

GOD THE ROCK

(Psalm 18.1-6 and 1 Corinthians 10.1-4)

Introduction

Well, having looked at that well-known and much-loved theme of God the Shepherd last week, today we're looking at another image of God from the Psalms; one certainly less familiar to us.

Personally, I have preached many times on the Lord as shepherd, and Jesus the good shepherd, indeed the great shepherd, the chief shepherd. But as I searched with the aid of a computer this week though my whole preaching career (826 in English and 465 in French) I found, as I suspected, that I have never once given a single talk on the theme of God as a rock before today.

It's perhaps a strange thing to compare God to. Rocks are heavy, lifeless, usually unattractive, often in the way, dull, inanimate objects. What inspired anyone to ever think that God was like a rock?

In popular culture today we think about dependable, reliable, supportive people and say "Oh, he's an absolute rock."

Queen Elizabeth 1, who had to assert her authority in a man's world, famously said, "Though the sex to which I belong is considered weak you will nevertheless find me a rock that bends to no wind."

We all know people who are steady as a rock, hard as rock and solid as a rock.

Conversely, when a relationship goes badly wrong, couples talk of their marriage hitting the rocks. When you're as discouraged as you can get you hit rock bottom. And if you are faced with an impossible dilemma we say you're between a rock and a hard place.

And yet 33 times in the Bible this is what God is named.

"Ascribe greatness to our God, the Rock! His work is perfect, and all His ways are just" (says Moses in Deuteronomy 32).

"You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation" (says Ethan in Psalm 89).

"For you have forgotten the God of your salvation and have not remembered the rock of your refuge" (says Isaiah in Isaiah 17).

And then here in our Psalm today, Psalm 18, David says, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

I want to say today that God as a rock means three distinct and important things.

1) My Fortress for Perspective

Firstly, God, the rock, is my fortress for perspective. This is what David says in the first half of v2. "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer."

He's thinking of a steep, inaccessible, natural defence that is hard to climb but from which there is a great view and a natural strategic advantage. It's easier to throw spears from a great height at an advancing enemy than it is to throw them up a sheer cliff as you attempt to scale it to attack it.

If ever you travel to the Holy Land for a guided tour, it's likely they'll take you on a bus trip from Jerusalem down to the Dead Sea, the lowest point on the Earth's surface.

And close to the Dead Sea, there is a huge, isolated rock plateau called Masada. King Herod the Great (that's the one who tried to kill the infant

Christ) built himself a palace on top of it. It's a natural fortification, and at about 400 metres high, it's impregnable. You can also see for miles.

Our Psalm says that is what God is like. If you build your life on him, your perspective changes.

When God is your rock, your fortress, you don't tell God how big your problems are; you tell the problems how big God is.

James Irwin was lunar module pilot on Apollo 15. He actually walked and drove on the lunar surface and picked up moon rocks in his hands. But he said, "Jesus walking on the earth is more important than man walking on the moon."

That Apollo mission must have been the pinnacle of his career and one of the highlights of his whole life. But when God is your rock, your fortress, your perspective on everything changes forever.

2) My Shelter for Protection

Secondly, God, the rock, is my shelter for protection. This is what David says in the second half of v2. "My God is my rock, in whom I take refuge."

If you've ever read the story of David in 1 and 2 Samuel, you know he spent many years on the run from an insanely jealous, insecure, controlling king called Saul. He pursued David with armies, with spears, with bows and arrows. He hunted him down with dogs.

There is an introductory note in our Bibles before v1 of this Psalm, and it says, "*Of David, the servant of the Lord. He sang to the Lord the words of this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.*"

David had many close shaves. And whenever Saul and his men got too close for comfort, David would find concealed caves and secret hideouts in the rocky Judean desert and seek refuge in God.

David Livingstone, the famous missionary to Africa, tells how he was once chased up a tree and besieged by a pride of lions. He said the tree was so small that he was barely out of reach of these ferocious beasts.

He said they would stand on their back feet and roar and shake the little tree, and that he could actually feel their hot breath as they went for him. "But," his diary says this; "I had a good night and felt happier and safer in that little tree besieged by lions, in the savannah of Africa, in the will of God, than I would have been out of the will of God in England."

Trusting in God does not mean that none of the things you are afraid of will happen to you. They may well, but when you turn to God, the change in you will mean that whatever you fear will turn out in the end to be no bug deal to you.

3) My Foundation for Life

Thirdly, God, the rock, is my foundation for life. Perhaps this is the kind of place Jesus was thinking about when he told his story in Matthew 7.

"Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock."

If you build your life on the permanent, eternal, solid bedrock of Jesus and his word, you have a wholesome, sound foundation for life which defines your principles, your morals, your ideals and your destiny.

You will live by permanent tried and tested values, not muddled, fashionable opinions.

Ending

As I end, I want to say a few words on our second reading from 1 Corinthians 10. It refers to when the Israelites were journeying from Egypt through the desert to the Promised Land. Twice, they ran out of water. Twice, Moses got water out of a rock.

Paul, referring back to this says that the rock was Christ. He doesn't mean that in his pre-incarnation existence, Jesus was literally a magic mineral.

Every page of the OT is watermarked with previews of Jesus; every prophet a foreshadowing of Jesus the Word of God; every priest a foreshadowing of Jesus the Great High Priest; every king a foreshadowing of Jesus the King of kings; every sacrifice a foreshadowing of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; every holy place a foreshadowing of Christ dwelling with us.

A dry rock in a desert place giving water to a thirsty nation is a foreshadowing of the one who can bring hope out of utter despair and life out of death.

A fortress for perspective, a shelter for protection, a foundation for life and an abundant supply of life for the desperate – that's Jesus. Do you trust in him today?

Let's pray...