

# Shadows of the Great Rock

by John MacDuff

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*John MacDuff's sermon emphasizes Christ as the Rock providing shelter and peace in life's storms through faith and trust.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 61:3, Isaiah 4:6, Isaiah 26:3-4, Isaiah 32:2, Isaiah 60:20, Hosea 14:7, Matthew 11:28, John 14:1, Philippians 4:7

**Topics:** "Divine Refuge", "Christ's Presence"

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## Description

John MacDuff preaches about Christ being the ultimate shelter and refuge for His people, using the imagery of a rock providing shade in the desert to illustrate how Christ adapts to the changing circumstances and needs of His believers throughout their lives. Just as the rock in the wilderness followed the Israelites, Christ is ever-present with His protecting grace and love, offering hope, strength, and eternal life. The shadows of the Great Rock of Ages symbolize all that Christ is to His people - the Bestower of pardon, peace, sympathy, and consolation.

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## Transcript

"And a Man will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land." Isaiah 32:2

A great rock! "That Rock is Christ," and "the shadows" are those precious truths--those sublime grounds and utterances of trust and confidence, under which His people may calmly and peacefully repose. His people are beautifully described, in the words of one of the minor prophets, as "those who dwell under His shadow;" while "the thirsty land" may indicate those for whom these "shadows from the heat" are most needed, and by whom they will be most prized. The Psalmist tells us the season when his prayer rises with devoutest intensity--"When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me unto the Rock that is higher than I."

In order to be fully understood and appreciated, our present emblem of a rock, with its grateful shelter from burning sun and scorching rays, requires the experience of the Eastern traveler. Where the rock rises like a solitary monolith amid the desert sands, he can pull up his tent-pegs and shift or vary his position, so as to catch the constantly-moving shadow in its circular course; from its morning westerly projection, until the setting sun casts the lengthening farewell image on the eastern side.

So is it with the ever-varying shadows of the Rock of Ages. Christ is adapted to, and for, all the constantly-changing circumstances, and needs, and exigencies of His people; for all ages and for all

experiences. For the morning of life there are, at the base of this eternal Rock, so to speak--shadows of hopeful trust and simple faith. For middle life--those "grounded and settled"--there are "rests at noon." And as with the literal rock in the wilderness where the eventide shadows are the deepest of all, so, when the sun of life is going down in the western sky, deepest and holiest are the hopes and joys of the departing believer.

To the wayfarer in the Arabian desert few things are more glorious or memorable, than when, seated in the shades of parting day under some over-canopying ledge, and his face turned to the towering, granite peaks, he sees these illuminated with the last glow of the sun--radiant with a luster indescribable to those who have never witnessed it--a blaze of ruby and amethyst, as if the mute pledge and prophecy of tomorrow's rising.

So is the spiritual reality. Not only in the sunset of life are the Shadows of the Great Rock to Christ's own people grandest and most real, but God's own Everlasting mountains of Promise are often then seen glowing with unearthly splendor--a splendor unknown and unexperienced in the haze and light of garish noontide. The heavens thus, in a silent, unspoken evening, hymn the "song without words," "declare the glory of God," as if with a similar pledge and prelude of a better and brighter rising--"Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end." Isaiah 60:20

Come, let us seat ourselves under these "munitions of rocks," with their majestic shadows. They represent figuratively all that Christ is, all that He says and promises to His believing people--the Bestower of pardon--peace--sympathy--consolation--strength--hope--eternal life. Let us prove that He is faithful who promised--"It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain." Isaiah 4:6

We need hardly say that the emblem of a Rock, as applied to the Divine Redeemer, is alike the most sublime and appropriate of figures--suggestive as it is of strength, durability, shelter, safety, protection, rest. It speaks of Nature's noblest monumental edifices--as ancient as creation--as fresh as when at first sculptured by the Great Craftsman--older, grander, more lasting than obelisk and pyramid, or the most colossal work of human power. Over these rocks have the winds of heaven continually swept. Age after age has the sun discharged upon them his quiver of golden arrows--but resisting all changes--defying all elements--outliving all political convulsions--no wrinkle can be traced on their majestic brow--now in sunny robes of roseate light--now gleaming in the moonbeams with silver mantle--now swathed in white garments of cloud--but every hoary peak remaining immutably the same. Such is the rock of our salvation!

Among the many strange ideas, myths, and fantasies of the Jewish nation, regarding the journeyings of their Fathers in the Wilderness, none was more singular, yet none more beautiful, than that the Rock in the wilderness literally followed the Pilgrim tribes from station to station, and from encampment to encampment, to the last hour of the wanderings--that however blazing the sun and waterless the streams, there the mysterious, ever-present accompanying Rock was, with its unfailing shadow and inexhaustible streams. Significant and impressive is the allusion which Paul makes to this old Hebrew tradition--taking it as an emblem and interpreter of the grand central verity of his own teaching. For thus does he translate the Rabbinical dream into a sublime, divine reality--"They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them--and that Rock was Christ."

Christ--the Rock of Ages--ever present in the midst of His Church and people with the shadow of His protecting grace and love--even when the sun of life is hottest and its desert dreariest--during every stage and experience of the wilderness--on to the very brink of "the border river." Old Testament and New combine in uttering the same all-glorious promise--"In all places where I record my name, I will come unto you, and I will bless you." "Lo, I am with you always (all the days), even unto the end of the world."

Nor let us forget the keynote of our motto verse, that which (specially to the weary Pilgrim), like the unit, gives untold value to all the ciphers which follow--"A MAN"--(a sympathizing Man--a once-suffering, now a living and glorified Man on the Throne! "A MAN shall be as the Shadow of a Great Rock in a weary land."

Not long ago, in skirting the shores of the grandest of European lakes, I was particularly arrested with the exquisite delicacy of shadow cast by one colossal fragment of rock on the precipice from which some convulsion of nature had sundered it. The shadow was there, deep and unmistakable; but it melted into the background with gradations of refined loveliness which no pencil or pigment of artist could reproduce.

Taking from these "earthly things a heavenly meaning," such also, is the tenderness of the shadows cast by the Great Rock of Ages--the tenderness of the Voices of the Brother-Man. Each Believer may well say of his Divine-human Guardian and Protector, in the words of the Psalmist--"You have also given me the shield of Your salvation--and Your right hand sustains me, and Your GENTLENESS has made me great."

All Oriental travelers have been impressed with the mystic and significant calm and silence of "the waste wilderness,"--so different from their mountain home-regions. However isolated these latter may be from the abodes of man, no such silence is possible where there is the music of babbling streams--the splash of cascade--the twittering of birds--the rustle of leaves--the hum of insects. But that Great Rock, sleeping on its shadows of drifted sands in the midst of the trackless solitude, is a true Hospice--(a House of PEACE). The spiritual Pilgrim, encamped under His shadow, feels it to be "the peace of God which passes all understanding." "You will keep him in perfect peace (lit. peace peace) whose mind is stayed on You."

Reader, may it be yours to be included in the precious promise--"Those who dwell under His shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine--the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon."

Nor can we more suitably end than with the grand exhortation of the Prophet, whose noblest and divinest mission was that "he spoke of HIM"--words whose significance and beauty are alone brought out in the marginal reading--"Trust in the Lord always, for the Lord Jehovah is the ROCK OF AGES." Isaiah 26:4

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