

The Safest Spot in the Universe

Christ our Refuge

Hebrews 6:18-20

The safest spot on earth is just over 700 miles from us this morning in Colorado. It is a super secure military command center called NORAD. There in the Rockies, under Cheyenne Mountain, a mile deep in the granite corridors, is the heart of America's missile defense center.

The main entrance to the complex is approximately one-third of a mile from the North Portal via a tunnel which leads to a pair of steel Blast Doors each weighing 25 tons. Behind the 25-ton blast doors is a steel building complex built within a 4.5 acre grid of excavated chambers and tunnels and surrounded by 2,000 feet of granite. Excavation began for the new NORAD Combat Operations Center in Cheyenne Mountain in May 1961. The excavation was nearly complete one year later.

Built at the height of the Cold War and able to withstand any bomb blast, chemical or biological weapon--it is self sustaining for those inside for two years. But only if you are able to get there in time to avoid the attack.

The safest spot in the Universe, that is even safer than Cheyenne Mountain, is also the closest. Closer than that military center 700 miles from here, closer than your safe room, closer than a shelter, closer than anything else--is the refuge God has designed.

Jesus Christ our hope, our refuge, and our salvation--is one thought away, one prayer away. He is as close as a cry, as close as an out stretched hand, or an upturned heart. Anyone, anywhere can instantly arrive in that safest of all places--from any location.

We have already seen Christ our forerunner who has forever anchored our souls safely in heaven. If that were all there was for us in Hebrews 6—that would be enough for a lifetime of hope. But there is more.

Turn with me again to Hebrews 6 as we look again at these precious words of security, comfort and hope—because there is so much MORE from God's Word for us!

*Hebrews 6: 17-20 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, 18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled **for refuge** to lay hold of the hope set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where the forerunner has entered for us,*

even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

This refuge is the safest spot in the universe. But how do we get there? God's Word says we come by "laying hold of the hope set before us" (v. 18). What is that hope? It is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Now turn with me back a few pages to 1 Timothy 1:1. As we stand to listen to Paul, we will find the answer.

*"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord **Jesus Christ, our hope.**"*

The safest spot in the universe is in the embrace of Jesus.

Prayer

The only way to have assurance of salvation, a strong confidence, and a steadfast hope, is to seek refuge in God by embracing Jesus Christ, who is our only hope of salvation¹.

Remember that the Greek word in Hebrews that is translated "refuge" (in KJV, NKJV, and NASB) is the same one used in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament) in the passages describing the cities of refuge? We saw that last week.

The writer of Hebrews is telling us that the only way to experience the power of God that saves us is when we run to Christ in desperation--for refuge to that safest place.

And to understand one of the clearest explanations of entering into the refuge of Christ, turn with me to Joshua 20.

When Israel entered the Promised Land, God gave them a constant reminder of His salvation. This reminder was ordered by God to be set up in the Land as a visible symbol of Him as God their Savior 24/7/365 across the entire land.

What was that reminder? A strategically placed group of six cities called the Cities of Refuge. There is actually a whole chapter of the Bible (Joshua 20) devoted to these cities. The most beautiful, the most powerful, the most amazing picture of Jesus Christ is tucked away in one of those back corners of the Scriptures. That picture is one that shows Jesus is always waiting, His arms are always open, the door is never locked—the clearest picture of Christ's as Savior is seen in the cities of refuge.

"And they [assigned] Kedesh in Galilee in Mount Naphtali, and Shechem in Mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. And on the other side [of the] Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of

¹ John MacArthur, *Saved Without A Doubt*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books) 1992.

tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. These were the cities assigned for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger who sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person without intent might flee the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation." (Joshua 20: 7-9)

Those Cities of Refuge were wonderful

Anyone could access these cities of refuge because they *were easy to reach* from any place in the country. God expressly commanded that roads were to be made to these cities (Deut. 19:3). These cities were accessible. Some of them were located on mounts so as to be even more prominent.

Anyone could access these cities of refuge because they were *open to all* — to the Israelite, the stranger, and sojourner. (Numbers 35: 15) Joshua 20:9 says, "that whosoever killed a person ..." (KJV). What verse sounds like this—that whosoever..." Right! John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Anyone could access these cities of refuge because they the great doors of these cities were *always left open* and *never locked*. We can see why. Otherwise a man might die while beating on the door.

Anyone could access these cities of refuge because they were *a completely sufficient refuge*, then, not only providing legal protection, but also meeting a man's needs once he was inside. **The cities of refuge were completely adequate for the needs of the endangered ones.** So long as the slayer remained in the city, he was safe, and he would be freed when the high priest died.

Anyone could access these cities of refuge because there was *no other hope*. Note that the slayer is told to flee to the city. Such a person could not afford to delay!

Christ was portrayed by the Cities of Refuge

The similarities between the cities of refuge and Christ, our refuge, are striking. We can compare them point for point.

Anyone can come to Him for *Christ is easy to reach*. We may cast ourselves upon Christ at any time, in any place. The Church is to be the teller of this good news. The Church is to cry, "Refuge! Refuge!" to the lost world. This emphasis is made at the very end of the Bible in the book of Revelation: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). So has the Savior placed Himself within the reach of all, even of such as are in the utmost peril of His wrath. Jewish tradition declares that there were posts at the cross roads with "Refuge! Refuge!" upon them, pointing out the way.

Anyone can come to Him for ***Christ is open to all*** — the Jew and the Gentile, the Greek and the barbarian, to all people. Listen to the echoes of Christ's open arms throughout the Scriptures: Genesis 3:9 Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?"; Isaiah 45:22 "Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other; Matthew 11:28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; Revelation 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

Anyone can come to Him for ***Christ is a completely sufficient refuge***. Christ's death in space-time history is completely adequate to meet our need for refuge from the true moral guilt which we have. It is final because of who He is. He is the infinite second person of the Trinity; therefore, His death has infinite value. And just as even the suburbs or borders of the city were a sufficient security to the offender. Numbers 35:26-27 *"But if the manslayer at any time goes outside the limits of the city of refuge where he fled, 27 and the avenger of blood finds him outside the limits of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood."* So there is virtue even in the hem of Christ's garment for the healing and saving of poor sinners. If we cannot reach to a full assurance, we may comfort ourselves in a good hope through grace².

Anyone can come to Him for ***if we do not flee to the refuge*** which God has given to us at such a great price, ***there is no help for us***. Hebrews relates this negative emphasis to the Old Testament: "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, with which he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" (Heb. 10:28, 29). There isn't one of us who does not stand in that situation. We have heard the gospel, and if in the Old Testament ignoring God's law brought death, what about us if we despise the work of Christ and the grace which He showers upon us? Nor can lost sinners today afford to delay in fleeing to the only refuge, Jesus Christ.³

Anyone can come to Him for ***Christ never locks His gates***. Jesus told us that He is the Door—and we know that He is the Door that is never shut, never locked, never barred. To the very last words of the Bible is Revelation 22 He is still saying, "Come." There is no need to wake Him. He is infinite; He is God; He is never asleep. We do not have to beat upon the door and die because He does not open it. Many have stood by a deathbed and seen sinners believe in the last moments of life. It is good that there is no gate to unlock and that men can enter quickly. What a picture of Christ! Certainly the "way to the city" is clear! No one need ever wonder how to come to Him, for we come to Him by faith. He will never turn any sinner away (John 6:37). High roads led to each city, and their gates were always open.

² Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*, (InterVarsity Press: IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament) Downer's Grove, IL.

So Christ is easy to reach; His arms are open to all; His entrance is never locked; He is a completely sufficient refuge, and He is the only hope. How wonderful. But there is so much more as we examine the differences between the cities of refuge and Christ our refuge. Christ is portrayed by the cities of refuge but He is so much better!

But--Christ is better than any City of Refuge

There are three reasons why Jesus is better than any earthly city of refuge. They are because: He died only for the guilty which means for all of us—those cities were for only the innocent; He offers only permanent refuge—those cities were for temporary refuge; and finally He is closer than any city of refuge—it was a hard and dangerous journey for anyone trying to get to those cities.

1. Christ is better because He *died only for the guilty*. The biggest difference is that the cities of refuge protected only the innocent. They were only for the man who killed by mistake. When the slayer came to the city, he was admitted but he was also tried. With us, there is no trial, for we are already condemned!

The elders of the city only protected someone who was innocent of murder, but Christ receives guilty sinners. What grace! John 3:18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Christ died for the guilty, for the deliberate sinner. Who is that deliberate sinner? Every one of us can say, "It is I!" How is it possible that the holy God would accept those that are guilty? It is not by giving up His holiness. He does not devalue that, or we would have no moral absolute in the universe. Rather, the reason Christ is able to be our Redeemer is that He is a high priest and the sacrifice He gave was His own death.

"What a picture this is for us today! This reveals that Christ is our refuge. Listen to what this means— I have already been carried into court, and at the trial I was found guilty.

I was a sinner. The penalty which was leveled against me was death—and it has already been executed. Christ bore the penalty for me, you see. Because He died in my place, I am free.

I have been delivered from the penalty of sin; never do I have to answer for it again.

I am free now to go out and serve Him.

I now have a High Priest, a resurrected Savior, to whom I can go.

What a wonderful picture of my Savior this gives! The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1

Cor. 10: 11). "Ensamples" are types. Millions of things could have been recorded, but God chose to record only these things because they enable us to grow in our understanding of Him and our relationship to Him⁴."

A person only could stay in a city of refuge until the death of the high priest, and then left. Christ is our high priest. He has died once for all, and He lives forever. So though we are legally guilty before God, when we cast ourselves upon Him we are free forever. The true Christian can never perish, but by failing to "abide in Christ" he or she opens the door to spiritual and physical dangers.

This Old Testament picture does not suggest that we may "leave Christ" and lose our salvation, for we do not build doctrines on types; rather we interpret types on the basis of doctrines. Our High Priest will never die, and because He lives, we live also. Hebrews 7:23-27 says this strongly:

*And they, truly, were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death; but this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore, **he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him**, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's; for this he did once, when he offered up himself (Heb. 7:23-27)*

2. Christ is better because He offers only Permanent Refuge. Hebrews also speaks of Christ as "the forerunner [who] is for us entered" (Heb. 6:20). That means that He has entered into God's presence and that we can enter, too. When do we enter this refuge? I would suggest we enter at three different times.

- First, we enter in **once for all** at the moment we cast ourselves upon Christ and accept Him as our Savior. We are declared justified by God the judge on the basis of Christ's finished work. In Romans 5:11 Paul uses the aorist tense, indicating our justification is a past thing, completed forever. If we are saved, we are saved. Romans 5:11 And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom **we have now received the reconciliation**. Remember what we saw two weeks ago—justification means that God has no record that we even sinned. Our sins are paid for, put on Christ's account and gone forever!
- Second, we enter **every daily moment** into this refuge as Christians when we claim the blood of Christ to cover a specific sin. 1 John 1:7, 9 *"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son **cleanses us from all sin**. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*
- Third, **we will enter in perfectly and completely** at that great moment when we die or when the Lord returns. Hebrews 7:24-25 *"But He, because He*

⁴ McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

*continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Therefore He is also able to **save to the uttermost** those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."*

3. Christ is better because He is nearer than any city of refuge. A runner could fall and not be able to get to a fugitive in time to shelter him within the walls of safety, but a man who looks to Christ can never fail. The Bible makes a specific promise: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). In fact, Jesus says, "I stand at the door and knock" (Rev. 3:20). He Himself seeks us.⁵

How near is Christ? To answer that let me share the following story that was told by Harry A. Ironside (1876-1951) who traveled for more than 50 years as a home missionary, evangelist and Bible teacher. He was pastor of Moody Memorial Church, a visiting professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and the author of more than 60 books and pamphlets. The following is a tract he wrote called "The Way of Peace".

Dr. Charles Berry was one of the first of the so-called New Theology men, who preached salvation by character rather than by the atoning blood of Christ, salvation by ethical culture rather than by personal faith in the Lord Jesus, salvation by reformation rather than by regeneration. Popular, eloquent and personally pleasing, he attracted large audiences, who hung upon his words and depended upon him as their spiritual mentor.

But a great change was seen in his preaching, which resulted from a new experience with God, which revolutionized his thinking. In telling his friend Dr. Jowett about it, he said that late one stormy night, as he was preparing to retire, the doorbell rang. When he went down and opened the door, there stood a poorly dressed young woman who asked if he was the minister. Upon being assured that he was, she begged him to go with her at once to get her mother in.

He thought that she meant that her poor mother was out in the storm and the darkness in an intoxicated condition; so he demurred, saying he could hardly be expected to go out and get her mother in and suggested that she see a policeman who might give the help required.

The girl explained that her mother was not drunk and added, "You must come with me. My mother is dying, and she is afraid to die. She wants to go to heaven, but she doesn't know how to get in." I told her I'd get a preacher to take her in.

"Do come, Sir, and get my mother in."

He now understood that the dying woman needed someone who could show her the way of salvation, but he hesitated, thinking it was hardly a case for him. He urged the girl to go to a missionary living near the wretched locality in which she lived. But she refused. She insisted she wanted a real minister and begged him to go with her.

⁵Schaeffer, Francis A., *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1985.

"Do come, sir. I want you to get my mother in before it's too late. Please, sir, do come with me."

At last he consented to go, and the girl led the way to one of the worst sections of the city. In this miserable neighborhood she took him into a tenement house and up a rickety flight of stairs to a poverty-stricken room. Downstairs many men and women were drinking and carousing, and the air resounded with horrid oaths and vile language. The minister found the poor woman lying on a miserable makeshift of a bed, evidently near to death.

"I've brought him!" exclaimed the daughter. "I've got the minister from the big church where the swells go. He'll get you in, Mother. Just do what he says."

"What can I do for you, my poor woman?" he inquired as kindly as he could.

"Why, sir, I'm dying, and I want you to get me into heaven. I've been a great sinner, and I don't know how to get in."

The minister began to speak of the necessity of a good life, of building a noble character, and how goodness always paid in the end.

"You don't understand, sir!" she cried. "That won't do! I'm dying and I've lived a bad life. It's too late for me. Oh, can't you get me in?"

He tried again and gave some good advice and endeavored to comfort her by expressing the hope that all would be well if she would only seek to lead a Christian life.

"That won't do!" she exclaimed. "I'm a poor sinner! I've no time to lead a Christian life. I'm dying and I want to go in. Oh, can't you tell me how I may get into heaven?"

Dr. Berry did not know what to say or how to comfort her. At last he thought, "Why not tell her what my mother used to tell me? Why not give her some of the simple texts and Gospel stories I learned as a child?"

With this in mind he began to repeat some of the precious Gospel verses telling of God's love for sinners and of the Savior who had died to redeem. The woman listened eagerly. "That's it! That ought to get me in, shouldn't it! Did he die for sinners? Then that should get me in."

Stirred to the depths of his own being he told the story of the cross as he had not preached it for years. Like a thirsty soul, she drank in the living water. Finally, he knelt and prayed with her.

She trusted Christ for herself. Her fears were allayed and she entered into peace.

"Jowett," said Dr. Berry years afterward, "I helped get her in that night, and while I was helping to get her in, I got myself in also!"⁶

The Wonderful Benefits of Staying in the Safest Spot in the Universe

And once into the arms of Jesus, what do you get? Turn back for a moment to Joshua 20 and note somewhere these six truths for those who flee to the safest spot in the universe. When you get there, to Him, you find the perfect refuge has so much to offer us. Jesus can be for any and all of us this morning the perfect refuge.

Now can I read Joshua 20 again and give you the meaning of each city that God names? Here we go:

"And they [assigned] Kedesh in Galilee in Mount Naphtali, and Shechem in Mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. And on the other side [of the] Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. These were the cities assigned for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger who sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person without intent might flee the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation." (Joshua 20: 7-9)

KEDESH is not only a city name it also means a "holy place" or "righteousness".

SHECHEM is not only a city name it also means "shoulder".

HEBRON is not only a city name it also means "fellowship".

BEZER is not only a city name it also means a "stronghold" or "fortress"

RAMOTH is not only a city name it also means "exalted" or "heights"

GOLAN is not only a city name it also means "separated."

Now listen to how each of those city names portray details of the refuge offered for us to lay hold of every day, every hour, and every moment of our lives.

Jesus offers to each of us to be a refuge when we are unclean, a refuge when we are weary, a refuge when we are homeless, a refuge when we are helpless, a refuge when we are hopeless, and a refuge when we are tempted.

Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the unclean; Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the weary; Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the homeless; Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the helpless; Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the hopeless; and Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the tempted.

Have you fled to the safest spot in the universe? If not do so today. If you have, look around—Christ wants to be your moment by moment perfect refuge!

⁶ Harry A. Ironside, @ 1940 American Tract Society, Garland, Texas