

(The Names of Jesus) 2. The Rock of Ages

by A.B. Simpson

Transcript

“You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You: because he trusts in You, Trust in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord JEHOVAH is everlasting strength.” (Isa.26: 3, 4.) The literal translation of this beautiful verse, as it will be found in the margin of our English Bible is, “The Lord JEHOVAH is the Rock of Ages.” This is the foundation of that beautiful hymn which is one of the favorites of the English-speaking Christians in the world: a hymn without which any collection would be absolutely incomplete. The imagery is very familiar to every Bible reader; rocks and mountains are associated with every important incident and epoch in the Bible. It was on Ararat that the new world began; on Moriah that the faith of Abraham was perfected; on Sinai that the law was given; on Horeb that the Tabernacle was designed; on Nebo that the Land of Promise was unveiled; on Zion that the capitol of Judah was fixed; on Moriah that the temple was reared; on Carmel that the nation of Israel was called to their covenant God; on Mount Hattin that Jesus preached His sermon; on Hermon that He was transfigured; on Calvary that He died; and from Olivet that He ascended. It is not strange, therefore, that the mountain and the rock have become favorite expressions of sacred things, for which their natural defenses, their immutable and changeless features, their colossal strength, their lofty eminence, their wide-reaching prospects of vision, and their beauty, so specially fit them.

The metaphor is repeated over and over again. “The Lord is our rock.” “The rock of our heart.” “The rock of our salvation.” “The rock that is higher than we.” “The shadow of a great rock in a weary land”; and here, the most sublime of them all, “The Rock of Ages.” This is the only passage in the Scriptures where this particular phrase, so full of deep meaning and majesty, is found.

Like some sublime mountain face, this text is a mighty and isolated rock in which we can trace the face of Jesus, our Rock of Ages. As we sit down under its mighty shadow, as we rest upon its velvet slopes, as we drink from the crystal fountains that flow from its side, we hear the sweet echo of our text: “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You: because he trusts in You. Trust in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord JEHOVAH is the Rock of Ages.”

The Rock

Higher even than its fine natural suggestiveness is the perfect Scriptural significance of this verse. It looks back to some of the most instructive and striking types of the Old Testament.

1. It recalls the rock in Horeb and speaks of Christ as our Savior. "I do not want you to be ignorant," says the apostle, addressing us New Testament Christians, "how that all our fathers . . . did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." Perishing with thirst, the Israelites were led by Moses to the face of the rock in Horeb. Then the lawgiver lifted up his rod and smote the rock at God's command upon its naked face. Immediately it burst open, and from the cleft there poured a living stream, running through the camp in rivulets and floods of living water, until the thirsty thousands drank, and drank again, and gave their children and their cattle to drink until their thirst was fully satisfied. And they praised God for His great deliverance.

This incident has been applied with full Scriptural authority to the crucifixion of the Savior. He, for us, was smitten by the rod of the Lawgiver and Judge as our sacrifice and substitute, and from His pierced side there flows for us the water of life, where we can drink of His boundless mercies, His forgiving love, His renewing grace and thankfully sing,

Rock in Horeb, riven for me By the law's avenging rod, Flowing from thy side I see Streams of water and of blood.

And I wash my crimson soul Whiter than the wool and snow, While the cleansing waters roll, And the living fountains flow. 2. The Rock of Ages reminds us of the rock in Kadesh: the type of Christ, a fuller and more perfect Savior. Forty years after the rock of Horeb was smitten, the camp of Israel came to Kadesh. The old story was repeated again. Thirsty and hungry they murmured instead of praying, and once again their lawgiver led them to the rock. This time the command was different. He was not to smite the rock as before, but simply to speak to it, and the promise was given that the water should immediately gush forth. In a moment of haste and disobedience he exceeded his orders and smote the rock repeatedly with words of irritation, perhaps of unbelief. God honored His promise by sending the water abundantly again, but He was grieved with His servant for disobeying the explicit command; and for this offense Moses was excluded from the promised land. The waters, however, came forth, and the people drank abundantly, and the river continued to flow through the desert.

This is the type of the deeper fullness of Christ our Savior, and of the infinite grace of the Holy Spirit, which is simply awaiting the call of faith on the part of every believer. This is not the atonement which first opened the rock of salvation for us; but this is the deeper fullness of the Holy Ghost, sanctifying and satisfying the soul.

The word "Kadesh" means righteousness, or holiness, and so this is the type of Christ our Sanctifier and Satisfier. This does not teach us of the Holy Spirit procured and sent down from heaven through the finished work of Christ, but the Holy Spirit already given and simply awaiting the call of faith to be received. We do not need now to smite the rock, to crucify Christ again, or to go through a desperate struggle and strain; but we need simply to look and live, to take and have, to speak the simple word of trust, "Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove," and He answers quickly to our cry, and our prayer is changed to the song of praise:

Rock of Kadesh, flowing still, From the Savior glorified; All my empty being fill With thy Pentecostal tide. 3. The Rock of Ages looks back to another beautiful picture: "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them." What can this mean? "Following rock." Not that the rock moved through the desert, but the river that ran from the rock followed them through the desert. The rock followed them with

its floods of life and cleansing. The Psalmist tells us the water ran in the desert like a river. The historian tells us that when once in the desert they were perishing for want of water, they simply gathered in a little circle upon the burning sands, and with their staves dug a little well in the sand, and lifted up their voices to God in songs of praise; immediately the waters sprang up from the depths below, and overflowed again, as at Horeb and Kadesh, from the subterranean springs. So the Rock of Ages sends its living fountains all along our way, and although the desert may be all around us and the wells may all seem dry, yet faith has only to make room and lift up the song of praise even in the hottest desert, and immediately the waters will spring forth in abundance, and we shall sing again:

Following rock, from day to day, Sending forth on every hand Rivers all along the way, Underneath the desert sand. Open deep the living well, Where Thy hidden fountains flow; Ever near Thee let me dwell, As I through the desert go. 4. The Rock of Ages is also a sheltering rock. This is the rock of which the Psalmist cried, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." He shall be "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." A little rock only reflects upon us the more intensely the heat which it has absorbed; but the great rock drinks in the warm rays on one side, and on the other has a cooling shadow for the traveler who rests under its overshadowing cliffs. So, weak and selfish hearts only irritate us and throw over us the reflection of their burdens; but Christ is the shadow of a great rock. Occupied every moment as He is with the cares of others, with the sorrows of a weeping world, with the myriad prayers that are every moment surging into His ears, with the dying cries and groans of sinking souls, with the despairing shrieks of the wretched ones that are every moment drifting into eternity. He is always at leisure for us. He is always at our call, and His whole heart is ever ready to comfort and rest us, as though there were no others in the wide universe but us requiring His sympathy and rest. Oh, the delightful peace, the safe refuge, the perfect security they enjoy who have found their home within the cleft of the Rock of Ages!

Shadowing rock in weary lands, Let me rest beneath Thy shade; Traveling o'er the burning sands, Shelter my defenseless head. Covert from the tempest rude, Refuge from the raging tide, Fortress when by foes pursued, Let me in Thy bosom hide. 5. The Rock of Ages is also a foundation rock. It is a place to build upon. It is the resting-place of faith and hope. There trust finds its full assurance as it leans upon the promise, "He that believes on the Son has everlasting life." There the soul can struggle with self and sin as it reposes all its weight upon the everlasting promise, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin." There hope anchors all her cables as she commits all her destinies, her affections and her treasures to this immovable rock and cries, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." The mountains shall depart, and the hills shall be removed; but this rock shall stand. Our most substantial edifices shall crumble into dust; our oldest institutions shall vanish away; our securities and investments shall be ashes in the flames of a dissolving world; but the Rock of Ages will remain unshaken and immovable, and, standing upon it amid the awful roar of the last great convulsion, we shall indeed be able to say, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; . . . though the mountains shake with the swellings thereof. . . . God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early."

Rock of Ages, fixed and sure, Be my faith's foundation stone; Hopes we built on Thee endure, Stable as Thy steadfast throne. While my heart on Thee is stayed, Winds may howl and torrents pour; I shall never be afraid, I am safe forevermore. Such are some of the Scriptural suggestions of this beautiful

name. There are further depths of significance in it that no words can fully unfold. It recalls to us not only the past associations of the Bible, but the past associations of the people of the church of God and our own experience. It is the rock of the past. How touching it is to travel in Bible lands, and, as you sit down at the well of Nazareth or Bethlehem, to think of the thousands who in every generation have drunk of that fountain and rested at that well! There Abraham rested and drank. There Jesus came as a little child with His mother. There crusaders, pilgrims, and great travelers have quenched their thirst. How touching, how wonderful! It is the well of ages. This is the Rock of Ages.

How it quickens one's pulse and moistens one's eyes to go through the tower of London and read upon the walls the last messages of saints and martyrs — the verses of Scripture which they were leaning their heads upon in view of the scaffold or the stake upon the morrow! How wonderful to take that twenty-third Psalm and trace its record as it has been written, not only in Bibles and letters bathed in love and the prayers of human hearts and heavenly anointings, but as it has been written on prison walls and dungeon floors! Oh, how awesome one feels, as he reads its verses, that he is treading on sacred ground, and that every syllable is marked with the footprints of some sufferer or victor that has gone before!

And so, this Christ to whom we come has been the Rock of Ages. The comfort He gives us has been proved often before. He is a tried stone, a sure foundation; and he that believes on Him shall never be ashamed. He has been proved in temptation, in sickness, in sorrow, in death. Other generations have proved Him. Our fathers and mothers have proved Him. Our past trials have proved Him.

Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him, How I've proved Him — and — Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus, Oh, for grace to trust Him more! And, as the Rock of Ages, He will live through future ages. He covers all the future, and He is keeping all that can ever concern us forevermore. Oh, let us trust in the Lord JEHOVAH forever: for the Lord JEHOVAH is the Rock of Ages.

The Rest

“You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you: because he trusts in You. Trust in the Lord forever.”

This blessed Rock is our place of rest. It is a place of perfect rest. “Peace! Peace!” is the marginal and more beautiful translation of this picture of the Christian's rest. There is a double peace. There is the peace of conscience that comes with justification, and the deeper rest of God that comes with His indwelling, and the best of this is that He keeps it. It is a peace that abides forever and that keeps the heart in which it reigns: “And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

But there are conditions on our part. The first is trust. This is the sweet Old Testament word for faith — its child phase. It is not so much the intellectual act of believing as the heart attitude of confiding and trusting.

The next condition is staying. We not only trust, but we stay trusting. There is a passive rest which is the result of indolence and inaction. It is simply drifting. The Christian's rest is an active reliance on the loving and everlasting arms of God. This will illustrate it. Look at yonder boat running before the breeze. Let that helm go lax, and lo! the sails flap in the winds, and the boat drifts and tosses with the tide, dashed about at the mercy of the billows, without any fixed course or steady poise. This is the attitude of many a life — simply drifting, trustless, restless, tempest-tossed, and tending nowhere but to deeper unrest forever-more. But look at that boat now, as the experienced seaman sits down at the stern and puts his

strong and steady hand upon the helm, pressing hard against the wind. See how the sails quickly fill and lean against the wind, like white-winged birds upon the air. Notice how the tossing vessel rights up and sets her prow against the waves in a steady course. Observe how the drifting and tossing ceases, and the pitch and poise of the little ship are like the movements of a thing of life. Notice how swiftly she cuts her way through the raging waters, obedient to the joint impulse of the sail above and the helm astern. Notice how the very winds that almost cross her path, or blow in her very face, help her on her course. Beautiful picture of the soul that is stayed upon God! The pressure of His providence, the very difficulties that confront us but quicken our steadfast trust, and we meet them with the firm hand and fixed will of humble, holy confidence in God. How the will springs into steadiness and power! How its tossings are stilled, and its whole movement is quieted, intensely alive and active, yet intensely restful! It presses on, like that noble little ship, through wind and tide, in the will of God and the work of life. This is the picture of a soul stayed upon God.

There is, further, a distinct reference here to the thoughts of the mind and their bearing upon the spirit of trust. It is the mind that is stayed upon God. Just translate this word "stayed" as "stopped," and carry with you the idea of a suspending of your busy thoughts, cares, and activities, and you will understand better the prophet's meaning. The rest of faith is usually hindered most by the restlessness of our ever busy thoughts. We get to reasoning, questioning, wondering, fearing, looking forward to this emergency and that contingency, and our soul is disquieted by a whirlwind of conflicting thoughts. God wants us to stop thinking.

A lady came to spend a week or two in our home to learn the secret of our deeper life in Christ. Her face was clouded with care, and her heart was distracted with doubts, anxiety and fears. She was really in danger of losing her mind through spiritual unrest. She came to our Friday meeting to be anointed for healing of this terrible pressure upon her brain. As we knelt by her side, we asked her if she would promise the Lord to stop thinking for a week. She said she could not, that at every instant she was like one swept by a hurricane of troubled thoughts. We told her she could and she must, that she needed to set her will firmly in the strength of God "like the ill birds that might beat their wings upon the window pane, she need not open the window and let them in; like the wild billows that might surge against the ship, and even flood the deck, she need not open the hatches and let them down into the cabin. She could simply stand guard at the door of her mind and refuse to receive these thoughts, to dwell upon them, to harbor them, to enter into sympathy with them. She could simply say, "I won't think," and as surely as she would do this and hold steadily to this attitude, the habit would soon become established, and her thoughts would be controlled.

"But," she said, "shall I give up my good thoughts?" "Yes," our answer was, "everything at present, for all are unrestful. Even your good thoughts are evil, and when God gets you fixed in the habit of stillness, then He will breathe into you His thoughts without an effort upon your part." At length she reluctantly consented to make the promise and set her will like a flint, in the name of the Lord, against all thinking, and promised to learn to be perfectly still. Before the week had passed her whole face and heart were perfectly transfigured. "The peace of God that passes all understanding," had taken possession of her soul, and she was rejoicing in the Lord and testifying to His victorious keeping grace and power. Beloved, stay your heart on God; not on thoughts nor feelings, but on that Presence that will possess you utterly, and fill you with that "peace that passes all understanding," as you turn away from all else to Him alone.

Trust and rest in Christ forever, Lean thy head upon His breast; Nothing from His love can sever Those who simply trust and rest.

Trust and rest in hours of sorrow; Every wrong shall be redressed, In some happy, bright tomorrow, If you only trust and rest.

Trust and rest when all around thee Puts thy faith to sorest test; Let no fear nor foe confound thee, Wait for God and trust and rest.

Trust and rest with heart abiding, Like a birdling in its nest, Underneath His feathers hiding; Fold thy wings and trust and rest.

Trust and rest till gentle fingers Fold thy hands across thy breast, While the echo softly lingers, Everlasting trust and rest.

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