

The City of Refuge.

by Andrew Bonar

The sermon emphasizes the city of refuge as a type of salvation from sin through Christ, highlighting the importance of faith, trust, and deliverance.

Scripture: Genesis 35:27, Numbers 35:25, Joshua 20:2-3, Isaiah 26:1-4, Ezekiel 33:11, John 6:44, Romans 8:31-34, Hebrews 2:15, Revelation 14:3, Revelation 14:7

Topics: "Salvation", "Refuge in Christ"

Description

Andrew Bonar preaches on the concept of cities of refuge as a divine provision for sinners, illustrating how these cities symbolize the salvation found in Christ. He emphasizes that the path to refuge is clear and accessible, with no barriers preventing the sinner from reaching Jesus, the ultimate refuge from judgment. Bonar draws parallels between the manslayer seeking safety and the sinner seeking redemption, highlighting the importance of fleeing to Christ without delay. He encourages believers to recognize their need for salvation and to trust in God's promise that all who come to Him will be received. The sermon concludes with a call to remain in Christ, the eternal city of refuge, until His return.

Transcript

'Appoint for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses;

and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood'

Joshua 20:2,3

There were six cities of refuge in the land of Israel. These were so situated that any manslayer, when pursued, might find his flight directed and his escape assisted by the very nature of the ground where they stood.

(1.) Three of them stood on one side of Jordan and three on the other. No river rolled between him and his place of safety.

(2.) All of them stood in plains; Kedesh in the plains of Zaanaim, Sychem in the plain of Moreh, Hebron in a level wilderness, Golan and Ramoth-Gilead at the foot of their adjoining hills. The manslayer had no up-hill race to run in seeking deliverance ; there was nothing in his way which might hinder his flight.

(3.) Near each city (except Bezer, which required no further mark, being seen afar on the long spacious heath) stood a hill, that served the purpose of an ensign to guide the guilty man, and to invite him to the refuge. Kedesh had the hill of Naphtali close by. Sychem had Mount Gerizzim. Hebron had those vine-terraced heights, on which Abraham once stood and saw the smoke of Sodom. Golan had the heights of Bashan ; and Ramoth-Gilead stood under the lofty hills of Gilead. He who appointed these cities took care that they should be marked afar off, that the steps of one seeking refuge might without difficulty be guided towards them. For it was intended by all these peculiarities, to show the sinner's road to the Redeemer. No river rolls between him and Christ! No hills raise their barrier between him and the Saviour. The way is plain and open; it is broad and level ; and while yet afar off his eye catches a glimpse of that ensign which waves on Calvary, over the city of refuge,- 'As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked ; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die..' (Ezek.33:11.) This, even while he is yet a great way off, kindles hope and keeps it alive.

One of these cities of refuge was Hebron - well known as being the place where Abraham long abode. Let us linger for a little at this city, and call to mind some of those sights often seen in other days from its walls and within its gates. The inhabitants there dwelt safely as in a 'peaceable habitation, in a sure dwelling, and in a quiet resting place.' The vines clothed the surrounding hills, and rich crops waved over the plains of Mamre. Not far off was the spot, where, under a spreading oak, Abraham, 'the friend of God' (Gen. 35:27,) had held communion with his Redeemer.

Oftentimes in the cool of the clay, when the breeze of evening had begun to awake, the people might be seen on the flat roofs of their houses, or the top of their city walls, enjoying the scene and remembering former days. Many a song of praise ascended, many a holy meditation was enjoyed, many a thankful emotion kindled. But occasionally the peace of this happy hour was suddenly disturbed by a piercing cry of alarm that resounded from the valley - a cry of fear and a cry of rage and wrath.

The citizens stopped their song and saw a trembling murderer, with horror on his brow, in full speed making for the gate, and behind him, with bare sword, the avenger of blood pressing on with relentless fury. Sometimes, it is likely, if for a moment the pursuer slackened his speed, they saw the weary manslayer incautiously sit down to rest, thinking that now he was so near his refuge, he might abate his anxiety ; and then the avenger would seize the favourable opportunity, spring on him, and plunge the sword into his soul.

Oh! the agonising look the wretched man gave in death toward the city! and his awful cry of despair, as he yielded up his breath with guilt on his conscience, and remorse gnawing his soul! Sometimes too they saw one in his flight come close up to the gate ; but he hesitated to enter, stood doubting, afraid to go in, though trembling for the approach of the avenger, until, ere he was aware, the avenger smote him to the dust, and he breathed his last with his dying head bent down on the very threshold of the gate!

But oftener still they saw the pursued flying murderer come with full speed down the valley, reach the open gate, bound over the threshold, and stand in safety within ! the elders of the city met him, and asked him how he had ventured in so boldly. 'You are stained with blood, and your trembling frame testifies that you are a guilty man?' 'Yes, I own it is true, but on that very account I fled for refuge.' 'But why have you come hither? No native of the city is like you; they are all children of Abraham.'

'True, but though no native be like me, yet many like me have got in, for God himself has called it a city of refuge.' 'But you bring no recommendation?' 'God never spoke of any recommendation being needed.' 'Still, you have given no reason why you in particular should expect to be received?' 'Yes, for the warrant is, that any and every manslayer may come.' The elders smiled well pleased; the manslayer was secured in the place of refuge ; and there was praise in all the city because another was saved.

The delivered man soon joined in their hymns to the God of his life ; but oftener still sang in their hearing some peculiar songs of praise, which none could sing but a manslayer that had fled for refuge (Rev. 14:3.) Frequently, too, the whole company of delivered men would meet together, talk over their dangers, tell of their escape, and unite their voice and heart in these songs of deliverance (Acts 2:42.)

These events in Israel were intended as a type of what takes place in the kingdom of God on earth. The manslayer, wet with the blood of his fellow, is the type of a sinner. And in choosing no other than a manslayer to be the type of a sinner, God points out the murderous nature of sin. Sin brings death on the man himself, and thrusts the sting of the second death into his soul. The sinning soul crucifies Christ afresh ; it quenches, or, in other words, tries to extinguish the life of the Holy Spirit ; it wishes that there were no God, or, in other words, aims at the very being of God the Father. O sinner, how deep is the crimson dye of your soul! How can you escape the damnation of hell? On the other hand, the avenger of blood represents or personifies the stern but most righteous demands for vengeance, made by the holy law, pursuing the unforgiven sinner, in order to execute the sentence, 'Thou shalt surely die' (Gen. 2:17.) And the city of refuge is the salvation provided for the sinner in Christ Jesus, bestowed without money, and without price, without preparation and without delay, on every soul of man that flees to Him as the refuge from the wrath to come.

From the walls and battlements of heaven, angels have seen many such sights as the men of Hebron used to see. Let us lead you to some of them. 1. They have seen many a manslayer. They have seen many a soul - and you among the rest, stained with crimson guilt, yet sitting at ease. Have they not seen you destroy your soul? Then you are a man-slayer. Have they not seen you by your words, and influence of your example, prevent others from being saved? Have they not seen you wishing in your heart that God were away, or that there was no God?

And is not this really wishing for and attempting to compass the death of God? You have wished there were no Christ, and no Holy Spirit! O blood-stained, murderous soul, you stand charged with murder, accomplished in regard to yourself, and your neighbours, and with designs against the life of the Holy God! Perhaps the devil keeps you at rest, and persuades you not to be alarmed. Eat, drink, and be merry! But, nevertheless, you are a man-slayer. You ruin your own soul, and your example ruins your friends; and you are an enemy that entertains murderous designs against God.

The avenger has not forgotten you. 2. They have seen many a man-slayer awakened. Few sinners in our land remain unvisited by some convictions ; yet few of them flee from the wrath to come. Some are left miserable by a sense of guilt, that hangs over them, like a black cloud, night and day,- 'all their life the subject to bondage' (Heb. 2: 15.) They have many forebodings of danger, yet companions, and pleasures, and their dislike of a change, and the secret hope that perhaps all is not true that is threatened, stifle their feelings, and hinder them from fleeing.

Is this your state? Are you a sinner aware of your danger? If so, surely you must flee? You dare not sit still. What though you repent, and are sorry, and shed tears, and reproach yourself for your folly ? - all that is

vain. The avenger of blood never ceases on that account. Indeed, you are more likely to be cut off suddenly than many others ; for your convictions will make Satan afraid of losing you, and your delaying to flee will provoke God, so that he will wait no more.

Up, up, and flee for your life You dare not sit still. O if you would flee, there would be deep, deep interest in you, felt by the people on the walls of Hebron - the angels in heaven. To see you running to the city of refuge - that would be a blessed sight ! Up, and run speedily! Many have run along that road to the city ; the way to Christ has been traversed by thousands, some more, and some less guilty than you, who knew that he was their only refuge. 'The kingdom of heaven is preached, and every man presseth into it.' 3.

They have seen many fleeing towards the city. This is more than being awakened by a sense of danger and need. They have begun to seek deliverance; they flee! Are you a fleeing sinner? If you are, there are some marks that men will not fail to see in you. For example, you will be affected by a sense of your own personal guilt and danger: you will not be fleeing just because others are doing so. You will have a feeling of immediate need; you cannot put off the matter to a distant day.

You will also feel engrossed to a great degree with concern to escape ; a fleeing man-slayer would not be hindered with the trifles on the road, or the people whom he met. You will forsake the company of friends that hinder you. Above all, your eye will be ever looking toward the mountain-height that marks the place of refuge, and along the plain that leads to it ; your thoughts will be occupied with the open door; and your delight will be to hear of those who fled and got in safely.

You will be ever looking for Jesus, and rejoicing in whatever leads to a view of him, whether a sermon, or the Bible, or prayer. You will be meditating on his completed work, which opens the fountain for sin and uncleanness. You will delight to read and hear of such as Paul, and Manasseh, and those Jerusalem-sinners who, in every view, were even more than man-slayers, for they crucified the 'Son of Man,' 'the fellow of the Almighty.' But remember there can be no safety for you short of the city; none, none, till you are within it.

It is not being 'almost persuaded to be a Christian;' - it is not being 'not far from the kingdom of God,' - that will save your soul. It is not setting out and running toward the gate, nor even touching the threshold - but it is getting over the threshold, and getting in, that will be your safety. If the man-slayer stopped short of this, he might as well have never tried to flee. No sinner can be pardoned until a sufficient testimony is left against his sin, and this can be done only by his actual coming to Christ Jesus.

No man-slayer could be forgiven until he got to the city, the very appointment of which was God's testimony against the man's guilt and deserved punishment. No sinner can be forgiven in a righteous way, except by being hid in Christ. Hopes, desires, wishes, convictions, fears, sorrows, in such a case, are no more than shrubs or flowers, that line the road to the city. 4. They have seen the joyful entrance of many into the city of refuge. Fearful, weary, faint, they came up to the open gate and ventured in, because it was open for such as they.

They believed Christ to be the sinner's way to the Father. They came to view his finished and perfect work in behalf of sinners; they examined it, and perceived both its fitness and its fulness ; they saw that the Father considered it a wide enough entrance for any sinner; and so they ventured in. Jehovah had declared it to be sufficient, and that was enough for them. Let us ask them, and see their grounds of faith. 'You are stained with blood,' it might be said to them; 'you have been guilty of trampling under foot the Son of God, and aiming many a blow at the life and heart of God; and your conscience tells you that you

deserve vengeance; and nothing but filth appears on your person.

How dare you come hither?' They reply, 'For the very reason that we are blood-stained sinners we have fled to Jesus.' Ask again, 'How could you ever hope to see the King in His beauty; His people are a holy people ?' They reply, 'True, but blood-stained souls have become white in His blood, His precious blood was shed for this very end.' 'But you bring no recommendation ? you say nothing of your previous efforts, prayers, tears, good deeds, sincere obedience?' 'No, we say nothing of these, for they are not required to our being accepted in the Beloved.'

'Well, then, at least, show why you in particular venture to come?' 'Our warrant is His own sure word, whosoever cometh I will in no wise cast out.' And now the gate closes them in. They shall go no more out. Angels welcome them with songs; and Father, Son, and Spirit rest over them in love. There is joy in heaven over them!

These redeemed, however, are nevertheless not yet perfect. Their iniquities are forgiven, and every sin blotted out; but their hearts retain much corruption. But to promote holiness they keep much in each other's company and help each other's joy. They often sing such songs as that of Romans 8:31-34, 'If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?

It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us!' O what peace and joy! No frown of a displeased God, for His anger is turned away, and He comforts them! With joy they draw water out of the wells of salvation, and as they survey and examine their city of refuge, they find new reasons for joy and enduring gratitude. Now that they are in Christ, they inquire freely as to the past; and they find that all along, from the first hour they began to flee, it was the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father in the name of Christ, who was drawing them (John 6:44.)

At the time that they felt alarmed, and yet lingered in their sins, it was a secret drawing of the Divine hand that enabled them at length to get away from others, and really to flee for refuge. At the time when they had nearly stopped short, attracted by the golden apples which Satan scattered in their path, it was the Spirit that drew them on. At that moment, when, faint and weary, they had well-nigh sat down in despair, it was the drawing of the Father through the Holy Spirit that brought them onward still.

And when at length they saw so clearly where to rest, and felt themselves able to rest satisfied in Christ alone, it was the Holy Spirit who caused the scales to drop from their eyes, and who effectually persuaded their souls. O, how full now is their gratitude to Father, Son, and Spirit,- Thou hast loved us with an everlasting love, and with everlasting kindness hast Thou drawn us! They are never heard to boast of anything but of Him; not even of their own faith, their eager running to the city.

No; for that, too, was owing to the Spirit He sent into them (Eph. 2:5), and it was not that, but the city, that saved them. They reach further still in their discoveries of God's wondrous ways towards them. They are taken into a chamber in the council-house of the city of refuge, and allowed to read its records. The Book of Life is shown to them, and they find now that they were elected from all eternity! and that it was in consequence of the purpose of God that they were called and drawn by the Spirit of Jesus.

Amazing grace! How deeply fixed is the foundation of their safety! They feel humbled at the same time; for they were chosen for no good in themselves at all, but wholly to the praise and glory of Him who called

them. It was mere grace that made the difference between them and other man-slayers. Every new discovery yields matter for praise and adoration. They go down to the gates to praise the Lord among the assembled people. They forsake not the assembling of themselves together, but go to their own company -(Acts 4:23)- whenever opportunity occurs.

Their life is a life of happy, cheerful faith in Him whose finished work redeemed them, and of unceasing love and devotion to Him who called them out of darkness into marvellous light. Often are they heard singing, 'We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gate, that the righteous nation that keepeth the truth may enter in. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is the rock of ages.' (Isaiah 26:1-4.)

But like the saved man-slayer who dared not be found beyond the gate of the city until the High Priest had gone to glory (Num. 35:25), they dare not for an hour go out of their place of safety. They abide in Christ. However holy they become, whatever reputation they have gained, however honoured and distinguished for spiritual attainments, they abide in Christ alone. Their first security was found in Him, and it is their security to the last. Though laden with the fruits of righteousness, and filled with all the graces of the Spirit, they depend for safety on the enclosing wall of their city of refuge, as much as does the sinner that only yesterday came in.

And so they will remain till their High Priest enter upon 'his glorious rest' (Isa. 11:10); and then they shall share with Him in that joy, each one receiving his inheritance and possessing an unchanging love. For this they are always longing. Oftentimes they ascend the battlements and towers of their strong city to look out for any signs of the coming glory; or sitting at their windows, they turn their eye to the east to see if there be any streaks of the dawn. For when from the New Jerusalem the tidings shall arrive that Jesus our High Priest has entered into His rest, then shall His redeemed return to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. 'FEAR GOD AND GIVE GLORY TO HIM, FOR THE HOUR OF HIS JUDGMENT IS COME! (Rev. 14:7.)

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