

# THE HEAVENLY ROCK

## A SERMON

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“For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.” Deuteronomy 32:31

THE Lord is, as you are aware, very frequently set forth for our encouragement under the figure in which he here appears, that of a rock; conveying the twofold idea of strength and durability; and these are the two things that we especially need. Our God is indeed a strong rock; and hence, in the 26th of Isaiah, where it is said, “Trust you in the Lord forever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength;” the literal rendering which our translators have given us in the margin is, from which we get the hymn, I suppose, that uses these words, “Trust you in the Lord forever; for in the Lord Jehovah is the rock of ages.” We may, therefore, take, that scripture to explain the meaning of our text. “Trust you in the Lord forever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.” So that if brought to trust in him now, we may trust in him forever; if reconciled to him, and we are his friends, then he is our friend today, and will be our friend tomorrow. You will also see that here is the usual distinction between the godly and the ungodly; between them that serve God and them that serve him not; between them that are called by his grace and them that are not. “Their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.” I notice then, first, *what we are to understand by our Rock*; and then, secondly, and, I may say, lastly, for I shall notice the subject under these two main departments, secondly, *the judgment of our enemies*; that they themselves acknowledge, in the way I shall describe, if time and space permit, that their rock is not as our Rock.

First, then, our Rock of course means, as I have said, the Lord in his strength and durability. And we cannot do better than take that which is set before us in this interesting and beautiful chapter to explain to us what is here meant. The first thing is that of sovereignty; our God is decisive, and that forever. And all the four things I am about to say concerning this rock, each has an eternity in it. First, here is the sovereignty of God. “He separated,” this chapter says, “the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.” Here, then, our Rock is a rock of division, of sovereignty, taking one and leaving another. And see how this nicely accords, that those whom he has taken he is able to keep. God the Father has taken them in his

love and choice, and he has strength enough to keep them, and he has kept them, and does keep them. The Lord Jesus Christ took them, and he has strength enough to keep them, and he has kept them, and he does keep them; and when the Holy Spirit becomes a spirit of grace and supplication in a poor sinner's heart to separate him from others, here is again strength; he has strength enough to keep him, and strength enough to be with him. Now, this distinction is everlasting. Let us look at it for a moment. Is it not a sweet thought, to be loved with an everlasting love, that there is not anything in us or connected with us that makes any difference in that love? We may indeed well say, each Christian may well say,

“My soul through many changes goes,  
But his love no variation knows.”

Here is love always; here is God to love you with all his heart and with all his soul. And so, of choice it is an everlasting choice. It is not being chosen to something temporal, but to something that is eternal; and this choice is in Christ. The Lord has chosen many people for temporal purposes and rejected them after they were chosen; but not so here. Here is a choice in Jesus Christ; and chosen in him the choice remains; he will never reject you; God has not cast away his people whom he did foreknow. And we say the same of the dear Savior's mediatorial work; his precious atonement runs along to all eternity.

“His precious blood  
Shall never lose its power,  
Till all the ransomed church of God  
Is saved, to sin no more.”

His righteousness runs along forever, Angelic righteousness failed, and angels fell. Adam's righteousness failed, and Adam, fell. The righteousness of the Israelites, that is, old covenant righteousness, failed, and they fell. But here is a righteousness that will never fail. Think of that great scripture to the very purpose upon this point, that Jesus Christ is “Jehovah our Righteousness.” Ah, what more can you desire? Thus, to be loved with this eternal love; thus, to be chosen with this eternal choice; and to be redeemed with this eternal redemption; and to be accepted in this eternal righteousness. And then, of the Holy Spirit it is written, and some of us so far, I think, are pretty good proofs of it, that “He that began the good work will carry it on unto the day of Jesus Christ.” Here, then, are strength and eternity. And I ask those that know the Lord, as far as you are concerned, would you have any alteration? Would you have any alteration in God's love or in God's choice of you? Is there any other manner after which he could have chosen you so suited to you? Has he not chosen you after the good pleasure of his own will? Has he not chosen you after the riches of his grace? Has he not chosen you after the abundance of his mercy? And has he not chosen you to eternal blessedness by that which is sure to bring you there, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ? He has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ. This, then, is one representation given of our God in this chapter; and if we are brought to feel what poor creatures we are, we shall more or less, sooner or later, most heartily, and spiritually, and decisively fall in with this sovereignty of the great God. As I hinted last Lord's day morning, the enemy has ever aimed to misrepresent the sovereignty of God, to represent it as something not to be believed; and the natural man blindly despises it. But you who know how to answer those two questions put by the apostle, he asks these two questions, and I have often admired them, he

says, "Who makes you to differ?" Now, look that in the face; "Who makes you to differ?" If you are loved; if you are chosen; if you are saved; if you are brought to receive the testimony of that eternal love; brought to receive the testimony of Christ's mediation; the testimony of his mercy, who makes you thus to differ from your former state, and who makes you thus to differ from others? That is one question. And then the apostle asks, if possible, a greater question still; he adds another question to it; he says not only, "Who makes you to differ?" but, "What have you that you have not received?" Then you cannot have anything with which you can stand before God that you have, not first received of God. Do you speak of your faith? Why, you received that of God. Do you speak of a praying heart? It is God that has given you this. Do you speak of a great Savior? It is God that has given you this. Do you speak of a lively hope, according to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that hope has in prospect an eternal inheritance? It is the Lord that has given you this; that has blessed you with all spiritual blessings. This is our Rock, then; and every one of these blessed truths stands eternally firm. Here is an omnipotence and an eternity of strength. The next thing is that of possession: For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance." And now let me lay before you, with all the clearness and simplicity and sincerity of which I am capable, the way in which the Lord has taken his portion. The Lord's people are his portion. Let us go to the 2nd of Hebrews, and see how the Lord has taken his portion; how he takes possession of this portion, namely, his people, and that will give us, I think, a clear apprehension of the way in which we possess him.

First, then, we are creatures; we are by nature, under the law, creatures, dependent creatures; but we are also under sin, and under death, under the curse, and under Satan. This is where the Lord's people are; yet, notwithstanding this, they are his portion. Now hear the apostle read this matter out, "Forasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he," the Divine Word, he, the great Redeemer, whose goings forth have been from of old, even from everlasting, he who was in the beginning, with, God, and was God, "he also himself likewise took part of the same", thus came in and took possession of our nature, became man, became a Son, became the great High priest. And what was his purpose? Why "that through death," here it is, this is the way the Lord takes his portion, takes a poor sinner; and we must notice each item as we go along here, for, these are the endearments of heaven; these are the endearments of the gospel; these are the endearments of eternity; these are the things that win our affections to the blessed God; these are the things that give expansion to the soul, light up eternity with attractions, and made one of old say, and it has made others say as well, when brought into the same state of mind, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better;" "that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death." Oh, it was an awful death, indeed, that Christ died! None ever died before, none ever died since, none ever can die such a death. It was a penal death, concentrating in one penalty innumerable penalties; concentrating in his death all the sins of his people; concentrating in his death all the agonies of hell. There the pains of hell got hold upon him in a way, perhaps, we shall never fully comprehend; there the sorrows of death compassed him about; and yet, dreadful as was that death, he said, "The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?" My portion, my people, are under sin, and I am determined they shall be above sin. Cost what it may, I will redeem them. And so, through death, he destroyed sin, and by destroying sin, he destroyed the devil; for the devil has no dominion over us, apart from sin. If sin be destroyed, Satan has lost his hold. Hence it is he cannot touch us in Christ Jesus the Lord. There we abide, and this wicked one touches us not. "That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death;" for he must have a nature that can die; while, at the same time, he must be God, to bring into that death an omnipotence and

eternity of power. I have almost thought, sometimes, Satan has said, "Oh, we can soon put that weak man to death. He has no friends, and nowhere to lay his head. We can soon put him to death." But there was a hidden power in him that the world knew not. Little did they think that omnipotence of power concentrated itself in that apparently poor, weak man. Little did they think that there was an eternity of power; and how astonished must have been all the hosts of hell when that omnipotent power in Christ's death came into operation, crushed every sin, ground every sin, as it were, to powder, bruised the serpent's head, took away the sting of death, swallowed up death in victory, confounded all hell! And if Jesus Christ would do all this, rather than lose us, why, he would do anything. This is the Rock. Here we have the two ideas again, namely, strength and durability; for he has by his one offering wrought perfection, and that perfection runs on to all eternity. And who is this wondrous death for? Where is there a poor sinner to whom this department, this Rock, is so suited? "And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Fellow-traveler to eternity, let me ask you the question here, Do you know what it is to be afraid of the second death? to be afraid that you shall be lost? to be afraid that the ponderous curses of the Bible will fall upon you? to be afraid that the waters of death will overwhelm you, and carry you down into the Dead Sea of eternal perdition? Do you feel afraid of this sometimes? If you do, how suited to you is that wondrous death which Jesus has died! If you know something of the fear, something of the trembling, there is the promise for you, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word." If brought thus far, then it is the wondrous death of Jesus that can deliver you. If the Holy Spirit gives you only a grain of faith in Christ's wondrous death, in what he has done, it will assuage your fears, it will strengthen your heart, it will increase your faith, it will endear the Savior, and you will feel a hope spring up, with, Who can tell? who can tell? If Jesus died for sinners, I am a sinner; and if he receives sinners, I am a sinner; and if he declares friendship with them, or reconciliation with them, I am a sinner. Who can tell? Here, then, is all the strength that you can need; and here is all the deliverance you can need; for Christ, by his wondrous death, has wrought eternal freedom. Here, then, is a rock of distinction, and here is a rock of salvation. "The Lord's portion is his people: Jacob is the lot of his inheritance;" and thus he came into our nature, took flesh and blood, that he might die a wondrous death, that we might live a wondrous life, for eternal life is a wondrous life, not only as to the duration of it, but as to the dignity of it. It is the life of God. It is a life as far superior to the life of an archangel, as Christ is so much better than the angels; for Christ is our life, and the life that he lives we are to live. It is a wondrous life, not only because it is endless, but because of the dignity of it, the association of it. Immanuel, God with us, and we with him, in indissoluble oneness through the cycles of ages of eternity. He died a wondrous death, that we might live a wondrous life. The dear Savior might well say, in relation to this glorious opening up of things, "Behold, I, and the children whom the Lord has given me, are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth in Mount Zion."

But, again: the apostle seems determined to win our best affections, to make us love the Rock of our salvation; and after thus showing how he takes the portion, and bringing before us his wondrous death, suited to the poor sinner that is brought to fear the second death, and fears the first death because of the second, I say, and fears the first death because of the second, it is not merely death, it is what lies beyond it. It is the combination of the two that makes the sinner tremble; but Christ has swallowed up both. "Verily" as though he should say, you sons of men, you convinced sinners, you who know your lost condition, hear what I have to say, "Verily" the apostle's very soul was absorbed in his subject, "he took not on him the nature of angels." What

does this mean? Why, it suggests to us that, had it been the will of God, Christ might have passed by us, and have taken upon him the nature of angels, and have redeemed angels, instead of redeeming man; have saved fallen angels, instead of saving fallen man. "He took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him", as his portion, "the seed of Abraham;" not the seed of Adam, for that would mean the natural descendants of Adam, the whole human race, but "the seed of Abraham," those who were placed by eternal election in the new covenant, and in due time, shall be born of the Spirit of God, these shall become the children of faith, the children of God, the children of Abraham. He took them, take notice of that, he took them, and became responsible for them. And the apostle does not stop here; no; he goes on again, as though he was anticipating the timid and the fearful, saying, Ah! you are afraid! Some of you are afraid this High Priest, though he has died, will not be kind to you; but he goes on again to say, "Wherefore in all things it became him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God." What things? The words of that verse ran through my soul this morning like lightning, like honey, like heavenly oil, "to make reconciliation for the sins of the people."

He has done it all. The greatest honor you can do to God is to acknowledge that Christ has done it, that he has made the reconciliation the greatest honor you can do to God is to receive the testimony of what Christ has done; the greatest honor you can do to God is to abide sacredly and solemnly unto death, if needs be, by the testimony of what Christ has done. He has made reconciliation for the sins of the people. Here, then, is the Rock, of our salvation. First, it is a rock of division; that division and distinction remain eternal. Second, it is the Rock of our salvation; he has died this wondrous death; he took not on him the nature of angels, but took the seed of Abraham; and that he is a merciful and a faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, and has made reconciliation for the sins of the people, and there the matter ends. This is the rock, the strength and durability; these are the two chief things intended. Well, then, let other things be weak, and temporal, and temporary, let them pass away; we shall have One left to supply our needs to eternity; God our exceeding joy, and all our springs in him.

Third, here is consecration, not only distinction and salvation, but consecration. The Lord finds his people in the wilderness; that is true, whether we refer it to our state by nature, or whether we refer it to that solemn conviction of our state that brings us into a solitary condition before God. "I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness." "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste-howling wilderness." "Waste howling wilderness." Some people tell us this is not a waste howling wilderness, only as people make it so. Well, perhaps not; but when a sinner is made alive, and sins that he had forgotten come howling after him with, "You are the man;" and when the commandments of the law come howling after him with, "Cursed is the man that continues not in all things written in the book of the law to do them;" when the law comes howling, as it were, after him with, "Cursed is the man;" indeed, that "by the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified;" when howling adversities, and temptations, and trials come, that man knows that his sin has turned his mortal existence into a waste howling wilderness. While he was dead, he heard not the howling of his sins, he heard not the thunders of the law, he heard not the trumpet of Sinai; there was no terrible sight, then, at which you feared and quaked. But when awakened to your real condition, then you became a poor, miserable, solitary creature; then you became as a wilderness, a solitary place. That is where the Lord finds a poor sinner when he has brought him into that state. And what does he do? Take him out of it? Not yet, he leads him about. You shall hear some more howling yet; you shall have some more wilderness work yet; you are not going to jump out of your

trouble all at once. "He led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye;" shall not get out yet. All this is for consecration, to consecrate you to God. This is our Rock; and however far you may be humbled, he has strength enough to lift you up; and however much you may be broken to pieces, he has skill, and strength, and mercy enough to put you right; and when you have been exercised sufficiently in this wilderness department, then he will begin to change his dealings a little with you. The Lord uses, then, a beautiful simile, very suited to us high-doctrine people, very suited indeed. "As an eagle stirs up her nest, flutters over her young." Here is paternity, you see, here is endearment; "spreads abroad her wings," so as to protect them; "takes them," will not allow any of the small birds to run away with the eaglets, or, I dare say, the hawk and the vulture, the free-will hawk and the duty-faith vulture, would like to be off with them. But no; the parent eagle spreads abroad her wings, protects them, takes them, bears them on her wings. "So, the Lord alone did lead him," and what is the result? "there was no strange God with him;" did not mean there should be. Now, in natural history we have many interesting circumstances about the eagle, which of course I must not mention this morning, any farther than just to observe that when the parent eagle teaches the eaglet to fly, in the process it always widens the circle, and elevates its sphere. The eaglet is made to fly first in a very narrow circle; cannot fly farther. And just so the Christian; his range of acquaintance with the truth is very narrow at the first; by-and-bye he gets another flight by faith and widens his circle. And-every time the eaglet learns there is a degree of elevation, getting up higher and higher; so that the circle is gradually widened, and the sphere is gradually elevated, until the parent eagle and the eaglets go beyond mortal ken; for many writers who have watched the parent eagle at this work say that they go so high that they go right out of sight, the parent eagle and the eaglets all out of sight; might perhaps with an instrument see them, but not with the bare eye, cannot see them. Just so, with the Lord; he brings his people out of all their earthly religions and confidences, brings them up on high, and when he gets them up on high, he says, Now then, that is your place on high; and your defense, where eagles love to be, shall be the munitions of rocks; and in these lofty regions bread shall be given, and waters shall be sure. "And there was no strange god with him." The Lord is too high to have any strange god with him. That is how it is; bless you, if you will but be low enough in doctrine, there are plenty of gods, duty-faith gods, and free-will gods, and Puseyite gods; but he who is taught of God will rise, and rise, and rise, until he gets into the rocks of eternity, and there is no strange god with him. So it is. Ah, such a one, when he gets up thus far, he says, "Whom have I in heaven but you? and there is none upon the earth I desire beside you." David might well pray when he said, "From the end of the earth will I cry unto you, when my heart is overwhelmed;" and what shall be your prayer, David? "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I." So then, it is a rock of distinction, a rock of salvation, a rock of exaltation. Let the inhabitants of this rock sing, let them shout from the tops of these mystic and eternal mountains, for they are to dwell there forever. Consecration. "There was no strange god with him." There was none with God the Father in loving and choosing us; there was none with God the Son when he redeemed us, his own arm brought salvation; there was none with God the Spirit when he quickened us, and none with God the Spirit now when he blesses us, for he gives to every man severally as he will; and there will be none with God in raising us from the dead, it will be God's own work; and there will be none but God in heaven to serve, for God will be all in all. There was no strange god with him.

Now I am fully aware that this distinction, this salvation, and this experience, by which we are brought away from all false systems, and brought to God alone, that to some of you these are mere hearsay things. If I could open your eyes, and ears, and hearts, and minds, as easily as I can set the

things forth, you should not leave this place, this morning without a sweet acquaintance with these things; but then that is God's work; he has mercy upon whom he will have mercy. But unto you that know the Lord, I know well that your times of enjoying these things of course are in the hands of the Lord; those of you that know the Lord, you can understand the sovereignty of God in this eternal distinction; you can understand the way of his salvation, you can understand this wilderness work, and you can understand his teaching, indicated by the dealing of the parent eagle with the eaglets; you can understand a little of that, for there stands the promise, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall rise with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint."

Then the next representation, which I suppose is as far as we shall go this morning, of our Rock is, that it is not a barren rock, Here are the people distinguished; here they are saved; here they are taught; here they are brought to the heights of Zion; here, they are brought to the mountains of Israel; here they are brought into the new heavens and the new earth; here they are brought into purer climes. Now, in conclusion let us see what kind of sustenance these people that inhabit this rock are to have; for we must have another sermon on the other part of our subject some time or another. Now, the sustenance. What is the consequence of being thus dealt with, and brought to have the Lord alone to be our God? "He made him ride on the high places of the garth", the high places of the new earth; not the old earth, the new earth; "that he might eat the increase of the fields", not the fields of this world, although that is alluded to, I think, in the midst of Canaan, as we shall have to observe, because of course the language is figurative, but, taking it spiritually, the increase of the heavenly fields. What are gospel truths but heavenly fields? And now let us look at it. There are seven kinds of sustenance; and yet the literal sustenance that I am about to mention, associated with this rock, is a mere nothing, in comparison of the spiritual sustenance indicated by the language there used. It begins with sweetness; but then mark, before this sweetness comes there has been the division, and there has been salvation; there is wilderness work, and there is being brought up into where the truth is. "He made him to suck honey out of the rock." You that have tasted pardoning mercy and forgiving love; you that have been brought to realize in your soul the preciousness of Jesus; is the figure too strong? Think you that David was wrong when he said of the word of the Lord, that it was sweeter than honey and the honeycomb? So it is. "He made him to suck honey out of the rock" there it is, "and oil out of the flinty rock." Now, the honey. I take that to mean the word of God in its sweetness, the word, of God being sweeter than honey; there are times when it is. And oil. I take the oil to be the grace of God. You read of the golden oil, brought through the golden pipes to keep the lamps burning; and I am sure, friends, our love would not burn, but for the oil of God's grace; but when the Lord pours in the oil of his grace, then it burns. John Bunyan, has a good representation, of this, that Satan, was pouring in his temptations upon the soul to quench the fire, and Satan could not think how it was he could not even lower the fire; and John Bunyan observes, there was a man, that Satan did not see, pouring oil in on the other side all the time; so that the more water there was poured in, the higher and hotter it burnt; and oil and water will not mix; and so the devil's gospel and Christ's gospel will not mix, depend upon it. So that the Lord pours in oil, and keeps the lamp burning, keeps our soul alive. "And butter." That is another thing, butter, real butter, always fresh. No dry bread; no dry doctrine. When a man preaches the truth in a dry sort of way to me it is always like bread without butter. I say, Well, I like this man's sermon very well; but there is no butter. It is very good bread; but I like to have butter with it, buttered on both sides, if you like. So that there shall be no dry bread; bless the Lord for that. "And milk." The sincere milk of the word to nourish us; bless the Lord for this. And then,

fifth, there are all the sacrificial excellencies of Christ. "With fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats;" of course, a figurative mode, of speech, to denote the sacrificial excellencies and endearments of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here, then, is the sweetness; here is the oil of God's grace; here is the truth, well buttered, shall I say? here is the milk to nourish; here are the sacrificial excellencies of Christ; and then comes "the fat of kidneys of wheat;" or the best of wheat, the finest of sustenance, no barley, bread, that, is the bread of captivity; people never eat barley bread if they can get wheaten bread, except some of the old misers, they eat it to save money; but with that exception we always eat good wheaten bread if we can get it; and so here the finest of the wheat. And then, how does it terminate? "You did drink the pure blood of the grape." But, my hearer, how comparatively trivial are these things, in comparison of the things which they signify? The things which they signify are eternal; God's word will never lose; its sweetness. A great many things turn sour, and bitter too, but the oil will never lose its freshness, nor the butter either; the milk will never lose its purity; the sacrificial excellencies, of Christ will remain eternally the same; the wheat will ever remain the same; the pure blood of the grape, the blood of the everlasting covenant, will ever remain the same.

Such, then, is our Rock, such is our God, in this discriminating grace; in this saving mercy; in this divine teaching; and in this sustenance. Now notice, in this description of the sustenance there is not one drawback, all the good things possible, and not one drawback. How nicely it accords with after scriptures, such as these, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Thus then, "Their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges." I have noticed this rock as a rock of division, of sovereignty, taking one and leaving another; second, as a rock of salvation, "The Lord's portion is his people: Jacob is the lot of his inheritance;" third, as a rock of consecration, "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirs up her nest, flutters over her young, spreads abroad her wings, takes them, bears them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him;" fourth, as a rock of exaltation, "He made him ride on the high places of the earth;" and finally, I have shown you that this rock is not a barren rock, but that the people who are brought to inhabit it have the best of all sustenance. Such is our Rock.

But time does not allow me to touch upon the other part, *the judgment of our enemies*, that they themselves shall be brought to acknowledge that their rock is not as our Rock. We must, in due time, the Lord enabling me, have another sermon upon this.