

A Rock Higher Than I

by E.A. Johnston

When we're overwhelmed by trials, we can find peace and refuge in God, who is a rock higher than our troubles.

Duration: 20:04

Scripture: Psalm 46:1, Psalm 61:2, Matthew 6:33, Mark 4:35-41, Romans 8:28, Philippians 3:10

Topics: "Promises"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that God sees and is present with us in our trials and storms. He compares God's watchful eye to a silversmith purging impurities from silver, never taking his eyes off the process. The preacher encourages listeners to seek refuge and strength in God, who is a rock higher than us. He mentions the story of Job as an example of someone who faced trials without clear explanations, but still trusted in God. The sermon concludes with the reminder that only God can resolve, heal, and deliver us from our God-sized problems.

Transcript

Today's message is about going through trials. Many today are experiencing difficulties facing storms in life, whether they be health-wise, financial, or family-wise. Most storms hit us without warning.

They come out of a clear blue sky, and they come suddenly. There are times when storms hit us, and they are quickly over. There are other times when a storm falls upon us, and there seems like there is no getting out from under its torrents.

As soon as there is a ray of sunshine and hope, another dark cloud settles over us, and there is more wind and thunder and torrents of trial and desperation, we become despondent, depressed, and dejected, and even deserted. To be in a really bad storm means loneliness, helplessness, hopelessness. This message is for those dear ones facing such dilemmas that there is no human answer to help, for the problem is too big for man.

It is a God-sized problem, and only a high and holy God can resolve it, heal it, or deliver you from it. Man can't help you. All your hope is hanging on God and a miracle.

Do you believe in miracles, friend? My Bible is full of miracles, full of deliverances for the people of God. God is a God who delivers. God is a God who calms the storm.

God is a God who speaks peace to our soul in times of besetting troubles. Sometimes there is an explanation or a reason for the trial we are going through. Other times there is no reason or explanation that we can see, like Job, who was given no clear concept of why the bad things happened to him, why he lost his family, why he lost his estate, why he lost it all, even his health was stolen from him.

It all came suddenly upon Job in the whirlwind of disaster, one disaster right after another. No sooner did a servant appear with bad news, Job did not have time to fully comprehend that disaster, before another servant was there with even worse news. When we read that book of Job, we see the reason behind it all.

It was a providence of God whereby he allowed Satan to have access to Job for a season, so God could receive glory from his creation. Another Bible character who knew severe trials was King David, and that is who I wish to speak about today. David was well familiar with testings, trials, and tribulations.

He was hunted like an animal among the rocks by King Saul. He pretended to be mad before the Philistine king because he feared for his life, but his troubles came to him for no apparent reason. Why did Saul hate him so? Well, let us read this Psalm, Psalm 61, that is our text today.

Bible scholars tell us that this particular Psalm was written by David as he hid in the land of the Philistines while he fled from the hands of Saul. In this Psalm, we see David's predicament and his cry to God for help. Here now is Psalm 61.

Hear my cry, O God. Attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee.

When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast 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, Selah.

For thou, O God, hast heard my vows. Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name. Thou wilt prolong the king's life and his years as many generations.

He shall abide before God forever. O prepare mercy and truth which may preserve him. So will I sing praise unto thy name forever that I may daily perform my vows.

In this Psalm, we see the reference made and the comparison to of God as a rock. David cries, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. And that's the name of our message today, friends. The rock that is higher than I. Well, why does David use such language? I believe because he feels he is sinking beneath his trowels.

The weight of them are too unbearable for him to sustain them any longer. In this Psalm, David says that his heart is overwhelmed. He feels he needs to get to higher ground because the flood of troubles are engulfing him.

And he knows that his only hope of safety, his only refuge is God. And God is that higher ground, that rock that is higher than he. Listen to his words again.

When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Often, David refers to God as a rock. Listen to the first two verses of the very next Psalm, Psalm 62. Truly, my soul waiteth upon God and from him cometh my salvation.

He only is my rock and my salvation. He is my defense. I shall not be greatly moved.

There again, David compares God to a rock, a strong bulwark, a defense, one which is so solid and strong it cannot be moved. Many years ago, my wife and I went to New England to visit lighthouses. We found one of particular interests in Bar Harbor, Maine.

It is called Bass Harbor Light and it is on Mount Desert Island. And I have a pencil sketch of it on my wall. I'm looking at it now.

As I look at this picture, my memory goes back to actually climbing those big rocks in the picture. I remember because they were much bigger than me and it was a struggle to scramble up those huge boulders that stand beneath the craggy shoreline just beneath Bass Harbor Light. It is a historic lighthouse.

But when I see that picture, what stands out more than even the lighthouse are those huge boulders, one on top of another, reaching up higher and higher toward the shore. That is the imagery David is speaking of. He is a man drowning in troubles and he needs desperately to get to higher ground before he is overtaken by the coming waves of affliction.

Have you, friend, ever been in a desperate situation like that? Perhaps you are in one now. You are overwhelmed. You are at your wits end.

You feel like you're drowning and you must get to higher ground. Perhaps you can say with David, my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Again and again throughout the Psalms of David, I hear his reference to God as a rock.

In Psalm 27, he says, For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion. In the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me. He shall set me up upon a rock.

In the first verse of Psalm 28, we read, Unto thee will I cry, O Lord, my rock. Again in Psalm 18, verse 31, David again states, For who is God? Save the Lord. For who is a rock? Save our God.

And in Psalm 40, David writes, He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock and established my goings. What is that old hymn, Rock of Ages? Yes, God is the Rock of Ages. He is higher than we, sturdier than we, stronger than we, more solid than we, more dependable than we.

God is our rock. So David's cry here in our text today from Psalm 61, where he says, When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. He admits it is a rock much higher than he, too high to climb himself in his own strength, too high to ascend it, even with the help of man. It is a rock only God can put us on.

Only He can deliver us and set us upon that rock, as Psalm 40 declares. Listen, friend, you may be there now, overwhelmed. There is no explanation to the difficulty you face, no apparent reason for the great trial you are in, no seeming end to the storm that is upon you.

But listen, dear one, there is a rock higher than I. There is a place you can go, go to God, seek refuge in Christ. Christ is our rock. He is higher than we.

Christ will sustain you in your trial. Christ will be there beside you in your trial, and Christ will comfort you in your trial. Go higher, friend, go higher, go higher.

Get up to that rock, the one who can give peace amidst a storm. What made David's trial so severe as he wrote this prayer to God in Psalm 61 was the fact that he did nothing to deserve Saul's hatred of him. From the get-go, he had delivered Saul from Israel's most feared enemy, Goliath, Goliath who defied the living God.

David was unable to wear the armor of Saul because of his smaller stature, but David was able to slay Goliath because he was defending God's honor. David not only eliminated this enemy of Saul, but David was brought into the household of Saul to soothe him by playing the harp for him. David ministers to Saul and does him good.

David also befriends Saul's son, Jonathan, and they become as brothers. So David has brought good to the house of Saul, not evil. He is a welcome guest, not an unwelcome one.

But the heart of Saul turns against David because his pride is pierced by the people singing, Saul slayed his thousands, but David his ten thousands. And when David comes to visit Saul, instead of a pleasant banquet table to be seated at, he has to dodge the spear of Saul which is thrown at him. Saul begins to hunt David like an animal.

David flees to the land of the Philistines to seek refuge there. He hides among the caves. David is even given opportunities to kill Saul.

One time he finds him in a cave unarmed, but David shows Saul mercy rather than touch the Lord's anointed. But still, Saul pursues him with the intent to kill and destroy him, and David has done nothing to deserve such a trial. Perhaps, friend, there is no human reason for your predicament.

Perhaps you are facing a severe storm and it is unrelenting in its attack on you, as unrelenting as Saul was to kill David. Perhaps you've done nothing to deserve the difficulties you now face. There is no explanation on the human side.

And on top of all that, God seems to be hiding his face from you when you pray and there's no answer or current deliverance. Heaven is as brass and his ears seem deaf to you. David often cried, hide not thy face from me, why dost thou cast me off? Another time David wrote, all thy waves and all thy billows are gone over me.

Hide not thy face from thy servant, for I am in trouble, hear me speedily. Is that your situation, friend? Does God seem like he's a million miles away and preoccupied with more urgent matters than your own? When Christ was on the cross, the darkest hour came to him, I believe, when he suffered the turned face of the Father, when he cried out in agony, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? It was the first time Jesus ever was alone without the Father. Our human minds and our human emotions cannot fathom that incredible agony of Christ as he cried out to the Father, and the Father did not answer because God could not look on sin and Christ was made sin for us.

Do you feel, friend, that God has turned his face from you? If that is your case, then you know a little of the sufferings of Christ in that moment on the cross. You have a better understanding of how much Christ suffered for you there as he hung there alone with our wretched sins upon him, alone and without God's presence with him. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Those words of Christ now have a deeper meaning to you because you can peer into the darkness of that great suffering.

You can see it with a hint of more insight than you ever had before you entered your own trial of suffering. Knowing how much Christ suffered for you will make you a better follower of the Lamb. Perhaps we will know God in a deeper way than ever before.

Perhaps we will have our reliance upon him as never before. Perhaps we will cast everything we have on him, that rock that is higher than I. Paul said in Philippians 3.10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of what? His sufferings. Is that right, friends? And for what purpose being made conformable unto his death? God is with you in your trial, friend.

God's eyes are upon you in your storm. Listen, friends, as the disciples were in the storm-tossed boat in the Sea of Galilee, we see in the Gospel of Mark the text, and it reads, And he saw them toiling and rowing. He saw them.

He saw them. Listen, friend, the silversmith, when he is holding the silver in the fire to purge out all its impurities, as he holds that silver in the flames, he never once takes his eyes off the silver. He saw them.

And friend, he sees you. He is there with you in your storm. I cannot tell you how you will get out of your trial or when, but I can assure you there is a rock higher than we, and we can go there for peace and refuge and strength and help.

We can go to that rock when we are overwhelmed. We can say with the psalmist, lead me to the rock that is higher than I, and he will take you there, friend. I promise you that.

I cannot tell you how to get out of your trial, but I can tell you how to live in it, how to endure it. Get up on that rock. Get up on that rock.

That rock is higher than I. Jesus will lift you up to where he is. Just as he stretched out his hand to Peter, when Peter was sinking and cried, save me, and Jesus did just that. Jesus is in the business of saving.

He came to seek and save. He will help you, friend. Get up to him.

Get up on that rock. When you are overwhelmed, he will lead you to the rock that is higher than your trouble, higher than your trial, higher than your grief, higher than your storm. When there is no one else to turn to, when all our resources are depleted, when all our human hope is gone, we can say with David, he only is my rock and my salvation.

He is my defense. I shall not be greatly moved. Amen.

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