



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Joshua 20:1 - 21:45

Winter 2021

"Refuge From Wrath"

TRANSCRIPT

Good morning. We are continuing our studies in the Book of Joshua and it's a lengthy portion of Scripture, chapters 20 and 21. Chapter 20 is not too long—it's nine verses. But 21 is a lengthy passage, 45 verses, and mainly it is the names of cities that were given to the Levites. And so what I'm going to do is read chapter 20 and then I'll read the last three verses of chapter 21. Joshua chapter 20,

¹ Then the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying, ² "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'Designate the cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses, ³ that the manslayer who kills any person unintentionally, without premeditation, may flee there, and they shall become your refuge from the avenger of blood. ⁴ He shall flee to one of these cities, and shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city and state his case in the hearing of the elders of that city; and they shall take him into the city to them and give him a place, so that he may dwell among them. ⁵ Now if the avenger of blood pursues him, then they shall not deliver the manslayer into his hand, because he struck his neighbor without premeditation and did not hate him beforehand. ⁶ He shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, until the death of the one who is high priest in those days. Then the manslayer shall return to his own city and to his own house, to the city from which he fled.' "

⁷ So they set apart Kadesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali and Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the hill country of Judah. ⁸ Beyond the Jordan east of Jericho, they designated Bezer in the wilderness on the plain from the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead from the cities of Gad, and Golan in Bashan from the tribe of Manasseh. ⁹ These were the appointed cities for all the sons of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them, that whoever kills any person unintentionally may flee there, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood until he stands before the congregation.

Joshua 20: 1-9

Now these are the six cities of 48 that were set apart for the Levites. And now in Chapter 21, the heads of the household of the Levites come and ask for the 48 cities that were designated to them; six cities of refuge and then 42 cities where the Levites would live throughout the land of Canaan and on the eastern side in Trans-Jordan. They're designated and then we read in verse 43 through 45 a kind of summation of this section of Joshua,

⁴³ So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. ⁴⁴ And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand. ⁴⁵ Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.

Joshua 21:43-45

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and our time of studying it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, what a privilege it is to come together as Your people on this Sunday morning, this LORD's day, and we come to fellowship with one another in the Spirit, the

Holy Spirit, and in Christ. And we can do that and have genuine fellowship in Him. And that fellowship is nourished, and really takes place through Your Word, Your revelation. And so LORD, as we look at Your Word this morning in the Book of Joshua, I pray that You would bless us; that You'd build us up in the faith, that You'd help us to understand the meaning of the text and what it meant for Israel—but also how it applies to us in a very special way. Help us to see here Your sovereignty and Your grace and mercy that You extend to us—a mercy that we receive though we're not worthy or deserving of it. So Father, build us up in the faith in that sense. Give us a sense of who You are, and Your greatness and Your goodness.

And Father, we do pray, not only for our spiritual needs, but our material needs. We pray for, first of all, the vulnerable among us. Bless them. We live in difficult times. I pray for the men and women of our congregation that have jobs that may be imperiled, or businesses that may face difficulty because of this pandemic. I pray that You'd preserve them and bless them and actually prosper them in this time. And bless all of us through it. Bless our health. Protect us.

But most of all Father, may we find in this time Your faithfulness and Your sufficiency for everything. And may we be lights in the midst of a despairing nation in many ways. May we show strength, the strength of Your sovereignty and the strength that we have because of the hope You've given us. And we have great hope. We've studied the inheritance that you gave to Israel and it's just a picture, and even a faint picture at that, of the great inheritance we have, which is eternal. We thank You for that. It's the hope we have, the hope of eternal life, and we have it by Your grace. May that be magnified this morning. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

John Bunyan, who you all know as the writer of the great Christian classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, also wrote an autobiography, probably less known to you than that great classic. It's titled, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Well, if Jacob's third son had written his own biography, that would have been an appropriate title. Levi was a scoundrel. Yet, he was greatly blessed. Blessed in his life and blessed in his descendants.

His tribe was given one of the most privileged positions in the nation, that of priests and teachers and judges—and one of the greatest inheritances in the promised land. That's the subject of our passage, which is Joshua chapters 20 and 21, for it concludes the allotment of Israel's inheritance with the cities that were given to the tribe of Levi.

The history behind this is the treachery of the two brothers, Simeon and Levi, in Genesis 34 when they slaughtered the men of Shechem in an act of revenge. In Genesis 49, when Jacob blessed his 12 sons, he cursed the anger of these two and said that they would be scattered in the land. —And that happened. Simeon's inheritance was in the midst of the tribe of Judah, and eventually it was absorbed into that tribe.

And Levi was scattered throughout the nation. But they became God's priests. Now some have thought that that was because Levi, the tribe of Levi, showed faithfulness during the apostasy of the golden calf in Exodus 32. But the family of Aaron was designated as the high priest earlier than that, in chapter 28 verses 1 through 4. So their dispersion through the nation was a blessing and their position as high priests and priests was an act of grace.

Back in chapter 13, verse 33 of Joshua, states that Moses didn't give them an inheritance, meaning a territorial area of the land. Instead, "...the LORD, the God of Israel, is their inheritance, as He had promised to them." What a privilege that is! It's really a great one. I don't know that there's a greater privilege that was given to anyone than that privilege to be servants of the LORD. That's their inheritance—this special service to the LORD. The tribe would be the nation's spiritual and legal authorities; as Moses and Aaron were the lawgiver and the high priest, both of them Levites. Now in order to carry out their duties, the Levites were given cities throughout the land—48 cities. Six of those were cities of refuge. Those cities are listed in chapter 20. The other 42, as well as the 6 cities of refuge are listed in chapter 21.

Moses gave detailed instruction on the cities of refuge in Numbers chapter 35 and in Deuteronomy 19. And here the LORD instructed Joshua to carry out His instruction and designate the cities. These cities of refuge were established with two people in mind, the manslayer, and the avenger of blood. Verse 3 of chapter 20, "The manslayer

who kills any person unintentionally, without premeditation, may flee there, and they shall become your refuge from the avenger of blood."

In early Israelite society the avenger of blood was the person responsible for carrying out justice. He was a relative of the victim and he was to right wrongs done to the family. In case of murder, his duty was to hunt down the guilty person and kill him. —Bring the guilty person to justice, which was not for the family only but also for the nation. Murder was considered a stain on the land. And if the crime went unpunished then the land, the whole nation, was considered defiled. And so capital punishment was prescribed as the means of removing this stain from the land and from the nation.

But that prescription for justice could easily become a pretext for vengefulness and a vendetta. Blood revenge was an ancient custom. In fact, when Cain killed Abel he feared vengeance—he feared that men would hunt him down and kill him. Lust for vengeance is inherent in man, so to guard against excess and the execution of a person who was killed by accident and not premeditation, cities were established to give them sanctuary to the manslayer.

So for example, and this is one of the examples that's taken from the Law, if two men were chopping wood, and the ax head slipped off the handle and struck the other man and killed him, it was an accident. (Deu 19:5). It was not deserving of capital punishment—but the victim's relative might not see it that way and in the heat of grief might carry out revenge. So the manslayer could flee to a designated city and find asylum. It was a provision that was, as one writer stated, "Without parallel in the ancient world."

The cities served as a preventative measure to blood feuds that could spread and be handed down from generation to generation, in which innocent lives would be taken. And they served to reinforce the principle of the sanctity of human life. Executions were to be restricted. Murderers were to be slain—but manslaughterers were to be spared.

The Law of Moses was designed to promote life, not to destroy life. The Law of Exodus 21 verses 23 through 25, which is repeated in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, is

famous, we're all familiar with it, because it's become notorious in our day—and notorious because it's been misunderstood. When an injury occurred, the Law prescribed, "...eye for eye, tooth for tooth..." (Ex 21:24). Now that sounds harsh to the modern ear, but it wasn't harsh at all. In fact, it was given to establish justice and mitigate excesses and injustice. The point is, the penalty must fit the crime. So, it's 'an eye for an eye', not 'a life for an eye', or not 'a daughter for a tooth'.

It's really not even clear that this formula was ever taken or applied literally. The retribution, for example, or the justice that Moses prescribed, (and this is an example that Moses gave), of a slave being wounded, a slave losing his eye, the penalty for that for the person who did it, is that the slave is given his freedom and not the offenders eye. (Ex 21:26). So it's not clear that this was literally applied. The point of the formula is that justice is to be even handed. Which shows us the Law of Moses, while it was strict, it was not harsh. It's not about poking out eyes and breaking teeth. The point of the Law was justice. It was to curb injustice, and to make punishment, as I said, fit the crime.

God is righteous. He's holy. He does not and cannot ignore sin. He cannot ignore crime in a nation. But He is also the life giver. And the Law shows a concern for life as much as it shows a concern for justice. For example, in Deuteronomy 20 verses 19 and 20, instruction is given on cutting down trees in a time of war. And it prescribes the cutting of them down: It's permitted if the trees can be used in warfare, perhaps in the siege of a city or something like that. But it forbids cutting down fruit trees. Now why is that? Because they nourish, because fruit trees sustain life. They are valued.

Some of you may have seen the movie *1917* about a year or so ago. I think it's based on a true story, but nevertheless it's a story about two young men in WWI who are sent on a dangerous mission. And very early on, they come to a bombed out Belgian farm. The house is wrecked and ruined. There's no one there. But as they walked to the house, they walked through an orchard. The retreating German army had cut down all of the blossoming cherry trees. There's nothing strategic about it. It was just a wanton act of destruction, a vengeful act that wrecked everything that had been done; the effort,

the time that had been put into this orchard that was intended to give blessing and nourishment.

The Law of Moses condemned that. The point of that Law is to show the value of life and to show that if God cares about fruit trees, then certainly He cares far more about human life. And that was the reason for these cities of refuge. They protected life. The provision for the cities are given in verses 4 through 6. The manslayer was to 'flee to one of them and stand at the entrance of the gate and state his case before the elders.'

City gates were invented, obviously, to control traffic in and out of the city. They were designed for defensive purposes. But also, the gates of the cities of the ancient world, (or Israel, at least), became the place of law courts. Cases were decided at the gate of the city. You look at the end of the Book of Ruth in chapter 4—that's where the issue is resolved. And so, the person fleeing there must first state his case. These cities were not set up for murderers and so a person had to state his case to the elders before he was allowed in.

When the avenger arrived, they would not deliver the manslayer into his hand. Instead verse 6 states, "He shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment until the death of the one who is high priest in those days. Then the manslayer shall return to his own city and to his own house, to the city from which he fled." So he was allowed to live in the city, provisionally, until the trial took place when he stood before the congregation for judgment. And in Numbers 35 verse 24 it states, "The congregation shall judge between the slayer and the blood avenger." And if he is judged to be a manslayer and innocent of murder, than he would be released—but not until, we're told, the high priest had died.

So the fugitive could stay in the city, but it was a kind of exile for such a person—evidently a kind of punishment. His action, after all, did cost a person's life. And so it was not without any kind of penalty. It wasn't intentional, but nevertheless blood was shed. And so there were consequences, he's to stay there in a kind of exile and that would be, I think, punishment for what was possibly carelessness on his part. And in so doing, it would serve as a warning to others that they should encourage care and meticulousness

in the little things of life—in all of the details. But he was to stay there until the high priest had died.

Well, there were six of these cities designated as cities of refuge, and they are listed in verses 7 and 8. Three of them were on the west side of the Jordan and three of them were listed on the east side of the Jordan, in Trans-Jordan. The ones in Canaan are in verse 7 and then the ones in Trans-Jordan in verse 8. So we read, "So they set apart Kadesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali and Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the hill country of Judah. Beyond the Jordan east of Jericho, they designated Bezer in the wilderness on the plain from the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan from the tribe of Manasseh."

So if you look at the map of these, it goes from the top, northern part to the central part of the land, to the very southern part; and the same on the eastern side of the Jordan. These were strategically located cities geographically, so that in every area of the land there was a place of refuge to be found. The refuge these cities offered was open not only to the Israelites, but also to the stranger in the land—the alien. It's something we find throughout the Law—God's concern for those that were disadvantaged. And so you have this formula: 'Taking care of the widow and the orphan and the alien.'

And so those that were there were to be taken care of. Verse 9 says, "These were the appointed cities for all the sons of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them, that whoever kills any person unintentionally may flee there..." Now the care for aliens, I know, is based upon the memory of Israel being an alien in the land of Egypt—and God says that, 'You take care of the alien because you were an alien in Egypt', (Deu 10:19). And it was a testimony to God's care for all humanity. He was not unfair to the stranger, He was just with all, and that was a great example. It was a light in the midst of the heathen nations that surrounded Israel and practiced rough justice. They saw something different in this nation that was to be the light to the nations. And so,

all were offered divine protection until the high priest died. Then they were allowed to go free.

Now this is an interesting provision—the death of the high priest seems to be an arbitrary reason for people to leave. You would think, ‘Well if this case is decided in his favor, this manslayer could go.’ But that was not the case, and it's been described as being ‘arbitrary’. I don't think it was, but nevertheless, no explanation is given for why the freedom came for the individual at the death of the high priest. Nevertheless, that's what marks the moment of freedom and all of this showed the value God put on human life. —And it's an example of grace.

It's interesting, (and this is where I see the grace involved in this), it's interesting that the tribe whose history was marked by vengeance with a bloodbath of revenge was given the task of managing sanctuaries that would protect from that. The cities given to the tribe of Levi were six cities of refuge and 42 cities of service. Those cities, those 42, as well as the six, are listed in chapter 21. The leaders of the tribe stepped forward to claim them, and that's how chapter 21 begins,

¹ Then the heads of the households of the Levites approached Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the households of the tribes of the sons of Israel. ² They spoke to them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, “The LORD commanded through Moses to give us cities to live in, with their pasture lands for our cattle.” ³ So the sons of Israel gave the Levites from their inheritance these cities with their pasture lands, according to the command of the LORD.

Joshua 21:1-3

There were three branches of the tribe of Levi according to Levi's sons; Kohath, Gershon, and Merari. In verses 4 through 5 we read that the Kohathites received 23 cities. They received 13 in the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Simeon, and they received 10 in the tribes of Ephraim, Dan, and the western portion of Manasseh. These were the priests, the sons of Aaron, according to verse 4.

And so the priestly cities were mostly within the southern portion of the land—what would become the Kingdom of Judah and the location of the temple at Jerusalem. You see in that the providence of God, because at the time that this was designated, at the time Joshua executed the instruction of the LORD, Jerusalem was a Jebusite city—and it would be under Canaanite control for some 400 years. Not until David conquered it would it become the capital of the kingdom. But that was unknown to the Levites. It was unknown to everyone. They couldn't see that God's purpose in putting so many of their cities in that area was for a purpose. He was setting the stage for a shift from Shiloh to Jerusalem long before its time.

Now that's how the providence of God works. That's the mystery of providence. We can never accurately interpret the events of our life—why things are ordered the way they are, why they take place the way they do. But God is doing a work. And those events, whatever they may be, are preparing us for something and maybe preparing something very significant in our lives.

That's the wonder of the sovereign grace of God, and I think it's an example of a verse that we looked at last week, Ephesians chapter 1, verse 11. Paul wrote there that 'we have an inheritance', which fits with the subject that we're looking at, and have been for some weeks in this book. "...we have an inheritance, having been predestined...", Paul wrote, "...according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will..." His providence insures that we will have our inheritance.

So we cannot always understand why things happen the way they do, but they happen for a purpose and God knows. And we will be amazed, I think, at times. And we see that as we look back on our lives. But the day will come when we're with Him and we will understand how everything fit together.

The cities of the Gershonites, the next division within the tribe of Levi, were located in eastern Manasseh, across the Jordan, in Trans-Jordan, and then, in the northern part of Canaan, in Issachar, Asher, and Naphtali in the north. Verse 7 gives the location that the cities of the division of Merari received. They were in Zebulun, and

among the Trans-Jordan tribes of Reuben and Gad. Then, verse 8 gives the summary statement, "Now the sons of Israel gave by lot the Levites these cities with their pasture lands, as the LORD had commanded through Moses."

So the scattering of the Levites among the other tribes was the fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy—but it was a curse turned into a blessing. Their tribal identity was preserved and they were made ministers of all of the tribes. In his final blessing on the tribes in Deuteronomy 33, verse 10, Moses said of the sons of Levi, "They shall teach Your ordinances to Jacob, and Your law to Israel." So throughout Israel there were teachers of the Word of God. It was a great responsibility, a service, and an essential one. They maintained the knowledge of God's Word among the people.

Hosea reminds us of the importance of that in a negative statement that is made, (actually the LORD is speaking), that in Hosea, chapter 4, verse 6 he records God's statement, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." The Levites were scattered throughout the land, strategically placed throughout the land, to be a spiritual influence that was a preservation against all of the evil influences that still surrounded them—surrounded them in the Gentile nations, that even with those Canaanites that were still scattered through the land, with their influences—these Levites were those that would protect against the evil influences of the world.

One writer stated, "It has been estimated that no one Israelite lived more than ten miles from a city in which Levites had their residence." So every Israelite had the opportunity to be well instructed, had the opportunity for counsel about the various problems of life that they would encounter, and had the opportunity to learn about the LORD God and be strengthened in that way.

God's provision for the nation in the function of the Levites and their geographical distribution reminds us of the importance of the instruction of the Word of God. I noticed in Warren's prayer that he gave a great deal of emphasis to learning and studying the Word of God throughout the week—and the importance of it. And we find that all through the Word of God—Old and New Testament alike. It is 'a lamp to the feet' the psalmist said, (Ps 119:105). A lamp to our feet—it guides us through the dark days of

life. It guides us through the difficulties of this world. The Word of God is 'a lamp to our feet' and it gives wisdom and a sound mind, the apostle Paul wrote. Without it we drift spiritually, we drift from the faith, and we succumb to the temptations that surround us.

Verses 9 through 42 list the cities and locations that were given to the tribe of Levi. Some of them are noteworthy. For example, in verse 11, the city of Hebron is listed. "Thus they gave them Kiriath-arba, *Arba being* the father of Anak (that is, Hebron), in the hill country of Judah, with its surrounding pasture lands." Now that's noteworthy because Hebron was the city given to Caleb and which he conquered. And yet he gave it to the Levites for their use. And, as verse 12 explains, Caleb and his family kept the surrounding pasture lands. They cultivated that, they took care of all of that, but the city itself was given to the Levites without protest from this faithful man, Caleb. And it's an example of his faith, I think, and an example of the way a person of faith is to live.

A person of faith holds the things of this world loosely. He or she doesn't seek to hold on to all of his possessions for personal pleasure, but uses them for the LORD's work—and understands the providence of God when God has another use for them. Well Caleb knew that all that he had, all that he possessed, was given to him by the LORD God. It was a gift of His grace and Caleb was glad to give it back. In fact, I think he was probably glad to have Levites there, near him, to give instruction in the Law.

In verse 17 and verse 18, the cities of Benjamin, Gibeon and Anathoth are listed. Anathoth is significant because that's the home of the prophet Jeremiah. So he would leave from that town and just go up to Jerusalem, not far away, and have his ministry. Gibeon is significant because it was the city of the Gibeonites, who you remember from chapter 6, had deceived Joshua into making a covenant with them. And so, a city of lies became a center of truth—that's the grace of God.

In verse 21, one of the cities in the territory of Ephraim that is listed is particularly interesting and significant in this context. It's given as a city of refuge, and that is Shechem. Well that's significant because that's the site of Levi's and Simeon's

treachery. But the LORD shows the place of the blood revenge as the place where refuge would be given against the avenger of blood. The one city you might expect would be withheld from the Levites is Shechem. But He gave them the place of their family's shame in order that they might protect men from excessive vengeance. Much like the LORD took Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor of the church, the destroyer of the people of God, to be the builder of the church—the man of the Law to be the 'Apostle of Grace'. That's the grace of God.

Now at the end of the chapter, the whole section of the book regarding the division of the land is summarized in verses 43 through 45. These verses have been called one of the key sections to the entire book because here the theme of God's faithfulness is summarized; "So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all the enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass."

God is faithful—that's the testimony. He does not promise any inheritance that He does not give. He does not make a promise that He will not keep. He is faithful always. He performed every part of His promise.

Now this didn't mean that every part of the land was conquered—it wasn't, Canaanites continued to live there. Joshua has pointed that out to the people, to the Ephraimites and to others, 'Go and conquer the land if you need more space.' And they did. And so more remained to be conquered, even as this statement was made.

But the LORD had told Israel, back through Moses in Deuteronomy 7, verse 22, before the conquest even began, that they would conquer it gradually. And the people would have setbacks for the rest of their history. They would fail, and they did fail. But their unfaithfulness would not annul God's faithfulness. As Paul put it in 2 Timothy

chapter 2, verse 13, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself." The Book of Joshua affirms that; "Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass." (21:45). And His promises to us will come to pass as well.

But the lessons here are even more specific than those that are given to Israel. The refuge given in those cities of refuge was a blessing. —But the refuge that we find in Christ is infinitely greater. Those cities gave no mercy to the murderer. In fact, while the Law of Moses was perfect as Law, and distributed justice fairly and evenly, it was all about justice—it's not about mercy. It made no provision for the murderer. There was no provision in the Law for mercy and forgiveness for many, many sins. In fact, what are called 'sins of a high hand' had no sacrifice for them, and those sins are really the sins that are most prevalent, most common. Sins that are done defiantly, done deliberately, there was no sacrifice for such a sin. There was sacrifice only for sins of ignorance and weakness. Willful, presumptuous sinners had no refuge. They were outside the camp. Levi could not have found refuge in those cities of refuge that his children possessed and where they judged.

But still, the city of refuge gives us a picture of the grace that would come—the eternal refuge for sinners. The picture is given in the Law that when the high priest died, the manslayer was freed. Now, as I said, there's no reason stated for that provision. And there has been speculation, why did the manslayer have to wait until the high priest died? Well, perhaps all of that is by design to be a type of Christ, to be a type of the One who would come, the Great High Priest, who when He died, set the prisoners free.

So these cities of mercy for the manslayer were a picture of our eternal refuge in Christ, and the mercy that we find in Him. Hebrews, chapter 6, the exhortation may draw upon that, because there the author speaks of believers in verses 17 and 18 as the 'heirs of the promise' and says of them, "...we who have taken refuge...". So the sinner, the heir, the believer who is saved is one who has "taken refuge". Christ is the refuge for sinners to whom we may flee for safety from the wrath to come—from the justice of God that we all richly deserve. We have it from Him because He suffered that justice in

our place. All who believe in Him are in Him and can never be removed from Him. —We have forgiveness. We have shelter in Him and are forever secure in Him and safe.

At the beginning of the lesson I mentioned John Bunyan. I mentioned his autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, and said that that would be an appropriate title for Levi's life. In fact, it would be a good title for the lives of each one of us. God only saves sinners—and the more clearly we see ourselves, the more clearly we see the greatness of our own sin and guilt.

John Newton did. He was an amazing work of grace. —Saved, as you know, while a slave trader, while engaged in that heinous practice. And he went on to be a great and selfless servant of the LORD, and servant of those slaves, because he was an advocate for their manumission—their freedom. We see very clearly in his life the greatness of sin—and why he became the author of one of our favorite hymns, *Amazing Grace*. Well good quotes are quoted often, and I've given this quote often, but when Newton was old, when he was at the end of his ministry and really at the end of his life, he said, "My memory is nearly gone. I remember two things: That I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior." He died not long after that.

Christ is a great Savior. Is He your Savior? Is Christ your refuge? We will all die. We will all stand before God the judge. Will you stand before Him in Christ, forgiven and clothed in His righteousness—or stand in your own sin? The LORD loves life, not death. He gives eternal life to all who come to Christ. If you have not done that, come to Him, flee to Christ, trust in Him. He receives all who do.

May God bless us with that, give us encouragement in the faith, and encourage you if you've not come to Him to come to Him. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for pictures You give us of Your grace all through Your Word—and here we find that in these six cities of refuge. They picture more than just

Your justice in that dispensation of the Old Testament. They're a reminder of who You are, that while You are just, You also have made provision for the sinner. And that provision ultimately is in Christ. We thank You for that. Thank You for Him. Thank You for sending Him and thank You, LORD Jesus, for coming.

So Father, bless us as we consider these things. Remind us, as we are reminded from this passage, of the importance of Your Word and how we need to be men and women, young and old alike, who study the Scriptures, and know the Scriptures, and understand who You are from Your Word. And in so doing, we will understand Your sovereign grace, and how it blesses us richly.

We are debtors to mercy alone, so we give You thanks for that. And LORD, we're reminded of that by the elements that are before us, and soon we will take them as we observe the LORD's Supper. I pray, LORD, that You would prepare our hearts for that and may we take it properly—and may it have its proper sanctifying effect upon us. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)