



GOD IS ... OUR ROCK (Psalm 62; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4) Ross Pogson

Good morning Grace Church, to everyone here, and also those at home! We have been exploring topics on the theme of 'Behold Our God', and we are now in a series of studies dealing with 'Who God is in relation to us', a more personal account of how we relate to God in our lives.

The importance of rocks – strength, protection, refuge and stronghold

As part of this theme I want to talk about how '**God is our ROCK**, a firm foundation, the foundation of everything in the Universe. 'Rock' is a very important word, and I am not saying that just because I am a Geologist, although the word is very important to me in that context too! It is also a very important word in Scripture. Did you know that a word translated as 'rock' from Hebrew or Greek is used 142 times in the Old and New Testament, and 59 of those verses refer to God as our Rock? People living in Old and New Testament times were familiar with rocks – they were all around them as hills, mountains and rocky crags, and were a part of their everyday experience.

The word "rock" makes us think of strength. We use the word 'rock' in proverbial sayings such as 'firm as a rock', 'steady as a rock'. Rock, often limestone or basalt, was used to build foundations, walls, altars, temples, fortresses, and towers for ceremonies, refuge and protection in Biblical times. Rocks were also heaped up to make memorials to witness an agreement with God or to remember an important event. The 10 commandments were written on tablets of rock. Caves and rocky crevices were often David's refuge when running away from Saul, who sought to kill him (1 Samuel 24:3). There are two Hebrew words which mean rock. '*Sela*' has meanings of a fissure or split in a rock, hence the picture of God as a rock of refuge and a hiding place providing security. *Tsur* is more massive, very safe, and virtually impenetrable like a mountain stronghold. It speaks of God's strength, endurance, and reliability.

When I think of rocks, especially massive cliffs of rock, I think of strength, steadfastness, dependability, solidness, and durability, long lasting, like the massive granite peak of Mt Sinai in Egypt, which I climbed in 1984 – I happen to have a piece of that beautiful pink granite which I collected from the summit. But those descriptions of cliffs and mountains could also be applied to our God too – our everlasting Rock, with the strength to give us strength in times of need, the steadfastness to be always dependable and available, solid and unchangeable for eternity. His purposes and plans remain constant and immovable throughout history.

Safe and stable paths on firm ground – our rock-solid spiritual walk with God

I've had a lot to do with rocks in my professional career, strong dependable rocks, awe-inspiring majestic rocky peaks, but also unstable, hazardous, and unreliable rocky ground. I have been lucky enough to visit some very interesting rocky places on field trips in Australia and overseas, and especially in eastern and central Queensland. The most interesting rocks are more difficult to find - they somehow always seem to be on the tops of mountains, hills or volcanoes, so you have to spend a lot of energy, time and effort climbing up to see them. That has led me into some very steep and unstable places, where I have been in danger of sliding down the slopes if my footholds were not secure, and I was a little fearful of my safety.

Often, climbing up was not too difficult, even if it was a matter of two steps forward and one step backwards, but coming down again was a very different matter, and much more dangerous. I had to find solid ground on those steep rubbly and unstable slopes where everything moved under my feet and a sprained ankle was a real possibility. Many times I can remember asking for God's help to find solid ground or an easier path. When I looked around, I always found a better path to descend more safely, often descending in shallow sideways curves like a yacht tacking. In those situations, I am aware of God's protection. I always think of those comforting verses from Psalm 18 - which I like to call 'the hiker's verses': Ps 18:33 says: *"He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he causes me to stand on the heights"* and in Verse 36: *"You broaden the path beneath me so that my ankles do not give way"*. How appropriate.

To walk down a path safely you have to trust that path and the person who has made it, and know that your feet will not stray or slip. It is the same with our walk with God – we know and trust the one who made the path of our life. I have mentioned my difficult walks in steep and unstable country as part of my work, the very opposite of a firm foundation, when God guided my footsteps and kept me from danger, but my spiritual walk and your spiritual walk are not too different from that physical walk, to keep us on firm and stable spiritual ground with God's guidance.

God is our firm foundation, our Rock in whom we can trust and feel secure when we walk with Him. When everything around us looks and feels unstable and we feel like we are sliding away and out of control, it is comforting to know that God is still in control and He can lead us to firm ground and stop our feet from slipping, even when treading on the slippery ground of doubt, fear, worry, disappointment, illness or despair. I found a helpful comment: "Sometimes God lets you hit rock bottom so that you will discover that He is the Rock at the bottom".

God as our Rock – references in Scripture

The Psalmists, especially David, described God as their Rock 24 times. I am sure you have your own favourite verses among many, but here are just a few examples:

Ps 18:2 The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

Ps 18:31 For who is God, but the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God.

Ps 31:2-3 Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me! For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your names' sake you lead me and guide me.

Ps 62:2 He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken.

And Isaiah 44:8: *“This is why God spoke through the prophet Isaiah, saying, “Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one”.*

Also, Isaiah 26:4 *“Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal”*

But the concept of God as our Rock becomes even larger and even more important and vital, because that Rock became flesh and dwelt among us, as Jesus, our Rock of Salvation, the precious cornerstone whom the builders rejected. As Is 28:16 says *“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic.”* And in Acts 4:11, *“Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’”*

Paul in 1 Cor: 10:14 refers to the Israelites journey through the desert with Moses: *“For they drank from the spiritual Rock that accompanied them, and that Rock was Christ”.* During the wanderings in the wilderness, God caused water to flow from a rock. This was a miraculous source of water, and of life, a physical blessing and a Divine provision, but it was also a symbol of the provision of eternal spiritual life from Christ, life-giving water from the Rock.

God as our Rock – inspiration for hymns

When we trust God with our lives, we are building on a firm foundation in Him. Matthew 7:24-27 tells the parable of the wise man who built his house on the rock and not on the sand, and when trouble came it still stood firm. Remember the words of that familiar song: ‘Build on the rock, the rock that ever stands, O build on the rock and not upon the sands; You need not fear the storm, or the earthquake shock, you’re safe for evermore if you build on the Rock’. These words are by Henry Ernest Nicholl, who published them in 1947. The storms of life are no danger to us if we trust in God, our firm and dependable Rock and foundation.

Several other hymn writers have been inspired by God as our Rock, and also applied the term to Christ as our Rock too, for example the hymn, ‘My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and Righteousness’ also known as ‘The Solid Rock’ – which has the chorus “On Christ the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand”, words written by Edward Mote in 1834.

In England, in 1763 an Anglican Clergyman, the Vicar of Blagdon in Somerset, was walking through the picturesque ravine of Burringdon Combe 2 or 3 miles from where he lived, when he had to take shelter from a sudden storm. The place was very exposed and there was very little shelter, but he found a convenient cleft running down a mass of rock beside the road, giving him some protection. That Vicar was the Rev. Augustus Toplady, and he knew the eternal truth of God’s protection in the face of danger and also the role of Christ as our Rock of Salvation too. That experience led him to compose a hymn, which he wrote down on the back of a playing card he found on the ground at his feet. That hymn is still a favourite today: *Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee.”* The Rev. Augustus Toplady did indeed know our Ageless Rock of Protection, our sure and eternal refuge.

Martin Luther was inspired by Psalm 46, whose first verse says “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”, and in 1529 wrote both the tune and words (in German) for the hymn “God is our fortress and our Rock”, whose first stanza begins: “God is our fortress and our rock, our mighty help in danger; he shields us from the battle's shock and thwarts the devil's anger.” This hymn was said to have become “the battle hymn of the Reformation”.

Our true foundation – the Rock of Salvation

If God is our Rock, only He can provide stability and dependability in our lives, when the world around us is shifting and changing, causing uncertainty and confusion. He is our only refuge, security and solid foundation, the only Rock of Salvation upon which all our hopes are based. He is eternal, consistent, stable, not easily moved or shaken, utterly dependable.

Many people build their lives on, and put their trust and confidence in, the false foundations of relationships, power, money, reputation, possessions, and popularity, but these are only temporary, they don't last. Our faith and trust in God have to be as solid as a rock too. Only God can provide us with that true and firm foundation that has eternal worth, the solid, long-lasting, Rock of Salvation.