**"YEA GOD!! FOR BEING A REFUGE"**

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KEY WORDS: FAITH / GOD / REFUGE / HEAVEN

**INTRO.:** A. (Personal story—replace with your own!)--**CARMICHAEL--**I was driving to Sacramento to see a friend, youth pastor at the Carmichael Church. Somehow I made the driver of this pickup truck mad. I still don’t know what I did, must have cut him off or something. He and his girlfriend are yelling at me. He cut in front of me, then slowed way down, until we were almost stopped on the freeway. I finally went around him--then he tailgated me. My exit came, I went off--he followed me--got to a long line of cars--no place to go. I looked in the rearview mirror--saw him jump out of his car, come running up to me. Locked my door, I saw a little room to the right–I had a hot car back then-- went around car in front of me, floored it to the front of the line--had no idea what I would do when I got there--there was just room to squeeze through--he finally gave up running. I raced down the next street, I turned left, right, purposely tried to get lost--so he couldn't find me--heart pounding. I was terrified--finally found the church. I've been afraid to drive through Sacramento ever since--he might be waiting by the freeway, watching for my car. No fun being chased. I sat in my car and just shook. I got a call to that church a couple years ago, drove that same exit, felt it all again. **Looking over my shoulder, afraid he might show up again.**

**I. CITIES OF REFUGE.** A. In the Middle East the whole system of justice was originally based on chasing and running. If someone committed a murder--the victim's family or clan would get together, and pick out a **blood avenger**. His job would be to track the murderer, hunt him down, and kill him. So you'd pick the fastest guy in the family--"it's you." It was a matter of honor, find the murderer, announce that you're the blood avenger, run him down, kill him, take back evidence, and the whole family would hold a party. May seem a little primitive, take law, justice into your own hands. But it worked.

 B. The problem was–What if it was an accident? You're out chopping wood, your axhead flies off and kills someone. That family could still appoint a blood avenger and kill you. Doesn't seem fair.

 C. So God has them designate 6 **Cities of Refuge. Joshua 20-21.** **Numbers 35:9-11 “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Say this to the people of Israel: “When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, designate cities of refuge for people to flee to if they have killed someone accidentally. Num. 35:12 “‘”These cities will be places of protection from a dead person’s relatives who want to avenge the death. The slayer must not be killed before being tried.”’”**

 **D. MAP--**These 6 cities, spread all over Israel, 3 on each side of the river, to be no more than 1/2 day running from anywhere. The trails were all to be well-marked, with clear signs--"Refuge." Once a year the whole country would turn out to clear the trails, check on the signs--you never knew when you might need it yourself. So if you committed an unintentional murder, you immediately take off running. If you got to the City of Refuge before the Blood Avenger got there--you were safe--stand in the gate, state your case to the elders--if they thought you had a case, there was a trial. If you were declared innocent in the trial, you could live there in the City of Refuge until the High Priest died--then you could go back to your original home, safe, free. But if you ever went out of the city, you were fair game, and the Blood Avenger could chase you.

**II. WHAT DOES “REFUGE” FEEL LIKE?** A. So you can imagine what it feels like–in a thousand movies, you’re running through the woods, Indiana Jones, Bourne, you’re running, they’re after you, keep looking back, they’re almost caught up to you, you fall down, never going to make it, there’s the airplane, you jump in, you shout, let’s go–plane takes off–You made it. Safe. Not going to die today. **Refuge.**

B. We’re hiking in Thailand, 40 of us, 2.5 hours straight up a mountain in pouring down rain, slipping, falling, you get to your mountain hut, and you change your clothes, and you sit on the floor of this hut 20 feet up, and watch the rain pour down–refuge. HAWAII–my favorite moment in Hawaii–went hiking with Hilda, began to rain–Hilda gets an umbrella out of her backpack–I never would have thought of that–we’re under this tiny little umbrella, rain all around us. Rainbow over there. Refuge. BRIDGE–Switzerland, hailstorm, like people shooting at us. Got under bridge–stopped. Touched the ground, kissed the ground. **BORDER**–don’t know the name of the movie, black actor, pretends to be a policeman–they’re chasing him, he goes over the Mexican border–that second, the police have to stop. Safe. Refuge. Goes dancing down the street. Safe. They can’t touch him. Not going to die today.

**III. GOD IS A REFUGE.** A. The key point is that all these cities of refuge–all God’s idea. this was all God's idea. It is in the heart of God, in His nature, His character--to provide a place of refuge For people in trouble, for people who are running, for people who have people coming after them, for people who are hearing footsteps, people who need a hiding place.

 B. All these cities of refuge were to teach a bigger lesson–**ps. 46:1 “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” Ps. 91:4 “Under His wings you will find refuge.”** We think of God as a man, male, Our Father, who is in heaven. But this is the more feminine side of God. **Matt. 23:37 “‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I have longer to gather you together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.’”** God is a refuge.

 C. You can try other ways. **Babylon**–thought they were safe, 20-feet thick walls, river going through city, food for 20 years. But they dug a dry lake, came in, destroyed Babylon. **PENTAGON**–Adventist, going through Pentagon tour–figured, all of Russia and China’s missiles probably aimed at the Pentagon, asked tour guide, colonel, how safe is it here? Ma’am, this is the safest place on earth!” 2 months later, 9-11. **ONLY SAFE WITH GOD. REFUGE.**

 **D. Question is–IS IT REAL? Does God Himself actually come down out of heaven, get involved in the middle of things, solve people’s problems? Does He come down when you’re under stress, hearing footsteps, and do something with your nerve endings, and give you some sort of relief? Or is it all in your mind?** All through the Bible–God is a refuge. **Ps. 9:9 “The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.”**

**IV. WHO NEEDS A REFUGE?** A. Who doesn’t need one? Anybody who is hearing footsteps, somebody, something is after you. Made a list of just people in this church, this week: People behind on their rent, house payments, might lose their house. 3 kids, Dad died. Father almost died, now has cancer. Pam, RA, cyst on nerve. Somebody threw kid out of the house. Accident, no insurance, car smashed. 2 beautiful people, felt criticized, hurt. Lost car, riding bicycle 15 miles to work. Just a fraction.

 B. You need a cave today? Little safe harbor, out of the storm? Need to get “under His wings”? **Ps. 23:1,4 “The LORD is My Shepherd. I shall not want. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, FOR THOU ART WITH ME.”**

**V. HOW DO YOU ACCESS THIS REFUGE?** A. The next most obvious question–So how do you access this refuge? We don’t have any cities of refuge any more. Can’t just drive up to Loma Linda–as long as you’re in Loma Linda, nobody can touch you. They put those cameras in there, I get 3 tickets one Sabbath morning. $400 each. Loma Linda, not a city of refuge. Where do you go, get God to be your City of Refuge?

 B. The first step is a big step, and hard for most of us. **Ps. 91:15 “He will call upon me, and I will answer ; I will be with him in trouble.”** We have to **CALL OUT**--we have to make this move from independence to dependence--which is why more of us don't access this refuge of God. **RAFTING** years ago in southern OR, 3 days, had own little kayak. Put all our stuff in the big raft. Halfway through, fell out in a big rapids, went through the whole rapids in the water, swallowed a lot of water, struggling. Somebody saw it, said, “You better get into the raft for a while.” Didn’t want to do that. Didn’t want to admit couldn’t make it on my own. But had to admit, not going to make it on my own, climbed into the big raft. C. Three quick thoughts: #1–**You Can’t stay.** Had to leave your home and run, can’t think, maybe can stay, ride this out, maybe it will go away. Had to get up and go. #2–**You can’t wait.** Can’t think, plenty of time. Blood Avenger after you, fastest runner they have–time to go. Don’t assume, plenty of time. **#3–Can’t keep on running**. Run to City of Refuge, then stop there. Once get to God, you can stop running. Most of us keep on running, run harder, try to outrun the footsteps.

 D. **POUR OUT your soul. Ps. 62:8 “Pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.”** Can’t hide from God anyway. Pour it all out.

 E. **ON YOUR OWN–**You don’t have to come to a church. You don’t have to always call the pastor. Go see a counselor, though that is all fine. You don’t have to go a certain place anymore. **John 4:24 “God is a Spirit, and people worship Him in spirit.”** God is everywhere. God is a mobile refuge. You can access this refuge anywhere, any time, in the car, in dorm room, and God will be there. **Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings**, heard they have an invisible cloak. Any time in trouble, whip out invisible cloak, nobody can see you. Safe. **1 Samuel 30:6 “David strengthened himself in the LORD.”** Running from Saul, comes home, Philistines destroyed village, burned it all down, took wives and children. Soldiers going to stone him. Cried. No city to run to. Had to find God himself, right then. And God will be there.

 1. **Willow Creek–SELF FEEDERS. Assumed, as long as people came to church, give them all they needed, grow spiritually.** 20 years, survey, wasn’t working. Had to connect them up to God themselves. Self feeders, **John 14:1 “Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God.” Enough.**

 F. **GOSPEL. Today is Yom Kippur. Day of Atonement. 10th day of the 7th month.** Most of us grw up with the Investigative Judgment. Scared to death, judgment started, books opened, going over the names. Scared to death. NO. **Daniel 8, Day of Atonement. Sanctuary will be made right.** One day a year, goat made atonement, sins taken out, everybody cheered. SHALOM. Best day of the cheer. No more footsteps, no more accuser of the brethren, I will remember your sins no more. BUBBLE–CAN’T HEAR FOOTSTEPS.

 G.. **CHURCH. Church has to be a refuge.** **FRIZEN–WWII,** man was a scout, out ahead of Americans, German machine gun him in both legs, couldn’t move, fell into a creek, Americans retreated, left him there. German man crawled to him, waited to die, German, smiling, picked him up, carried him to other side, both sides stopped firing, sacred moment, laid him down, went back, fighting started. CHURCH–One time, the battle stops. The footsteps stop when you step into a church. Safe here. Not going to be hurt here. WE ARE THE CAVE, THE UMBRELLA IN THE RAIN, THE SHELTER IN THE TIME OF STORM. We are the refuge makers in the world.

 1 Letter–**WEARY ADVENTIST SOUL. Left church, Sunday church, found rest, grace, then came back. Mission, church has to be a refuge, not wearing people out. Prodigal son, party, for weary Adventist souls., people tired of trying to keep all rules, been hurt, food police, clothes police.**

 **2. Church has to be one place–don’t hear footsteps.**

**VI. HEAVEN IS THE ULTIMATE REFUGE. A.** And then one of these days we will go to the ultimate refuge. To a place where if you get to the front gate--you'll hear no more footsteps. No more harsh elements. No more tests. No more pressure, no more stress. No more competition. No more bad news. No more bills. No more running. And we will all gather around the great throne on Sabbath and say, Yea God.