

Christ is Risen... **He is risen, indeed!**

...We read as follows in Jesus' name:

The cities of the Levites in the midst of the possession of the people of Israel were in all forty-eight cities with their pasturelands. These cities each had its pasturelands around it. So it was with all these cities.

Thus **the Lord gave** to Israel all **the land** that He swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. And **the Lord gave** them **rest** on every side just as He had sworn to their fathers. **Not one of all their enemies had withstood them**, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands. **Not one word of all the good promises** that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had **failed**; all came to pass.^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

We don't hear of much action taking place in this reading, do we?

At least, not a lot by the people. They just "**settled there.**" That's all they did.

So it can kind of serve as a time of mental rest and reflection.

But don't think that this rest simply came to them after the battle of Jericho that we heard about last week.

After Jericho, the Israelites went further into the Promised Land — onward and upward (for CS Lewis fans).

For 7 years, Joshua had led their forces in carrying out the Lord's justice upon the Canaanites.

7 years of continued maneuvering throughout the land as various coalitions came up against them.

7 years of fighting.

Not one of all their enemies had withstood them,... not because Israel was such a martial force, but, as the text says, **for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands.**

The Lord had given them complete victory.

And just to impress upon you how complete a victory... and how successful their campaigns were...

we read that when Israel went up against the small town called Ai, right after Jericho,

that when only 36 Israelite soldiers were struck down in battle, Israel considered it a route.

Think of that, only 36 men died - and they realized something was very wrong. ^{Joshua 8}

Why? Because they were not used to losing anybody.

And this makes sense upon reflection of what God promised because any loss of life by Israel now meant that those casualties would not receive their allotted inheritances in the Promised Land.

And, in fact, this was a promise fulfilled by the Lord as Moses had prophesied:

"No one shall be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them." ^{Deuteronomy 7:24}

And truly, the battles were the Lord's. He took diligent care to fulfill His promises.

On one occasion, we are explicitly told that the Lord send large hailstones against the Canaanites and killed more by hail than Israel killed with the sword.

And then, during that same battle He made the sun stand still in the sky at the request of Joshua so that the Israelites could finish routing the Canaanites. ^{Joshua 10}

...

But now the Lord's work of conquest was DONE. It was FINISHED. Now there is to be rest.

Prior to our text (in fact, the previous 8 chapters ^[Joshua 13-20]), we read of the land being allotted, portioned out, to each of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Each tribe was given a territory (or two even, in the case of the tribe of Manasseh).

[You can see the allotments on a map as you leave this morning.]

Each tribe that is, EXCEPT the tribe of Levi, as was heard in today's text.

The tribe of Levi didn't receive a single territory (to live all together in a single place, like the others). As we heard, they were allotted 48 cities (with pasture lands) spread out throughout the Promised Land.

Remember that the tribe of Levi had been consecrated by God to serve Him & His people in His tabernacle. The Levites that descended from Aaron's line (the first High Priest) were the only ones authorized by God to serve as priests, and the rest of the Levites, their brothers, were to help them. The Levites' role at the tabernacle and temple services obviously allowed them more opportunity to learn and know the Word of the Lord as they spent time at the tabernacle with the priests. And so, their role among the Israelites, being spread throughout the Promised Land, was to be as spiritual teachers and leaders. Obviously, since they weren't priests, they couldn't offer the sacrifices as the priests did, but they could preach to and teach the people.

And so now that all the tribes had been assigned their allotments, and the Levites were now given their cities throughout the land, we read: **Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that He swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as He had sworn to their fathers.**

After 40 years of wandering, and 7 years of fighting, they now had permanent homes and could rest, **with great and good cities that [they] did not build, and houses full of all good things that [they] did not fill, and cisterns that [they] did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that [they] did not plant.** Deut. 6:10-11

Think of what that must have felt like for them. A place, a furnished place, to finally call their own. And when God said permanent, He meant it.

They were never to sell the land allotted to them. Leviticus 25:23

It was their inheritance and to be the inheritance of their children's children's children... into perpetuity.

...

The Promised Land, O Child of God, is a type (a picture) of your heavenly inheritance.

The Lord would have you be zealous in keeping your inheritance... to cherish and hold on to it, even as the cares, pleasures, and worries of this temporal life would steal away your attention. Genesis 25:34

It's not to be squandered (like Esau, who despised his birthright and gave it up for a temporary bowl of lentil soup).

Instead take Naboth as your example: who refused to give up his vineyard (his inheritance) to King Ahab, because the Lord had, indeed, forbidden it; 1 Kings 21

(and though he lost his earthly life, he kept his true inheritance eternally).

...

And notice, too, the bold and confident recognition and confession that the Lord was true to His Word.

He had promised it 100s of years ago, 1st to Abraham, then to Isaac and then to Jacob, that their descendants would become a great nation and that they would inherit this land...

(thus the title "the Promised Land").

That promise was then passed down through Jacob to his sons, the patriarchs of the 12 tribes.

Even though it took 100s of years for all that to be accomplished, the Lord was completely faithful, and proved that He is a God who can be trusted, even/especially when the promises seem impossible.

But it wasn't always true that Israel, as a nation, would believe God's promises. About 45 years prior, soon after they left Mt. Sinai and sent the 12 spies into the land, their parents and grandparents had disbelieved God's promises. They saw the large city walls and the large people and chose to believe their eyes instead of the Lord. They cried out and faithlessly complained that if they fought against the Canaanites at that time that they would lose and that their children would be orphans in the wilderness. Of that incident, we read how the Lord then promised those adults that they would never enter the land of Canaan themselves, but that their children, who they feared would be orphans, would instead enter and inherit the Promised Land. Numbers 13-14

Brothers and sisters in Christ, sheep of our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, Once again this Eastertide, we get to reflect on the Lord keeping His impossible promises. On the night He was betrayed, Jesus promised His disciples that He would **lay down His life for His sheep**. He further promised that **because** He would lay it down, **He had the power to take it up again.**^{John 10:17}

Hearing of Jesus' crucifixion, death, and burial, and then His consequent resurrection, is like hearing of the the 7 years of fighting that Israel had... complete victory after complete victory; all won because the Lord had given their enemies into their hands.

Jesus' death and resurrection IS the proof for us that the Lord keeps His promises, especially the impossible ones.

It's the proof that when He says, "I baptize you into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," you become His child – and heir... an heir of His heavenly kingdom in glory.

It's the proof that **the Blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses you from all sin,** ^{1 John 1:7}

as you are bathed in it and **your sins are washed away** in the waters of Holy Baptism. Acts 22:16

It's the proof that He **will be with you even to the end of the age.** Matthew 28:20

It's the proof that as He says, "**If you forgive the sins of any, they ARE forgiven them.**"^{John 20:23}

It's the proof that when He says, "**This is My body... This is My blood,**" Matthew 26:26,28

that His crucified and risen body and blood are there present for the forgiveness of all your sins.

**Not one of all [your] enemies can withstand [you],
for the Lord has given all [your] enemies into [your] hands.**

This is the Word of the Lord that we need to hear each week.

It's the rest that God desires you to take each and every day, and especially each week.

This word of forgiveness, spoken to you by His ministers/His pastors/His shepherds,

is the point of His OT command: "**You shall keep the day of rest holy.**"^{Exodus 20:8; 31:14; Deut.5:12}

It's not that God is so egotistical/vain/proud that He needs to hear your prayers, praises, & worship or so poor that He needs your money.

The 'day of rest' is for you, so that He can work – in you

so that you can hear His promises anew and be refreshed,

so that you can settle into His unbelievable forgiveness – freely won for you by Jesus Christ – and be strengthened, encouraged, and emboldened to fight the day-to-day battles,

not in doubt, fear, or dread of losing your life, but in faith and hope and love as you gain true life.

Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to you will fail; all will come to pass.

Thanks be to God.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria

LEVITICAL CITIES AND CITIES OF REFUGE

JOSH. 20-21

- Levitical city
- Levitical city (uncertain location)
- City of refuge
- Other city
- ▲ Mountain peak



MEDITERRANEAN SEA

DEAD SEA

Eastern Desert

