

Refuge

Since it is a *fifth Sunday* in the month (we get one once a quarter), our kids who are normally in our Discovery Kids program on Sundays are with us... and we are glad you are here! It is important to us that we are all together from time to time. What happens upstairs in Discovery Kids is really important, and wonderful... but we sure like having you with us in worship from time to time.



I thought we might get started with something a little different.

I'm not much of a *gameshow watcher*... but I have tuned in to a gameshow every once in a while. One that can be amusing is called "Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader. Have you seen it?

Here's a clip...

Of course what makes the show most entertaining is when the adults find out that they are NOT smarter than a fifth grader... at least for us watching.



So I thought we might put our own *twist* on this, and ask...

Are you smarter than Discovery Kids?

- In the Old Testament, there was a short list of rules that God gave to His people; what do we call them?
- When He gave the Ten Commandments, He gave them to a person, the leader of His people; who was that?
- Those Commands first appear in our Bibles in which Old Testament Book?



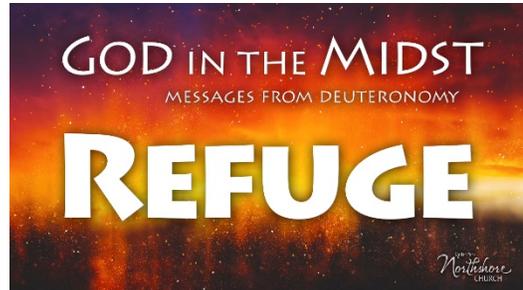
They appear again in Deuteronomy. A sermon from Moses. We are in a section of Deuteronomy that expands on the Commandments.

- Do you remember any of those Commandments?

- Today we are in chapter 19, a chapter that expands on the sixth Commandment; do you know what that Commandment is?
- What if you break a Commandment but you didn't mean to?

Chapter 19 of Deuteronomy draws distinctions based on *intent*. It answers the implied question, "What if you *accidentally* kill someone?"

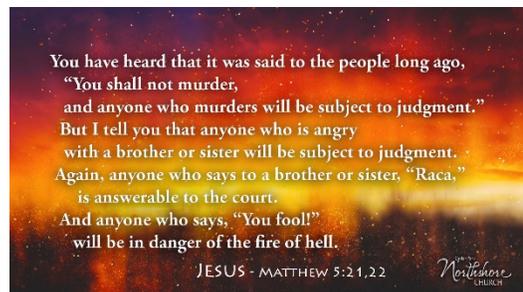
Our laws today consider intent when determining crime and punishment, using words like *1st degree*, *2nd degree*, *manslaughter* and such; we even determine that people are innocent because of self-defense. **Intent matters.**



Jesus seemed to teach that *intent* was as important as the act.

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, ^e and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'

"You shall not murder" comes right from the Ten Commandments, and it is the sort of thing upon which people can easily agree... that is until we start to define murder in *finer detail*.



- Was there intent? Maybe then it is manslaughter.
- Was there direct cause? Maybe then there is guilt as an accomplice.

You see... it may not take long at all to disagree, even on a principle as basic as "do not murder."

Jesus went to *fine details* beyond what anyone might think reasonable.

²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. ¹

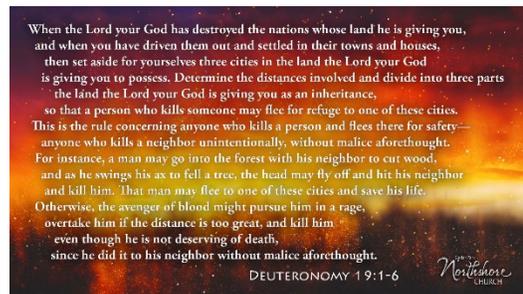
¹ The New International Version. (2011). (Mt 5:21–22). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

We would miss the point if we thought that Jesus was merely *moving the line* to a more strict place, taking the line from murder to mere anger, or degrading someone with mere *name calling*. Jesus was not standing among Pharisees who made law-keeping a burdensome, full-time job, declaring that He was some sort of *super Pharisee*.

No, Jesus was saying that while we might naturally be ruled by anger and hatred, this is not the system of His Kingdom. There is no room for the rule of anger or hatred in His Kingdom; **His rule is love**.

For *murder to be murder*, it has to come from evil intention... and that evil intention (with roots as simple as anger) is enough to pronounce one **guilty** in God's Kingdom. **Intent matters**. It seems that from the perspective of God's Kingdom, the intent is *as important* (if not *more important*) than the act.

So in Deuteronomy, based in the Commandment not to murder, there is provision for those that *unintentionally* kill. It started with three cities, with a directive to add more once their nation grew... **cities of refuge** where one could live in safety.



An example was given:

⁵ For instance, a man may go into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and as he swings his ax to fell a tree, the head may fly off and hit his neighbor and kill him. That man may flee to one of these cities and save his life.²

Was there some guilt? Perhaps *negligence*, the kind of thing that might be settled in a civil court today with money? Sure... and the perpetrator did pay a penalty.

While the cities of refuge did provide safety, the one fleeing to a city of refuge was a *refugee* living in exile. They were separated from their life, livelihood and family. It was still a high cost, even though they did not have to pay the cost of their life for a life.

² The New International Version. (2011). (Dt 19:5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The cities of refuge provided a measure of mercy for the *victims* as well. Families of the fallen could find some comfort in that the one who took the life, no matter how innocently, was no longer a part of the community.

These cities of refuge sound a bit like something that has been in our news: **sanctuary cities**. Some local governments have taken action that shields undocumented immigrants in some cases. Sanctuary cities are not the same thing as these *cities of refuge* in our text... but there might be some lessons that we can learn.



For those who take a *hard stand* against illegal immigration and are loudly opposed to sanctuary cities (or amnesty, or paths to legalization or citizenship)... maybe we should be careful to consider **intent**.

There is a clear difference between someone who *jumped the boarder* or *overstayed a visa* with the intent to do harm, than those who are merely pursuing safety or a better life for their kids. Can't we see the degrees of difference here based on intent?

Then there are those who had no ability to express intent, the *so called dreamers* who are undocumented because they came as dependent children. As we seek solutions, it seems that we should be mindful of intent. There should be mercy shown based on intent. There is no slippery slope, no need for a hard line. There is room for leniency based on intent; this is the way we apply justice in nearly every case. Could there be 1st degree trespassing for those with intent to do harm, for example?

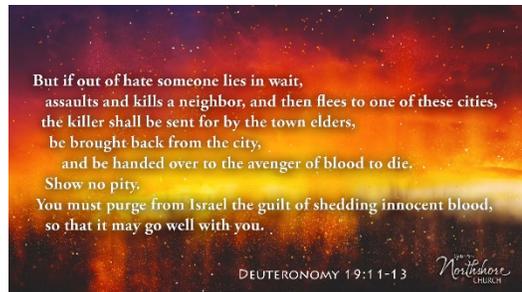
On the other hand, those who are most lenient in their categorical support of undocumented immigrants might consider a lesson from our text as well; even those who found security in the *cities of refuge* did so at a cost. They did not enjoy the full freedoms as citizens. Even if there was no evil intent, there was still a cost. If there is a 3rd degree trespassing with no evil intent, there ought to still be a price or penalty.

When the Lord your God has destroyed the nations whose land he is giving you, and when you have driven them out and settled in their towns and houses, then set aside for yourselves three cities in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess. Determine the distances involved and divide into three parts the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, so that a person who kills someone may flee for refuge to one of these cities. This is the rule concerning anyone who kills a person and flees there for safety— anyone who kills a neighbor unintentionally, without malice aforethought. For instance, a man may go into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and as he swings his ax to fell a tree, the head may fly off and hit his neighbor and kill him. That man may flee to one of these cities and save his life. Otherwise, the avenger of blood might pursue him in a rage, overtake him if the distance is too great, and kill him even though he is not deserving of death, since he did it to his neighbor without malice aforethought.

DEUTERONOMY 19:1-6

Northshore CHURCH

It is important to see that the cities of refuge were only for those who fit into that specific category... only for those who had killed *accidentally*. Murderers were not welcomed. In fact, in other passages, further along into Israel's history, prophets condemned those who misused the cities of refuge. The cities of refuge were meant as a means of justice, not a way to undermine justice.

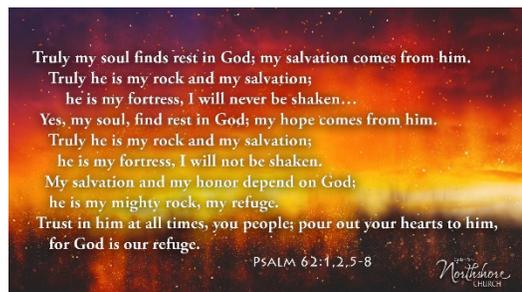


So what about us? Where do we go for refuge? Where do we run for safety? For salvation?

Of course we run to God (Psalm 62:8, Proverbs 14:26).

Hear the words of Psalm 62:

- ¹ Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from him.
- ² Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken...
- ⁵ Yes, my soul, find rest in God;
my hope comes from him.
- ⁶ Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.
- ⁷ My salvation and my honor depend on God;
he is my mighty rock, my refuge.
- ⁸ Trust in him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge. ³



God is our rock, salvation, fortress, and refuge. When those *ancients* ran to a city of refuge, they too were really running to God and the safety He provides. God provided the refuge, just as God provides our refuge. We, of course have something so much more than a mere **city** to which we run; we have a person, **Jesus**.

And here, of course, is the Good News of the Gospel. Our refuge is a place to run with **every** sin... not merely our accidental failures, but every sin. Jesus is that rock. Jesus is our fortress and salvation. Jesus is our refuge.

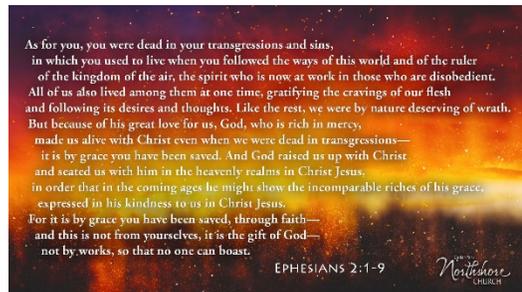
³ The New International Version. (2011). (Ps 62:1-8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Jesus saves us from every sin. When we run to Him with sorrow and repentance, with faith believing, we find refuge. Whether it is something so blatant like murder or subtle like anger, every evil **action** and **intent** when brought to Jesus can be forgiven; we find refuge.

While there may remain consequences and scars from sin, our eternal lives are secure and there is a hope for this life because Jesus is our refuge.

I found myself talking with a couple of guys this week about the life and refuge we find in Jesus. Here is the way we read it in Ephesians 2:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,⁴



Just as the penalty for murder was death (life for life) the penalty for all sin is death (eternal death)... and all of us are under that **life sentence**. There is no escaping it; we do not (cannot) measure up to the perfect holiness of God.

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.⁵

God gives us refuge in Christ... not free, because Christ paid the price, but ours nevertheless through faith.

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.⁶

Today is a day to believe, a day to run to Jesus and find refuge.

Have you ever found that refuge?

Is today a day to find that refuge again? Refuge from self-inflicted wounds, or simply refuge from life's circumstances?

Run to Jesus.

⁴ The New International Version. (2011). (Eph 2:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ The New International Version. (2011). (Eph 2:4–5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁶ The New International Version. (2011). (Eph 2:8–9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.