should so emphasize His care for the sinner in this book, which is so specially devoted to typify the principles of the higher Christian life.

GOD'S LOVE FOR SINNERS

At the very threshold of the land we meet Rahab, of Jericho, a woman representing the very worst class of society, and we find her not only saved, by the grace of God, but introduced into the ancestral line of David and of Christ Himself, and one of the mothers of the royal family of the eternal ages. And here at the close of the book, in the most careful provision which Jehovah made for the protection of the manslayer, we see a very emphatic hint of God's gracious care for the sinful and the lost.

Surely, it is meant to teach us that the higher we rise in the experience of God's grace, the lower we will stoop in the exercise of His mercy toward the fallen, and the more will we labor and care for the recovery of the lost. Let us never get so sanctified that we shall be out of reach of poor sinners, or lose our sympathy for them, and theirs for us. The nearer we come to our Master, the more frequently will we be found by His side in the company of publicans and sinners.

I should greatly suspect my sanctification if it led me to lose my interest in the salvation of men, and my love for the souls of the lost and the unworthy. Thank God that in these days the men and women that are going deepest into the slums and searching farthest for the sheep that have gone astray, are those who believe in the fulness of Christ, and live in His abiding love, and in all the higher things which we have been studying in this wondrous Book!

In this connection it is very noteworthy that all the cities of refuge were placed under the care of the Levites, and, in fact, were Levitical cities. The Levites, as we know, were the types of the highest consecration; and the lesson is, that God has given the sinful world in trust to His true Levites, and as His consecrated people fulfil the mission of the Levites they will be found seeking and saving the souls that have gone astray.

In the ancient cities of refuge there is a beautiful type of God's provision in the Gospel for the salvation of men.

A LEGAL AND DIVINE PROVISION

It was guarded and sanctioned by divine enactment, and it was as secure as the will and power of God could make it. If the law of the land stands behind you, you are stronger in your humble home, with a simple thread to hold the door, than you would be in a fortified castle, if you were contrary to the law. Entrenched behind the right, you can fold your arms and defy all the power of man to disturb you. But against the law, and in a position of wrong, you may be barricaded and defended by walls of adamant and bastions of steel; but the law will break through your defenses, drag you from your hiding-place, and consign you to the dungeon of a criminal in spite of all your fancied security.

The protection which God gave to the ancient manslayer was a legal and divine protection. Asylums were provided under special laws, to which he might flee and defy the avenger to touch him. Within that sacred enclosure it would be a crime to shed his blood, and every law and power in the land were bound to protect him.

And so the salvation which God offers to the sinner is not a mere adventitious escape from punishment, but a security so divinely arranged, so justly secured, so eternally guaranteed, that "we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

If you accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you will have all the power of God back of you to defend you; all the will of God on your side; all the justice and righteousness of God pledged to your defense, as well as all the infinite love and mercy of God to welcome and bless you. It is not a mere caprice of conditional clemency, which He may change at will, but an everlasting protection, based upon the principles of right, and immovable as the throne of God.

Every debt is not merely forgiven, but paid absolutely and forever by a just equivalent fully accepted by the offended party. The atonement of Jesus Christ has met every requirement of justice, and it would be

wrong on the part of God to punish one who has availed himself of this divine provision. Therefore, we are told that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

He is bound by the very attributes of justice to save the soul that accepts the atonement of Jesus, and His word is pledged as one that cannot lie, to save and keep the trusting heart.

Oh, sinner, if you come within this enclosure you are as safe as though you were in heaven! That word -- "Him that comes unto Me, I will in no wise cast out," will be a wall of adamant against your guilty conscience, and all your foes. That mighty promise -- "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand," will hold you as "an anchor both sure and steadfast, and which enters into that within the veil."

A JUST AND RIGHTEOUS PROVISION

It was not indiscriminate immunity from punishment for all classes of criminals, but it was a place of safety for the man who had accidentally, or without intent of evil, taken the life of his neighbor, and he was sheltered and guarded until his case could be investigated, and if he were found to be innocent of any intent of evil, he was allowed to remain in safety in this refuge until the death of the high priest.

And so the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not a premium on vice, or an excuse for license. It does not say to man, "commit all the sin you please, and you shall have plenary indulgence." But it is God's provision for men who sincerely desire to be delivered from sin, and be right with God and man.

If you really want to be saved and cleansed, and to live a right and true life, and will honestly choose it, the blood of Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit will instantly and fully save you, no matter who you are, or what you have been or done.

But if you do not want to do right, if your intention is to commit sin; if your purpose is to do evil, and you only want the Gospel to shelter you in it, you shall find it the most terrible place beneath the heavens for a false heart to stand. No man dare trifle with the precious blood of Christ. It says to the sinner, "Neither do I condemn you"; but it says just as solemnly, "Go, and sin no more." "There is forgiveness with God," not that He may be trifled with, but "that He may be feared."

THE DEATH OF CHRIST

The manslayer abode in the city of refuge until after the death of the high priest; then he was free to return to his home.

This very significantly points to the death of Jesus Christ, as the ground of our deliverance from guilt and sin, and our acceptance into the favor of God and the liberty of His sons. More specifically it points, perhaps, to the difference between the Old Testament saints and those under the Gospel. Under the Old Testament, the sins of believers were forgiven, and they were accepted into the favor of God, in anticipation of the redemption which was to be accomplished in the future, but they did not enter into heaven, but were held up to the Ascension of Christ, under a certain reserve, in Hades, or Paradise. But after Christ's resurrection they ascended with Him into heaven, and now the souls of believers at their death immediately pass into His glory, and enjoy the fulness of the purchase of His blood, as those of the past dispensation did not. Therefore, we find "David gathered to his fathers," but Stephen "beholding the heavens opened, and Jesus Christ standing on the right hand of God," as he enters His immediate

presence. Lazarus is carried, not into the bosom of Jesus, but "into Abraham's bosom," with the Old Testament saints. But Paul expects to "be with Christ, and the spirits of just men made perfect."

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ have discharged us from every claim, and given to us the glorious liberty of the sons of God in this world, and the heirs of His glory in the world to come.

ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

The ancient cities of refuge were accessible from all places, and to all classes. There were no less than six of them distributed throughout the land; three of them on the west side of the Jordan, about equal distances apart, and three on the east side; and none farther than a day's run from any point in the land. The roads that led to them were always kept in good repair, at the expense of the government. The way was always open, both day and night, for any fugitive that should fly to the asylum. The gates of the city were continually open, and persons there to welcome the fugitive the moment he might arrive, and to provide him with every necessary of life. No one was allowed to obstruct his progress on his journey. Everybody made way for him, and there was no possibility of mistaking the way, for at every crossing, and often along the way, were mile posts and inscriptions, pointing in the right direction, and the word "Refuge" written on each post, so that he could read even while he ran. This is the meaning of that expression: "He that runs may read."

So the way to Christ and the salvation of the Gospel is just as open and just as plain. Christ is accessible to every sinner that wants Him, and the gates of mercy are never farther than a day's run -- no, a moment's look -- from the most hopeless heart. The way of salvation is so plain that it is impossible for an honest inquirer to mistake it. There may be differences of opinion about doctrines. There may be variations about Sanctification, Healing, the Lord's Coming, and the doctrines of theology, but they are all one about the way of salvation. In the missions and in the inquiry meeting there is but one Gospel and one salvation; and you could never find out, if you tried, what church that Christian worker belongs to, when he is pointing souls to Christ.

Praise God for the simplicity of the Gospel. No man need ever be lost through ambiguity or uncertainty about this. God has left the highway always open; the gates are never closed; and He wants us to keep all obstacles out of the way of the sinner, and speed him on his way to the hope set before him. Oh come and enter in!

SAFE

The fugitive was perfectly safe in the city of refuge, and all his wants were supplied at the public expense. There was not even a weapon of war to be found within its gates, and there was no lack of anything which he needed for his comfort or maintenance.

And so with the provisions of the Gospel. We are eternally secure and amply supplied. "We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." God has provided in Christ for the supply of all our needs. There is grace for our daily cleansing and constant keeping, and our God has declared that He will supply all our needs "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" ; and of "His fulness, we have received even grace for grace."

FLY

There were two things which the manslayer must do, and which the sinner must also do. The first was to fly, and never to stop until he got within the precincts of the refuge. The second was to stay, and never venture beyond those precincts until he was publicly released.

And so for us there is a refuge, there is salvation, there is abundant grace; but we must fly to it. We must claim it. We must take it, or we shall perish. There is no safety on the way. There is no safety, almost there. The manslayer could have perished even on the very steps of its portals. And so we must not linger or delay a moment until we have crossed its threshold and are safe within its doors.

God's words are awfully urgent. "Flee from the wrath to come." "Lay hold on eternal life." "Tarry not in all the plain." "Behold, now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." Outside of Christ, everything in heaven and earth is against the sinner. Destruction pursues him in every breath, element and force about him. His only safety is to fly to Christ without a moment's delay, and then when you enter that sacred refuge, stay there.

STAY

There was a small circle around its walls within which the inmates could have freedom, and it was large enough to give them all the freedom they needed; but beyond that there was no safety.

And so God has circumscribed our refuge. Within its precincts, within the Holy Bible we are absolutely safe; but beyond His Word there is danger, and there may be destruction. Let us abide in Him and under His commandments, and we shall be safe and happy in His infinite protection and everlasting love.

The ancient cities of refuge also set forth the fulness of Christ's salvation for the sinner. It is not enough to be merely saved. God has a boundless progression of blessing through which He wants to lead us, and as we press forward into the fulness of Christ, we are not only safe and secure, but we are guarded from falling, and led on to all the heights of His grace and glory. A wise Christian worker will never be content with simply leading a soul to Christ, and will never rest until he has introduced him to the fulness of His grace, the baptism of His Spirit, and the blessings of a consecrated life. All this is finely set forth in the ancient cities of refuge. There were six of them, and their names are significant of the fulness of Christ.

SIGNIFICANT NAMES

The first was Kedesh, in the northwest, signifying "righteousness." The second was Shechem, in Central Palestine, west of the Jordan. This name signifies "a shoulder," and will stand for strength. The third was Hebron, in Southwestern Palestine; and this, we know, means "friendship and love." On the other side of the Jordan was Bezer, signifying "security." Next is Ramoth, which means "heights." And Golan, the last, means "a circle," and of course signifies the everlasting things.

Now, these six names, with their beautiful significance, furnish a glorious progression in the blessings of the Gospel and the grace of God.

The first thing Christ brings to us is righteousness, making us right with God, right with our own selves, and right with everybody else. This is Kedesh.

Next, He gives us His strength to keep us and help us, carrying us upon His shoulders, helping us in our helplessness, and bearing our burdens, and us as well. This is Shechem.

The next is Hebron, where He brings us into the experience of His love, and unfolds to us the fulness of His grace and the love-life of the Lord, filling us with His love for others, and binding us to Himself forever.

Then we come to Bezer, the place of establishing, settling, and security, where we are confirmed in our faith and hope, and established in our life and love immovably.

Now we are ready to make a further advance, and so we come to Ramoth, and all the heights of His grace and glory; the resurrection and ascension life of Christ; the place where we dwell on high, and seek the things that are above, and look on all things from the heaven-side and the throne-life.

And, finally, the series closes with Golan, the circle that never ends; the way everlasting; where we have the faith that falters not, the love that changes not, the peace that abides, the health that is divine, the joy that remains in us -- in short, the indwelling Christ, who is in us, "the same yesterday, today and forever"; an experience in which we anticipate even now the glory which is to come, and enjoy a foretaste of what awaits us in its fulness at His blessed coming.

Beloved, have we come along the whole of this glorious progression? Have we His righteousness, His strength, His love, His security, His heights of grace and glory, and do we know His everlasting way?

If not, the doors are all open. Perhaps you have entered Kedesh, but you may enter Shechem, too, and Hebron waits to welcome you, and Bezer to establish you, and Ramoth to exalt you, and Golan to bring you into the life eternal in which we may live, even before we reach eternity. Oh, let us enter and dwell there!

There safe shall we abide,

There sweet shall be our rest;

And, every longing satisfied,

With full salvation blest.

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