

The Rock That Is Higher Than I

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the need for a higher power, Jesus Christ, to overcome life's problems and challenges.

Duration: 35:21

Scripture: Psalm 61, Psalm 62:2, Psalm 62:6

Topics: "Character Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the need for a higher power in times of overwhelming circumstances. He shares various examples of individuals facing difficult situations, such as a war veteran struggling with drug addiction, a mother dealing with her daughter's involvement in Satanism, a couple experiencing a sudden loss of love in their marriage, and a person diagnosed with AIDS. The speaker highlights the importance of turning to a rock that is higher than oneself, referencing the biblical verse 'Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.' He emphasizes that human strength and self-reliance are insufficient in dealing with life's challenges, and that only God can provide true solace, forgiveness, and solutions to our problems.

Transcript

Turn in your Bible to Psalm 61, the 61st Psalm. I'd like to read the psalm through, it's a short one. Psalm 61, verse 1. Hear my cry, O God, attend to my prayer.

From the end of the earth I will cry to you. When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For you have been a shelter for me, and a strong power from the enemy. I will abide in your tabernacle forever.

I will trust in the shelter of your wings, Delah. For you, O God, have heard my vows. You have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.

You will prolong the king's life, his years as many generations. He shall abide before God forever. O prepare mercy and truth which may preserve him.

So I will sing praise to your name forever, that I may daily perform my vows. Notice especially that expression, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. I'd like to think with you about that this morning, but first of all, it says from the end of the earth. The psalmist uses that expression, the end of the earth.

What do you think that means? Well, it means the place of extremity. It means within corner. It means when you come to the end of yourself, there's no way to turn but up.

We could call it the brink or the point of desperation. You could be sitting here in Lafayette today and be at the end of the earth. Nobody knows the turmoil that can go on in the human heart while outwardly things seem to be quite serene.

The end of the earth. The next expression explains it a little more. It says, when my heart is overwhelmed.

And there really are overwhelming experiences in life, aren't there? In fact, I often marvel at the ability of the human brain to endure what it does endure. Here are some Christian parents. Their son has been off in the war and he got onto drugs.

Now he's home from the war, from the service, let's say, and he's gone through all kinds of rehabilitation programs, but he has a troubled mind. And one morning the father calls upstairs for him. Breakfast is ready.

No answer. Calls again. Breakfast is ready.

No answer. The father goes up, finds him in the attic, hanging by his neck. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. From the end of the earth will I cry to thee when my heart is overwhelmed.

Recently a mother called me on the phone. Has a 15 year old daughter. Joined the church of Satan in San Francisco.

Drank the blood of a sacrificial victim. She put poison in her mother's coffee. She's now in juvenile hall on attempted murder.

The mother is a Christian. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Or here's a couple and they've been married 19 years. And as far as their friends are concerned, it looks like an ideal marriage.

Then he comes home from work one day and he says to his wife, I don't love you anymore. I've got to leave. When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Here's a young fellow and he seems to be chronically ill.

Can't seem to rise above it and finally in desperation he goes to the doctor and the doctor puts him through a battery of tests and then calls him in for a consultation. The doctor says to him, you have AIDS. Dear friends, you need somebody bigger than yourself at a time like that, don't you? When you hear the death sentence pronounced to you.

Or here's a businessman and the whole bottom has fallen out of his business. The scaffolding has tumbled down around him. The creditors are barking for payment.

His debtors aren't paying him their bills. The situation, humanly speaking, is absolutely hopeless. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. It's generally believed that David wrote this when Absalom drove his father off the throne and drove him off into exile.

That's a bitter pill in life, isn't it? I was thinking about that this morning, how when Absalom was born, how that father must have doped it over that baby and actually he was his favorite son, although he wasn't worthy to be his favorite son. Some thanks for all of that love and kindness. Absalom seizes control and

his father is driven off into exile.

It's as if you had a son and he drove you out of the house, your house, where you're living. That's the kind of a situation that evoked this psalm from David. From the ends of the earth, when my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. I'd like to suggest to you this morning, we sure need a rock going through a world like this.

Just any rock won't do. We need a rock that is higher than ourselves. But I notice in this psalm there is such a rock.

David had the confidence that there is such a rock. And he also realized that you need somebody to help you come to the rock. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. What a joy it is to be able to stand here this morning and tell you the rock is Jesus.

It really is. The rock is Jesus. Characteristically, in the Old Testament, when you come to the word rock, it means deity.

Characteristically. I think it's very important to remember that. Let me give you a passage, for instance, you might be interested to turn to Deuteronomy 32, 31.

Deuteronomy 32, 31. And it says there, and interestingly enough, it's interesting the capitalization in this Bible that I have, says Deuteronomy 32, 31, for their rock is not like our rock. And our rock, the word rock, the second use of the word rock is capitalized in the New King James, correctly so, I think.

It means their rock, their idols, deities, their deities are not like our God, is really what it means. Characteristically, when the word rock is used in the Old Testament, it refers to God. Or, in this case, to false gods.

So, when Jesus, for instance, said to Peter, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church. The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. Those Jewish disciples, they knew what Jesus was saying.

They had no thought, whatever, that his church was going to be built on a man, Peter. When he used the word rock, the lights went on in their brain, and they said, Ah, deity, that's exactly right. Upon this rock, what was the rock? The rock was that great truth, Jesus Christ, the son of the living God, that was it.

Verse 3 of our psalm, going back to Psalm 61, verse 3 tells us that the rock is a person. Verse 2 says, From the end of the earth I will cry to you when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I know.

For you have been a shelter for me, and a strong power from the enemy. Once again, the you is capitalized in my Bible, although it's no capitalization in the original, in the Hebrew, but correctly, I think they've capitalized it. You have been a shelter.

The rock is a person, and the person is obviously the Lord, isn't he? Isaiah chapter 32, 2 speaks of the Lord as, it uses a lovely expression, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Isn't that beautiful? The shadow of a great rock in a weary land. It's as if people are traveling through a desert, a wilderness, and they're being smitten by the sun all day long, and they come to this rock and it casts a refreshing, cool shadow, and they find refuge in it.

And then, of course, in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 4, the apostle Paul links the rock very directly with Christ. Let me read it to you. 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 4, and again, it's speaking about the children of Israel going through the wilderness.

It says, they all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. Beautiful. And then the next Psalm, Psalm 62, reminds us that the Lord is the only rock, that is, the only true rock, the only worthy rock, the only worthwhile rock.

Verse 2, Psalm 62, verse 2, He only is my rock and my salvation. He is my defense. I shall not be greatly moved.

Verse 6, He only is my rock and my salvation. He is my defense. I shall not be moved.

This rock is greater than ourselves, higher than ourselves. You know, self is not sufficient for the blows and problems and difficulties of life. In fact, I'm intrigued as I go through the Bible and notice the things that self cannot do.

Some are seemingly simple things. James tells us, for instance, in his epistle that no man can tame the tongue. It's amazing, isn't it? No man can tame the tongue.

Here we have that little member in our mouth that's in a wet place and it's apt to slip and nobody can tame it. But God can tame it. Self isn't sufficient.

Man cannot wash away his own sins. He cannot atone. There's no way in which he can atone for his own sin.

Man cannot please God by himself. Says in Romans chapter 8, they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Man can't solve his own problems.

To me, that's the history of civilization. Man's attempt through politics and philosophy and all the other devices and stuff. He's had centuries to prove the ineffectiveness of every method to solve his own problems.

And he's a rock that's higher than himself. Jesus said a man isn't able, for instance, to increase the length of his life by being anxious or his stature. And certainly he can't postpone the moment of death any.

It's amazing when you start to think of it. He might have two billion dollars to his account. The man in San Francisco recently had, when the appointment came, he kept the appointment.

Two billion dollars couldn't postpone the time of his death. Some of the people that talked to the Lord when he was on earth, they were kind of supercilious and they thought that the world was their oyster and they thought they could do just whatever they wanted to do. The Lord Jesus reminded them that they couldn't come to God.

They couldn't come to him, to the Lord Jesus, unless the Father drew them. He kind of knocked the props out from under them when he said that. He said, oh well, I can come to Christ anytime I want.

I can live my life and then at the end of life come to Christ, you know. No, you can't come unless the Father draws you. And of course, finally, man cannot save himself.

He needs a rock that's higher than himself. And not only is man insufficient, but other people are not sufficient. It's interesting to me that in the previous Psalm, Psalm 60, verse 11, it says, Give us help from trouble, for vain is the help of man.

Vain is the help of man. The Pope can't solve our problems. The priest can't solve our problems.

The rabbi, the minister, doesn't make any difference what kind of men they are. They're just men at best, and they cannot solve our problems. The physician, the psychiatrist, the psychotherapist, the philosopher, the politician, they can't solve our problems.

The scientist, the scholar, husband, father, brother, completely inefficient. But it's wonderful that we do have a rock that is higher than ourselves. I'd like to think with you about that.

How is the Lord Jesus higher than we are? Well, he's higher than we are because he's God. And we're only men in Christ. He's higher than we are because he's our Creator.

Naturally, the Creator is greater than the creature, isn't he? This is the great lie of idolatry. Isaiah pictures the idol maker there. He takes a block of wood, and he starts with his plane and his chisel, and he starts carving that block of wood.

And, of course, he has all kinds of sawdust and all kinds of chips. And he takes some of the shavings, and he makes a fire, and he bakes bread with it. And then he takes some of the rest of it, and he makes a fire to make himself warm with it.

And then he falls down on his knees and worships the idol. He made the idol. The Creator is always greater than the created thing.

Here's a case where the Creator is worshipping what he made. But our rock is the Creator himself. We are his creatures, the sheep of his pasture.

Our rock is higher than ourselves because he's omnipotent. He has all power. And that should be very meaningful to us today.

I don't know what problem you have in your heart today, but I want to tell you the Savior can solve every problem. The tangles of life can undo nothing too hard for Jesus, nothing that he cannot do. If we come to him with our difficulties, with our perplexities, he can straighten them all out.

The Lord is higher than we are because he's infinitely wise. What does that mean, to be wise? It means he achieves the best possible results in the best possible way. Sometimes when the difficulties of life come our way, we think, boy, if I were running things, I'd do them a little differently.

The reason we say that is because we're ignorant. We're really ignorant in the heart of man that says that. If you knew what God knows, and were as loving as God is loving, and as powerful as God is powerful, you would do things just exactly the same way he does them.

No, I'd never let that come into my life. Yes, you would. God nothing does, nor suffers to be done, but what you would yourself.

If you could see the end of all he does as well as he. That gives poise to life, doesn't it? That gives serenity to life. I think it's wonderful to know that somebody's in control.

Nothing happens by chance to the child of God. There is no chance as far as the child of God. Everything is planned by an all-wise, all-loving, all-powerful rock.

The Lord Jesus Christ. And you would do it just the same as he does. Our rock is higher than ourselves because he can forgive sins.

That's something that the psychotherapist can never do. You can go, and you can lie on the couch there, and you can discuss all your problems. But he can't say to you, your sins are forgiven.

Go in peace. Only the Lord Jesus. Can speak those marvelous words.

And you know, wonder of wonders all, only he can raise the dead. We just had Easter, been reminded afresh of his glorious resurrection. Which is a pledge of our resurrection, those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We need him. We need a rock that is higher than ourselves for comfort in times of sorrow. Nobody lives very long in this world without having sorrow.

And Christian friends gather around us, and they, you know, speak words of comfort to us. And it's nice, and we enjoy it. But really, in the long run, only the Lord can comfort the breaking heart.

And it's wonderful when he comes to us and speaks through the word of God. And the clouds are dispelled, and our hearts are made light again. We need him in times of sorrow.

The death of a loved one. We need the Lord for guidance over an unknown way. If we're honest, we have to say with Jeremiah, Oh Lord, I know that the way of man is not in him.

It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. It's wonderful to have a guide along the way, and know his supernatural guidance. I was reading yesterday about a couple whom God called to the mission field.

And on the day they left, I think it was June 2, they were reading in Daily Light. And the scripture text for that day was, Arise and depart, for this is not your rest. That was the confirmation from God to them that they were walking in the right path.

They heard a voice behind them saying, This is the way, walk in it. Arise and depart, for this is not your rest. We need a rock that's higher than ourselves to break the chains of evil habits.

To think of the chains that are binding people today. The chains of drugs and chemicals. The chains of alcohol, and chains of immorality as well.

Men are struggling. Women are struggling with these things today, and they're trying to do it with their own strength when they can. They've got to flee to somebody who's bigger than themselves.

We need a rock that's higher than ourselves when we have wayward children, don't we? Like David with Absalom. One of life's bitterest pills to swallow. We need a rock that's higher than ourselves in times of discouragement and depression.

Terrible thing, isn't it? So many people are experiencing it today. Discouragement and depression. The more they think about it, the worse it gets.

They've got to get away from themselves and get their eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ. We need a rock that's higher than ourselves sometimes when we're in a situation where we need help in financial crisis. Surely we need a rock that's higher than ourselves for the salvation of our souls, don't we? No man can save his own soul to prevent the day of death.

We need a rock that's higher than ourselves. And I notice also in this psalm that we need someone to lead us to the rock. It says, when my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that's higher than I. You say, who can lead? The Holy Spirit is the one, isn't he? The Holy Spirit is the one who leads us to the rock that's higher than ourselves.

But you know, there has to be the desire there. There has to be the acknowledgement of need there. And when the Holy Spirit sees that, he comes in, he convicts us of our sins, and then he says, I have the answer.

His name is Jesus. And the favorite ministry of the Holy Spirit is just to put the floodlight on Jesus, the rock that's higher than ourselves. And it could very well be that there's someone here today and you're buffeted by the problems of life.

You wonder how much longer you can just stick it out. The Holy Spirit would like to lead you to the rock that's higher than yourself. And oftentimes he uses people to do it.

He works through people. It might be a man preaching the gospel. It might be a friend who comes and just sits down with you.

But I'd like to tell you this morning, we'd like to lead you to the rock that's higher than yourself. You say, what do I have to do? Well, first of all, you have to admit before God that you need help. That's hard for some people, isn't it? Some people are very self-sufficient.

They don't want to admit that they need anybody outside themselves. You have to. You have to be willing to admit before God that you're ungodly, helpless, hopeless, and really worthy of eternal death.

That's known as repentance. Repentance is agreeing with God about yourself. It's taking sides with God against yourself.

It's very hard to do because of man's pride. I think pride keeps more people from the Savior than any other thing. Second thing you have to do is believe that the Lord Jesus died for you on the cross of Calvary, that he was there as your substitute, that he was paying the price that your sins deserve, shedding his blood to wash away your sins.

And then by a definite act of faith, you have to submit yourself to him. Say, apart from you, I have no hope for heaven. But I believe you died for me, and the best way I know how, I'm going to accept you as Lord and Savior.

That's what it is. It's the commitment of a person to a person. It's the commitment of a man or a woman, boy or girl, to a rock that's higher than himself.

The moment you do that, God saves your soul. The moment you come in repentance of sin and true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, God saves your soul. It's a definite act of faith, receiving him as Lord and Savior.

Maybe there's somebody here this morning that would like to do that. If so, we'd love to talk to you afterwards. If you have problems, we'd like to discuss them.

I think I'll just stay down here this morning in case somebody would like to come and talk to us about it. I think the poet has put it very well in that lovely hymn. He said, O faith to the rock that is higher than I, my soul in its conflict and sorrows would fly.

So sinful, so weary, thine, thine would I be. Thou blessed rock of ages, I'm hiding in thee. Listen to this.

How oft in the conflict, when pressed by the foe, I have fled to my refuge and breathed out my woe. How oft when trials like sea billows roll, have I hidden in thee, O thou rock of my soul. And another poet wrote, O sometimes the shadows are deep, and rough seems the path to the goal, and sorrows sometimes how they sweep like tempest down over the soul.

O near to the rock let me keep. If blessings or sorrows prevail, or climbing the mountain way steep, or walking the shadowy vale, O then to the rock let me fly, to the rock that is higher than I. I think we'll turn in our hymn books, if we might, to hymn number 521, and just sing this in closing. Verse two says, in the calm of the noon day, in sorrow's lone hour, in times when temptation comes over, cast over me its power, in the tempest of life, on its wide heaving sea, thou blessed rock of ages, I'm hiding in thee.

Number 521. O say to the rock that is higher than I. Maybe that you're a Christian here today, and you're under a terrible burden, terrible weight of sorrow or anxiety. And this is your language today, from the end of the earth, when my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. We commend to you the Lord Jesus, a close walk with him, turning away from all the vain things of life.

Or if you're here today, and you're unsaved, and afraid to face eternity without the Savior, what a wonderful time to plead to him in all your need today. We would invite you, if you are unsaved and would like to talk to us, feel free to come down afterwards. There are many here who would be very glad to help you.

Father, we just thank you for your word, a living, powerful word, sharper than any two-edged sword. If you think of David's experience with Absalom and how it rung from his broken heart, this cry that he led to someone bigger than himself. Lord, that's what we need.

We need someone bigger than ourselves. Thank you for those here who have found that someone in yourselves.

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