

Joshua 20-22

“Possessing the Land – part two”

Introduction

- Tonight we going to continue our study in the book of Joshua - And as you remember from last week this book is divided into three sections

The Book of Joshua

Entering the promise land – Joshua 1-5

Conquering the promise land – Joshua 6-12

Possessing the promise land – Joshua 13-24

- God told Abraham hundreds of years before – I will give your descendants this land
 - And the book of Joshua is the story of how God keeps His promises

So where we are here tonight in chapter 20 is in the section concerning we have titled Possessing the land

- the battles have been fought
 - the land has been handed out to each tribe and now they are to deal with the pockets of resistance in their own area - some do that well and some don't do that at all as we looked at last week
- but also important to possessing the land is some final instructions from God through Joshua to the people of Israel

Now it is true, most of us do not like instructions

- I have some things I do well – I think I was put on earth to teach God's Word, not because I deserve or have earned it, but I feel like teaching is something I do well
 - I'm fairly good at the game of golf, being a husband and father – I have my strengths

But being a handy man is not one of them

- Last week, my wife asked if I could put two shelves and anchor them so they could support a weight
 - Some of you could do that with a cup of coffee in your hand, while on your way out the door for work
 - It took me, no exaggeration two full hours to do the job right – two hours – so embarrassing as man
 - I am not a handyman, but to make things worse

My wife loves IKEA, I like it too because it's cheap, but what I don't like is that it comes in a flat box and I am responsible to make these pieces into a bed for my kids or as shelves for dishes

- and when I start pulling out the pieces I start counting and when I get above 100 a serious depression begins to set in, I start sweating and breathing weird
 - I don't even know where to start, and then I remember = oh the instructions
- And yet when I pull it out, it's a bigger book than I am reading to work on my Master's degree
 - And worse, I actually understand the books I am reading to work on my master, attached part AB with socket zz, using the convenient IKEA tool, the little L shaped thing – I am in no way a tool guy and I know that is not a great tool

So I look at those instructions and want to skip over them, but I realize they will help put things together, that if I really understood the directions, what was supposed to come together would eventually come together

- And I share this with you, because as we come to Joshua 20-22, it can easily seem like IKEA instructions – Cities of Refuge, Levite Cities - ???

Honesty this is the type of section I would normally overview and skip and move on to Joshua's final sermon in chapters 23-24

- But Pastor Rob wanted to slow down a bit and really consider these instructions
 - And I am glad the Lord put that on his heart, because I think like all instructions, when we really think through what they are saying, it will help the whole picture of what God is doing come together
- So for you note takers, Joshua 20-22 is really a set of three instructions

Instructions Concerning..... – Joshua 20-22

#1 – The Cities of Refuge – Joshua 20

#2 – The Levitical Cities – Joshua 21

#3 – Ruben, Gad and ½ of Manasseh – Joshua 22

- Let's consider these one at a time tonight

Instructions Concerning..... – Joshua 20-22

#1 – The Cities of Refuge – Joshua 20

- As we read these instructions concerning the cities of refuge the first thing we must understand is these were the days before official police forces, there was no CSI units to check out crime scenes
 - And so though it seems barbaric to us, in those days all over the world, not just in Israel, if a member of your family was killed, the family was in charge of the retribution

Now you can see right away the problems with this sort of system

- you did not have overcrowding of jails, people did not wait years for their court date
 - no – you killed somebody's kid, you didn't have to wait for any of that, because Daddy is coming to get you
 - this was the system all over the world

Yet in the nation of Israel, God adds some instruction

- God realizes that occasionally people don't mean to kill people, there is an accident
 - You are chopping wood in a field and the ax head comes flying off and poor cousin Jimmy was in the wrong place at the wrong time
 - It was an accident
- But the friends of the family of cousin Jimmy were not there to see it was an accident, they didn't know, all they knew is their cousin is dead and you were the only one with him
 - And so the avenger of blood would come looking for you

God realizing that some deaths were accidental, set up Cities of Refuge all over Israel

- there were six cities – **Cities of Refuge map**
 - all of them located about a day's run from wherever you might live in Israel
 - why a day's run, because you would be running from the avenger of blood

If the murder was accidental, you would go to the city of refuge nearest you

- and they would take you in, and the avenger of blood could not take your life
 - and in this city of refuge you would have a trial before the elders of the city
 - and if it was determined that you were innocent, then you would live in the safety of that city until the death of the high priest, then you could return home

Now this is an interesting set of instructions, especially if you killed someone by accident, you were glad such instructions existed

But why are we looking at this and how does it make the picture of the word of God more clear to us?

- well these cities of refuge are really a great picture of our salvation in Jesus Christ
 - How so?
 - Well consider some facts about these cities of refuge

The Cities of Refuge

#1 – They were accessible

- again they were all located as we saw on that last map about a day's journey from where you were in Israel
 - we also know from Deuteronomy 19:3, they were to prepare roads to travel to these cities

“You shall prepare roads for yourself, and divide into three parts the territory of your land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, that any manslayer may flee there.” – Deuteronomy 19:3

- there were to be roads, not footpaths that could be overgrown
 - but clear roads, where the rocks were removed and the land was smoothed out to allow for fast travel
 - bridges were to be built over streams, again to allow for quick travel
 - and these were to be maintained every spring after the rainy season
 - at every intersection there was to be a clear, bold sign pointing to the way to the city of Refuge

And to me this is such a picture of our salvation

- listen, it is not cheap grace, for it cost Jesus everything to pay for our salvation
 - but now that He has paid it all
 - the way to salvation is not difficult
- The way is Jesus Christ

The clear road map is the gospel

- oh I'm not saying the enemy would not be hard after you, trying to take you down, for sure
 - but the way of salvation is clear
 - believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved

The Cities of Refuge

#1 – They were accessible

#2 – They were always unlocked

- We are told over and over again in the word that these cities were to always be open
 - So if you were coming at night, if you were on a feast day or a Sabbath day, you wouldn't be stuck outside
 - The way for salvation was always open

This again is why personally I believe anyone can be saved

- I know not every one of our brothers and sisters in Christ believe this and if that is you, we can still be friends, we can still fellowship together, because it doesn't bother me that you have no problem being wrong
 - I love you – but you are wrong

God desires...

“all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” – I Timothy 2:4

Jesus said...

“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.” – John 3:16

Paul the apostle said...

“whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” – Romans 10:13

If you are at the end of your rope and you realize I need a refuge from my sin and myself

- I need a deliverer – you call upon the name of the Lord, you run to Him, you believe in Him and trust your life to Him
 - You will never find that door locked

The Cities of Refuge

#1 – They were accessible

#2 – They were always unlocked

#3 – They were open to Jew and Gentile

- It was not just the Jewish people who could enter into a city of Refuge, it was anyone who realized I need a deliverer
 - And so too – the path of salvation is clear, always open and open to everyone
 - I don't care who you are or what you have done
 - Jesus loves you
 - Jesus died for you
 - Jesus is what you are looking and longing for
- One last one

The Cities of Refuge

#1 – They were accessible

#2 – They were always unlocked

#3 – They were open to Jew and Gentile

#4 – They were the only place of salvation

- You see another parallel to our salvation and our savior Jesus Christ and these cities of Refuge was the fact you had to be in the city to be saved
 - You couldn't declare your hometown, 'oh this is my city of refuge'
 - Too bad!
- Well I was on my way to a city of refuge – "so sad"

You couldn't invent your own city, you were not safe while you were on the way, and you could not leave

- and in the same way, you can't invent your own path

It is not good enough to declare yourself on a spiritual journey

- and although I don't believe you can lose your salvation like we lose our keys, oh where did it go, I sinned my way out of salvation – nope
 - I do believe there is enough exhortations in the scripture to stay, to keep yourself in the love of God (Jude 1:21), enough warnings about falling away in the book of Hebrews (2:1, 3:12)

Friends there is one way to heaven, not many paths, one way

- Jesus said in John 14, I am the way, not a way
 - Peter said in Acts 4, "there is no other name by which we can be saved, other than Jesus"
 - There is one city of refuge and it is Jesus, always available, open to all
 - But you need to believe in Him, you need to stick with Him
 - He is our city of refuge
- And when we turn to Him, you know what we find?
 - Well it is not just Joshua 20 that deals with these cities of refuge, they appear in Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy
- but it's only here that we get the names of the cities, and I think they are important that you see what we find in Him

The Names of the Cities of Refuge

#1 – Kedesh – "Righteousness"

#2 – Shechem – "Shoulder"

#3 – Hebron – "Fellowship"

#4 – Bezer – "Fortress"

#5 – Ramoth – "Heights"

#6 – Golan – "A place for Exiles"

- There is nothing like walking with, being hidden in, and clinging to Jesus Christ – our city of Refuge

Instructions Concerning..... – Joshua 20-22

#1 – The Cities of Refuge – Joshua 20

#2 – The Levitical Cities – Joshua 21

- Read verses 1-3
 - The rest of the chapter up until verse 43, which we will get to in a second, is Joshua having the heads of each of the families of the tribe of Levi and giving them cities to live in and dwell

Now if you remember from last week, the Levites did not have any territory given to them like the rest of the tribes

- the reason was they were to be a focused people
 - focused on ministering to the Lord and to the people of Israel
- So they did not have any land or cattle
 - Because God didn't want them focused on farming and raising animals or putting up shelves or IKEA, sorry I got off track
 - God wanted them ministering to Him and to His people full time
- So they didn't have any land – but they still needed food to eat and so they lived off the tithes of the rest of the tribes of Israel

That was how they ate and survived, but obviously they also needed a place to sleep and to live and raise families

- So God had Joshua appoint 48 cities all throughout the nation of Israel and the different families in the tribe of Levi would live in these cities
 - **Picture of the Levitical Cities**
- As you can see from the picture on the screen and on the back of your study guide these 48 cities were spread all over the nation of Israel
 - The red squares are Cities of Refuge, all of which were also Levitical cities

Now what I find important about these chapter's instructions as to where the Levite Cities needed to be, was that they are spread throughout the land

- there was a Levite city close to you no matter where you lived in Israel
 - God literally sprinkled His priests all through the land

And the reason I believed He did that was so they would have an influence everywhere

- and I see in that what God still does today
 - I mean you look around the room tonight and here is what I know – there are so many places of businesses represented here, so many families, so many neighborhoods, so many schools
- And yes as a pastor here at Calvary Chapel, it's my job to teach and preach the word
 - But I can't show up where you work, sit at your desk and look for opportunities to be salt and light
 - They would kick me out – who are you – well I'm a nice guy, I'm pastor Jason – get outta her
- I can show up at your school, at your family Christmas
 - But precious ones, God has placed you there
 - He has given you a sphere of influence

And just like God made sure there was always someone near who could help people understand God and His Word and will for their lives

- so God has done the same thing in our world
 - but that does mean that you need to know the Lord
 - You need to know His Word
 - You need to pray for opportunities to share His light
- **Oh pastor Jason you work at a church, you don't know what it's like at my job**

- listen I spent six years working in the world before I came to work here at Calvary Vista
 - and though that's a small number of years – I remember
- and it was my determination that the people I worked with knew where I stood, knew who the Christian was at my Carl's Jr. where I first worked and then at the golf courses where I worked for a few years after that
 - they knew who the Christian was, they knew what I believed
 - Now I didn't spend all day preaching at them – you are paid to work at your job, not evangelize, we need to be good witnesses
- The picture is salt and light – not scorpions, peppers, and lightning – my kids “not pepper and darkness”
 - I feel like sometimes that's how we act – God is angry at your sin – people are like, what kind of pepper is that
 - Or we are always there – should you really be smoking that? With a dark scowl, like Jesus?
- Salt and light – they know who you are, they know what you believe, not because you have beaten them over the head with it, or follow them around condemningly, no way
 - But they know who you are!

Why is that important – because like the children of Israel, when they want to know something about God, when they need prayer because their doctor just said Cancer, when they need to hear about salvation because their world is falling apart

- like the children of Israel, they know right where to go – they know who to ask

God has the same system today He has always had – He purposely puts His people all throughout the land

- that we might influence those He puts us near for Him
 - listen to me church – listen to me
 - you are not where you are at vocationally or locationally or relationally by accident
 - you are there by divine purpose
 - don't take that lightly

You know why? – Because there is no one like the God we serve – no one even comes close – what do I mean?

- look at the end of this chapter – verse 43
 - are you kidding me
 - do you realize who we are serving, who we are trusting our lives to
- church – the one who always says what He means and means what He says
 - the one who the Word declares concerning...

“Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.” – Joshua 21:45

- He made a promise to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob
 - He repeated that promise to Moses
- And it didn't look like God's Word was going to come to pass when Abraham and Sarah were barren, when Isaac and Rebecca were barren, when Jacob was chased from his homeland
 - It didn't look good when the nation of Israel was in bondage in Egypt
 - It didn't look good when they were up against the Red Sea
- It didn't look good when, because of their sin, a whole generation had to die off

And it didn't look good having to fight all those nations defending their homeland of Canaan

- but it's God, we cannot forget who we are dealing with gang, who we are being salt and light for
 - one who, not a word of His failed, it all came to pass

- has God made you promises?
- Listen to what even the prophet Balaam says about our God

“God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” – Numbers 23:19

- Unlike you or me – He does not lie
 - He does not repent – He does not need to turn and go in another direction
 - He has spoken, it will surely come to pass
- And I don’t know who needs to hear that tonight, I think in some ways we all do
 - He is coming again
 - He will draw near to you as you draw near
 - He will deal with those bondages and chains
 - He will keep His Word
- Because there is no one like our God
 - Friends – God has put you strategically around this community for a reason
 - Be His ambassadors, pray for opportunities – you personally walk with Him
 - Because there is no one like Him!

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- Read verses 1-9

So once again we are learning about the tribes of Gad, Ruben and half the tribe of Manasseh

- remember these were the tribes when they were on the other side of the Jordan, said to Moses, we want to stay here
 - Moses loses his mind because he is reminded of what happened when the 10 spies came back with a bad report – so Moses says, so what, you are just going to let your brothers fight alone for the land?
- Then they renegotiate
 - No – we will fight alongside our brothers, but when the fighting is over, we want to come back to this land

And as we looked at last week, not entering into all that God has for you has its problems, for these tribes would be the first tribes to be picked off by the enemy

- as will you and I, if we don’t enter into all that God has for us
 - but that is what we looked at last week

This week we see Joshua commending them for keeping their end of the bargain

- they did fight alongside their brothers for seven years, a long time to be away from family and friends
 - He commends them

Then Joshua blesses them – take your possessions, take what you won in battle and go be blessed in your land

- you have fought faithfully, now enjoy the blessings
 - He commended them, blessed them
 - But Joshua also warns them – be careful
- Be careful to walk in all the way of the Lord your God
 - And again I think Joshua is here again a great picture of Jesus

Jesus wants to take you in to all that He has for you

- He wants you to trust Him for His promises and not bail out early
 - But He will also meet you right where you are at

- He loves you, He is not mad at you or speaks condemningly to you
- Jesus will take you as far as you want to go, but not any further than you are willing to
 - And I want you to hear me on that church
 - Jesus will take you as far as you want to go
 - But He will not take you any further than you are willing to go and trust
- And although His love for you never changes, His faithfulness toward you doesn't go away
 - That doesn't mean that there won't be challenges because you are not willing to submit fully and completely

And we don't have to look any further for evidence of this than verse 10

- these people are thanked by Joshua for their service, blessed by Joshua, but they are not going into the promised land
 - and right away we see trouble
 - look at verse 10

The children of Israel heard someone say

- it's always the unidentified someone that says something that stirs up the body of Christ
 - and this certainly happens here

But I really appreciate how the elders of Israel handle this

- Instead of going to war and then asking questions later, they confront their brothers head on – what are you doing? What do you mean by this
 - and that gives the elders of Ruben and Gad and Manasseh a chance to respond

We didn't build this altar to worship another God, we did it so our kids would always remember we worship the same God as you guys on the other side of the Jordan

- a big misunderstanding
 - that if the elders of Israel didn't take time to pray and talk – there would have been needless blood shed
 - a misunderstanding that really wouldn't have happened in the first place if these guys would have just settled in the land God had for them

The great lesson from this instruction friends is misunderstandings happen in the church

- they are usually rooted in someone's incomplete obedience, not always, but often
 - But how do we respond?

We don't listen to what "someone says" – if I ever find who "someone is" I am going to get them, because "someone" has caused me more problems than I care to remember

- but don't listen to someone – we go to the person who we think did something wrong, we go to the one we have a problem with
 - and in humility, not anger, in love – we ask – what's the deal
 - 9 times out of 10 – it's simply a misunderstanding – that is I had reacted in the flesh – oh, I would have been and have been so embarrassed
- there is the 1 time out of 10 when someone had to die
 - but usually we can talk our way through it
 - you know why? – see this before we go our way

Because we worship at the same altar

- what a picture that altar is in chapter 22 of the altar we worship at, the cross of Calvary

In Christianity we all worship at the same altar, the cross

- and I love how God Himself instituted a way for us all to remember that act of love the same way – communion
 - because there are a lot tribes in Christianity – aren't there?

From those in what is called High church –

- they have their robes and traditions and formalities

- but you know what they do, every time they meet, they come to the table of communion – they remember the cross
- oh but they... I know – we worship at the foot of the same cross

Then you have those Pentecostals (say it like the Pentecostals)

- man they make our worship time at Calvary look boring
 - they are dancing and hooting and hollering – you can tell I'm a little Pentecostal at heart
 - but you know what – we worship at the same altar the cross of Calvary

You have the Baptists and the Presbyterians

- you have those who believe in the gifts of the spirit and those who believe those gifts have ceased
 - you have Calvinists and Arminists
 - you have those who believe in a pre-rapture and the heretics that believe in the post trib-rapture – I'm just kidding, not heretics
 - we all worship at the same altar

Listen I am fine with different tribes of Christianity, now I am talking about Christianity here, not Buddist and...

But I am fine with different tribes

- because I like my tribe
 - I love the balance of Calvary Chapel – where we believe the gifts are for today without getting all confusing in the service
 - I love that we believe God is sovereign and yet in that sovereignty He gives man a free will and holds Him responsible for the choice He makes
- I love that we believe the best way to grow in our relationship with God is to study His Word, chapter, by chapter verse by verse – here at church and on your own, just reading through the scriptures
 - I love being a Calvary Chapel Pastor, I don't want to attend somewhere else – but you know what
 - We all worship at the same altar
- When I forget because I can too, I start to put other denominations in my cross hairs, instead of realizing what Paul the apostle said was of the utmost importance
 - Jesus Christ and Him crucified

And as long as we keep the main thing that main thing

- listen you can have your tribe, I love my tribe
 - but I won't miss the heart of Christ for all His people
 - and for this world He died to saved
 - Important instructions from God's word tonight!