

'The Rock That Is Higher Than I'

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking God as our refuge during overwhelming times, highlighting the heart as the essence of our being.

Scripture: Psalm 61:1

Topics: "Finding Refuge in God", "The Heart of Man"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the importance of seeking refuge in God during overwhelming times, as expressed in Psalm 61. He reflects on the nature of man, asserting that our true identity lies in our hearts rather than our external circumstances or possessions. Tozer illustrates that when faced with life's pressures, it is essential to turn to the 'Rock that is higher than I,' which represents Jesus Christ, our ultimate source of strength and shelter. He encourages believers to cultivate their hearts and maintain a joyful spirit, reminding them that God is always present, ready to provide comfort and support. Ultimately, Tozer calls Christians to embrace their identity as children of God, finding peace and happiness in His presence.

Transcript

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Now, to help us this morning, I want to read four verses of the sixty-first Psalm. About two years ago, I gave a little prayer meeting talk about this one Wednesday night, but I want to develop it more fully today in the form of a sermon. The man of God says, Hear my cry O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry under Thee. When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the Rock that is higher than I. Now, the punctuation there can be shifted around. Probably, he said this, from the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee when my heart is overwhelmed, or he could have said, from the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, because he had just said he was crying unto the Lord. And then added, lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for thou hath been a shelter for me and a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in Thy tabernacle forever. I will trust in the covert of Thy wings.

I asked you to notice just as a matter of intellectual curiosity only, that this man in four verses here, has packed so many figures of speech, that it's a joyous confusion. It is like the Christmas tree on Christmas morning. Everything's delightful, but everything's badly mixed up. When my heart is overwhelmed, that could only mean a boat. And then the rock, lead me to the rock. For Thou hast been a shelter and Thou hast been a strong tower. And I will abide in Thy tabernacle, and I will trust in the covets of thy wings.

There is the daring of genius, shifting figures and metaphors as he pleases.

Now, I asked you to notice that this was written a great many hundred years before Christ was born, before He had ever uttered those wonderful words, God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth. And yet, here is a Jew, who has been taught that there is only one land properly, and that's Israel; only one people and that's the Jewish people; only one place to pray, and that is Jerusalem; only one direction to face and that is toward Jerusalem. And yet here is this Jew breaking through this form to the mercy of God. And he tells us and anticipates by many hundred years, what the New Testament taught, and what a lot of Christians have forgotten, that God is everywhere. Not only in the temple in Jerusalem between the wings of the cherubim, but that God is everywhere and that the church is anywhere where two people meet in the name of Jesus, and that help may be found wherever it is needed.

Now, this was learned by this Jew under pressure. He doesn't tell us what pressure it was. And I have read the commentators on this and various translators to try to get some help, but they never give you any help, never. The thing to do is read the Bible and leave the commentators to their infinitive splitting. But God is everywhere and the church is anywhere and help may be found everywhere. Now, that is in this text lying dormant, lying as an oak tree lies in an acorn. Ready, if it's given time to break out into a mighty oak, inviting the birds and sheltering the beast and living and outliving generations of men.

I might say here though it's not properly, I suppose part of the sermon, that's the best theology you'll ever learn will be learned under pressure. And the least useful theology you'll ever learn is that which you learn the easiest way, that is, by Bible classes. I believe in Bible classes and teach them all the time. But, that's the least important thing that you can learn. A man will learn more philosophy, spiritual philosophy and more truth when he gets under pressure if he prays and seeks God than he can never learn any other way. I think that not all the rabbis in Israel could have taught David to pray from the ends of the earth will I cry under Thee, but David's troubles taught him to say that. Or, if it was David. Some scholars think it was David when Absalom drove him out of Jerusalem and he was far away and felt that he was literally at the ends of the earth, though he wasn't too far away as we look at such things.

Now, the man said this, and this is really what I'm interested in. When my heart is overwhelmed, he said. I want to ask this question. Of what does man consists? You know that we are not like a diamond, all one piece. We're not like God, unitary, in the sense that we have no parts. We are thrown together. And, I want to know, what is that, that is the man? What is it? Now, is it his body? It can't be the body that's the man, because when the man dies, we talk about the man and his body. We say John Smith was a fine Christian and the church owes a lot to his godliness and his prayer. He was, John Smith was, we say. And the body can be viewed at such and such an undertakers. We distinguish unconsciously between the man and his body. And well we might, and it's the wisdom of the ages that has given us this language to distinguish the man from his body, bone and muscle. Bone and muscle don't constitute the man. And therefore, we when we say, the man, we do not mean his muscle or his blood even, because the man is not there. That's not the man. You can separate the man from his muscle and blood and you still have the man. Well, certainly then, if his body is not the man, his goods wouldn't be the man. What we have as property is all right, and we're glad for anything the Lord allows us to have if we haven't it honestly and give generously. But, that's not us. That's not the man.

We say when a man dies, how much was he worth? And we mean, how much did he have? Well, he's worth 90 cents the chemists say. Probably with this inflation he's worth about \$1.06. But, they used to say

he's worth 90 cents. That is, that you could buy a 160-pound man at the drugstore for about 96 cents. I don't want to give any of you ladies any wrong ideas, but the body of a man, the body of the man can be had for about that amount. So how ridiculous it is to say he's worth 96 cents. No, that's the tabernacle in which he lived. He is worth what God paid for him in blood and tears. The man is worth everything. Ten thousand worlds could not be compared with him.

And it's not the man's goods. I was thinking how we judge each other by our clothing. An ad says 90% of us is covered up and the most we all see is our face. Well, that's true, face in hand, that's true, and clothing means a lot. And now in these days, lots of money, a great deal is made of clothing. But you know one of the most pitiful, touching things in the wide world is a very fine garment after it's been discarded. It has a miserable, deserted, rundown, discouraged look that nothing else I know of has, unless it is an expensive automobile after it's been put out on the back lot. If you want to experience a feeling that's a bit different, just stop sometime when you pass one of these graveyards for forgotten automobiles and go out and look them over. There with so much rust that you can scrape it off with your thumb. They're passing back into the elements there. Weather-beaten and forgotten is an automobile. And, if you walk around to the front you'll see the proud name, Packard or Lincoln. Proud names they are, but how unutterably pitiful when they're pushed out to rot away or rust away and be forgotten. Surely your goods are not you? Surely, no matter how large the car, how big the house, how wonderful is the property, it isn't you.

When my heart, said the man of God, and there he got through to what a man is. A man is heart. It is a heart living in a body. And our thoughts and fears and hopes and aspirations and loves and joys and worship. And in faith, all this is the man. That's the man, that's the heart. Think of Jacob. Jacob had cattle, lots of cattle, but his cattle and his herds were not Jacob. But when his son was killed, or he thought he had been killed, and was shown as proof, the bloody garment, he said, I will go down now into the grave mourning for my son. There was Jacob. Jacob was found when he was mourning for his son. And that same Jacob would have mourned in the same way, if he had nothing but one little ewe lamb to his name. And if all the herds and sheep and camels that he possessed had not been his, Jacob would have still been there saying, I will go down to the grave mourning for my son. There we have the grave. There we have tears. There we have love. There we have relationship. There we have father and son. And there we have death. That's the man my brother.

David, when David was driven from his throne, and some say he wrote this when he was driven from his throne, as I've said. David, driven from his throne across the river, and that wicked man cursing him every inch of the way. Why that was not David. David with his crown off his head and his scepter out of his hand and wearing the common business clothes of his time, no longer king. That was not David. No, no. But when Solomon who had driven him from the, not Solomon, Absalom, who had driven him from his throne, was killed. Then, David went in and knelt down by the coffin and said, Oh, Solomon, Solomon, ah, Absalom, Absalom, my son. Oh, that I had died for thee! Would God that I had died for thee. There you found David mourning for Absalom. But when David was simply being chased through the mountains, that was not David. And when David was driven from his throne and gave it up, that was not David. But when David's heart was broken over the death of a bad boy that he still loved, Absalom, that was David.

Then there's Peter. Peter left his nets you remember and went along and he got whipped, and he got thrown into jail, and he got taken out and all. That wasn't really Peter. Peter was living in there, and I suppose feeling it, but a whipping. You can't whip a man really. You can only whip his body. You can't really put a man in jail.

The famous Madam Guyon wrote a little hymn when she was in prison. And she said a little bird am I shut in these walls. Well, she was just a bird in the cage. And yet, she could soar and sing and worship and walk with God. And the man in the prison, his imagination can range, and his heart can rise to God. So, that wasn't Peter when he was in jail. But later when Peter was crucified for his faith, and out of the joy of loyalty of his heart and remembering his failure at the time of his Lord's crucifixion, he begged them to crucify him upside down because he wasn't worthy to be crucified right side up. That was Peter. Then you got through to the man. You got through to the heart of the man.

You might go down through all the Bible, and through all Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" and through all biography and church history, and show that the man is never the external. The man is never his office, or his clothes. The Pope over on the throne sitting there that gaunt-faced, serious-minded, old chap with all of his thrones and his hats and all the rest. That's not the man. But, one of these days, that heart of his that's beated so long will suddenly stop and he'll face his Maker. There you'll have the man. That's the man, the heart of the man, and so with every bishop, and so with every pastor, and so with all of us together.

My heart, that's the man my friends. And you will find that your heart is always you. And that these other things are not you at all. And we Christians are called to the cultivation of the heart. And it's a sad thing to me that Christianity in our day, even evangelical Christianity has forgotten that people have hearts. Our magazines have gone statistical, and how to do it, and surveys, and all the rest. And we're talking about ecumenicity and percentages and numbers, and architecture and all that.

We're living on the outside where it's said in the book that man, God is Spirit and they that worship Him must worship him in Spirit. And we're called to be internal men and women, living within. But, instead of that, we have gotten out. And so now, books are written, magazines published, and lectures and sermons all the time, and the heart is never mentioned. We turned the heart over to Hollywood. And the only time the heart is mentioned much anymore, is when some sultry gal from out there moans about her heart. I've heard cows in the same tone of voice and with the same thing wrong with them, bellowing in the pasture field.

But when our hearts have been turned over to the world, and the only meaning it has is sex love, we Christians have voided our responsibility and forgotten our religion. For Christianity is the religion of the heart. God has made us to be men and women of the heart, of spirit, of soul, of loyalty and faith and love and memory and worship. This is the heart of the man. And David said when my heart is overwhelmed. Now, I don't know what happened. But I know that David's life was was hit hard, very hard. And that the three parts of the man that we usually say make up the personality, the mental, the volitionally, emotion, all of them had been overwhelmed.

And overwhelmed of course is like the capsizing of a boat. It is like the landslide that buries the cars and the trains. It is just liked the avalanche in the mountains that buries whole villages sometimes. And so, when the heart is overwhelmed, life has its earthquakes and life has its avalanches and life has its overwhelming experiences; mental experiences where you stand perplexed, volitional experiences where you stand in a state of indecision. And one of our harshest, harshest situations that life presents us with, is to find a man fleeing at a crossroad and not knowing which road to take. He's compelled by fear behind him to flee. And he's compelled by uncertainty and indecision to stand still not knowing which of a half dozen directions he might take. And that's to be overwhelmed.

And then, what can a man say about the pain? We talked about physical pain, but it's still my belief, after all the years, that the greatest pain is not physical pain at all. The greatest pain is the pain of the heart.

There was an old saying down in one of the southern states where I used to preach sometimes, about children. When they're little they tramp on your feet. But when they get big, they tramp on your heart. That came out of the bitterness of practical experience. That was not a cynical conclusion reached by a grouch. That was the wisdom of the countryside; the knowledge that when your little one is a little one, he can tramp on your feet. He can make you frightened by getting suddenly sick in the night. Or, he can come in with a bump that you're afraid a fracture. That's tramping on your feet. But when he gets to be 25 or 30 years old, he or she and, or younger even, run out on you and turn their back on you. That's tramping on your heart.

And so we have these earthquakes, these avalanches that overwhelm us. But I think we should stay by David's figure, because he talked about being overwhelmed and that means by water. And evidently, he had a boat in mind. When I am overwhelmed. When my boat capsizes, oh, my God, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Now, when your capsized out on a lake or on an ocean, it's too far back to the shore. There's no use even hoping to get back. The only hope is that there may be a rock within swimming distance. A rock that you can get to and await rescue.

Now, when the heart of mankind was overwhelmed at the fall, when Adam and Eve took hand in hand and walked out from the garden, and when their children were born out there and when Cain became a fugitive and with a mark on his brow, there was over whelming grief. There was a capsized boat. And the old man of God says lead me to a Rock that is higher than I.

Now, I want to warn you against certain rocks. Because there are rocks that are found everywhere and, in every age, they're turning up in some form. There is the stoical rock, it says live hard and kill your feeling and cultivate reason. One of the old folk songs that would hardly rate as a folk song, but at least it's one of the people songs. You will find it in all the books that have Annie Laurie and the rest. It is this. It starts out this way, love not, the one you will love may die. That's the first line. That's about as far as I'm interested in it. Love not, the one you love might die. That's stoicism. Never let yourself get attached to any human being because that human being may betray you.

There is the philosophy of the cynic. That's the philosophy of the devil. God allowed Himself to get attached to the human race and endured the broken heart when that race betrayed Him. Jesus loved John and Peter and James and endured the heartache along with the crucifixion when his disciples deserted him and fled. So that's an unworthy sentence, love not for who you love may die. Men become cold hard clods and murder their humanity. Not many are like that in our time, but there are the stoics. They will always turn up everywhere saying, be hard.

Then over on the other side, the Epicureans who say the opposite. You were born for pleasure therefore get all you can out of it. Paul quoted the Epicureans without approval of course in one of his epistles when he said eat drink and be merry for tomorrow, we die. Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die. That is the language of Epicureanism. And then, there is the rock of education. There's the rock of religion. And I could name are many rocks that come up and appear there but they're not rocks at all. They're simply illusions.

Now, is there a rock when my heart is overwhelmed? Lead me to the rock that is higher than. Is there a rock that is high enough? Oh, my friend, there is a Rock that can be seen above the waves. We used to

sing in the Methodist church this song, which way shall I take, shouts a voice in the night. I'm a pilgrim a wearied and spent is my life. And I look for a palace that shines on the hill, but between us a stream lieth solemn and chilled. And then, another part of the chorus would come in. Near, near thee, my son, is the old wayside cross, like a gray friar cowed, in lichens and moss; And its crossbeam will point to the bright golden span that bridges the water so safely for man. And that was a good song for that was the song of the cross that points with one of its, one of its hands, it points to the rock and the bridge and the strand that brings man and God together. There is a rock my brethren, there is a rock. Rock of ages cleft for me. Let me hide myself in thee.

Now, the main thing is to reach that Rock. Some people are so concerned about the age of the rock and the kind of rock and all, but that's not important. Security is what is important when you're perishing in the waves. When life is churning you about and you're soon to go down, we can't afford to go into details and reason about Christianity. God presents Jesus Christ and says, here is a Rock that's high enough for you. Here is a Rock that is high enough. And it's our business to take that Rock and then later on, we may think all we will. I have no objection to thinking. In fact, I'm for it. I'm going to give a, don't laugh now, but I'm going to give a lecture out at Wheaton here after a while on the Christian thinker. I don't know why but I am, if I live it out. But I believe in thinking. But there was an old church father who said that we get to know things by faith, and then we figure them out as far as we can by reason. And he said, we are busy thinking, not because we can ever get to know God that way, but because we already know God, we're letting our happy reason fly and search and gaze and look like a bird that's been kept in a cage now looking over all the landscape. I added of course that figure of speech. But that's what St. Anselm said, in his great work on God. So, I believe that we ought to think, but I don't believe that we ought to allow our skeptical, dubious thinking to keep us away from the Rock when we're perishing. There's only one thing to do, and that's to get to the Rock or you'll be dead in a little while.

So, Jesus Christ is the Rock in a weary land, a shelter in the time of storm. That was a great gospel song in the days of Moody. Christ is a Rock in a weary land. So, by reason, we reflect upon the Rock, but by faith we reached the Rock and are safe. If we'd only humble ourselves, just humble ourselves and dare to believe that the dear Lord God has made a way for us, and that the Rock there is big enough and high enough. The other rocks aren't high enough. They only fool you. They fool you, that's all. Like a man who at low tide gets on a rock, but at high tide finds that the water is higher than his neck, higher than his head. And so, he perishes, but it just prolongs his dying.

And so, it is with philosophy and religion without Christ, and education and all the rest. They're simply little rocks, but it's low tide, and when high tide comes, you will find the rock isn't high enough. So, God, Jesus Christ, God has given us a Rock that is high enough.

Then he changes the figure without asking our permission. Suddenly, he changed the figure and says, in the covert of Thy wings, I will abide in Thy tabernacle. I will trust in the covert of Thy wings. He becomes a worshiper now and goes to a tabernacle and he becomes a little chick and goes to the covert of his mother's wings. David there is a bold figure here. And yet, it is a figure that Jesus picked up and used and repeated for the same Jesus that repeated it in Galilee in the flesh had inspired David to say it. He spake by the mouth, the Holy Ghost spake by the mouth of David when he said in the covert of Thy wings.

Now, I've seen this myself as a boy on the farm. I've seen the chickens everywhere, running about, running about, and tiny little balls of fur, dashing about looking, pecking away, and making that tiny little peep, peep, peep, which gave them their name. They were always known as peeps on our farm. They're

known as chicks; I think in a more scientific terminology. But they were peeps then because they peeped and they're always peeping around there looking for things. And the mother was busy, busy scratching away for them, busy paying no attention to anything, and then the whistle would come, so high that for me, it was beyond my hearing. It was supersonic. I couldn't hear the thing. But she could hear it. And she would, you know, a chicken has to turn this way to look up. Some of the old farmers know that. And they have to turn up that way. They can't look straight up for some reason.

So, she turned and look up. And then she would utter a gurgling sort of excited sound. And every one of those little fellas would dash to her. And she throws out her wings and make an assuring sound. And then, if you wait a little while and watched, you'd see between every feather in the front part of the wing and beside the tail and back part of the wing everywhere, you'd see two little beady round eyes, looking out with a little yellow beak in the middle. They knew they were safe, because no hawk is going to come down and attack a brooding hen.

And David had seen that. And he said, in the covert of Thy wing will I make my, will I take my refuge. I will trust in the covert of Thy wings. And later on, Jesus said, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks, but she would not. David would and you and I can, and I will abide in Thy tabernacle forever. I will abide in Thy tabernacle forever. And then he says, Selah, Selah. I've tried for thirty-some years to discover what selah means and I don't quite know yet. And I've never met anybody that was sure. But I sort of think God puts it in as a little bit of a lullaby. It's sort of God making those little sounds of assurance to us. He says, I will trust in the covert of Thy wings, Selah.

I listened to a program last night on the radio-Brahms, dedicate to, devoted, that particular program devoted to the great composer, Brahms. What was he German? German. And they had a man from one of the universities there commenting. These evidently were records, commenting on these different records. A very scholarly sounding man with a strong accent. And they said to him, what about Brahms? Well, he said, Brahms didn't write for the violin he wrote against. And he said, It's so with every instrument. He said, the violinists complain, and the singers complain, and the horn players complain, and even the conductors complain. He is so very difficult.

Well, I was lying there listening to him, resting up a bit, and I remembered Brahms under another setting. I remembered years ago hearing Schumann-Heink sing Brahms Lullaby. There's nothing difficult there. Nobody's complaining there. That's Brahms, the father; Brahms, when he isn't quite such a genius. That was the other side of Brahms.

Now, we come to theology and there's lots of it. And we come to spiritual philosophy, and it's heavy and it's hard. And it demands time and attention. But when I'm reading such a verse as this, and it says, I will abide in Thy tabernacle forever. I will trust in the covert of Thy wings, Selah. I am listening to a lullaby. I am listening to God, by the Holy Ghost speaking to us through a man and saying now, you're in a world where there's a lot of trouble; and there's difficulty and there are problems. And you will sometimes be overwhelmed in your heart. The boat will sink and your heart will start down, but don't worry, there is a Rock, and there is a tabernacle, and there is a covert, and there is a God, Selah. So don't let it get you down.

I am preaching to you. I don't know what may be wrong with you. It is amazing how much we can get wrong with us. How people will write and come to see me and tell me things. What problems we do have. We make them mostly, but sometimes the devil sends them collect. But here they are these problems of

ours, these little ticking things that we don't know whether it's a Christmas present or a bomb. And we don't know what to do with it. My God, my heart is overwhelmed. My heart aches and I feel the weight of an avalanche on my soul. And God says Selah. You're my child and you belong to me. And don't be bothered by anything. My Son went down that far too, and the avalanche killed Him, and killed Him for your sake. And He came out of the grave alive forevermore and you're going to too.

So, don't worry about it. We Christians ought to be the happiest people in the world. And there never ought to be a mouth turned down in the whole kingdom of God. They all ought to be turned up. There never should be a human, Christian face without little crow tracks up here which show that there's a smile, because God's people ought to be a smiling people, because they ought to be a happy people. And they ought to be a happy people, because they dwell in the tabernacle of God and have full access to the covert of His wings. Selah

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