

“Standing on the Rock ... Really”

Isaiah 26.4; 1 Corinthians 3.11; 1 Corinthians 10.4; Luke 6.47-49; 1 Peter 2.4-10

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We need to talk some more about that Rock.

Earlier this week a woman came up to me, someone I don't know very well. She attends a different church, but she knows who I am and what I do, and she wanted to ask me a question. She goes to a Bible study at her church, and the leader had told the group that the world was going to end in ten days. Apparently there are, once again, some Christians who have come up with a specific date for the apocalypse. The woman wanted a second opinion. She knew the verse in Matthew where Jesus says “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matthew 24.36) and she wasn't sure the teacher's teaching lined up with that. I told her that she was absolutely right, and also that there have been *hundreds* of predictions like these throughout the centuries, and every single one of them has been wrong. I think she was relieved!

The very next day, I was at event with some of my colleagues, and our host, who also goes to a different church, took the opportunity to ask us, in all seriousness: “Have we reached Armageddon?”

There's a lot of fear out there. A lot of anxiety. A lot of things that some people are interpreting as *signs*. Back-to-back hurricanes, followed by back-to-back earthquakes. Weather patterns that feel extreme. Apprehension about what North Korea might decide to do, or about what *we* might decide to do about North Korea. National politics. Supreme Court decisions. The rise of the Islamic State. The global economy, and individual people's wealth, or lack thereof. Media outlets that turn *everything* into “breaking news,” and repeat it ad infinitum. Pundits who have an opinion about *everything*. And, periodically, Christian leaders who make grandiose claims about what all this *means*.

There's only one place I know to go to find answers to life's most difficult questions. One place to find strength and hope in the face of hard reality. It's not the media. It's not the weather report. It's not the people who claim to have all the answers. It's the Rock of our salvation, Jesus Christ.

Jacob seems to have been the first to call God “Rock.” At the end of his life, in his last words to his twelve sons, he refers to God as “the Mighty One of Jacob, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.” (Genesis 49.24) A few hundred years later Moses uses the same metaphor, in a song, *five times* in quick succession: “The Rock, his ways are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God, without deceit, just and upright is he” (Deuteronomy 32.4); “the Rock of [our] salvation” (32.15); “the Rock that bore you,

the God who gave you birth” (32.18); “the Rock, the LORD” (32.30); “their rock is not like our Rock; our enemies are fools” (32.31). In that song, Moses uses several different metaphors and terms – Father, Most High, an eagle – but the most prevalent expression, the one he used more than any other, is *Rock*.

Why *Rock*? Well, think about it. Rocks are strong. Solid. Firm. They don’t break easily. They withstand the test of time. They have been one of mankind’s most trusted, enduring, reliable implements for the maintaining and advancement of civilization; the Stone Age lasted nearly three and a half million years! When we were in Cape Cod last month, one of the beaches we went to had sand on the shore and rocks in the water. Timmy and I went out into the waves and scooped up several dozen rocks with our feet, which Ben used to make a little cairn on the sand, and the colors and formations we were scooping up were surprisingly diverse and often beautiful, smoothed out by the churning of waves over a period of – what? Decades? Centuries? Millennia? Those rocks that spring up every year in the farm fields around Mason, those rocks that we used to build this church – how old *are* they, *really*?

Older than you, and me, and everyone we know – by a *lot*. But not older than God.

“No one is holy like the Lord! There is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.” (1 Samuel 2.2) So sang Hannah, the mother of Samuel, a couple hundred years after Moses. “The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety. He is my refuge, my savior, the one who saves me from violence.” (2 Samuel 22.2-3) So sang David, a few decades later, after defeating all his enemies. “God’s way is perfect; all the Lord’s promises prove true. He is a shield for all who look to him for protection. For who is God except the Lord? Who but our God is a solid rock? God is my strong fortress.... The Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock! May God, the Rock of my salvation, be exalted!” (2 Samuel 22.31-33, 47)

When we get to the Psalms, the Rock metaphor is all over the place. “Who is God except the Lord? And who is a rock besides our God?” (Psalm 18.31) “The Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock! May God, the Rock of my salvation, be exalted!” (Psalm 18.46) – yes, scripture does sometimes repeat itself! “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.” (Psalm 19.14) “To you, O Lord, I call; my Rock, do not refuse to hear me.” (Psalm 28.1) “Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me. You are indeed my Rock and my fortress; for your name’s sake lead me and guide me.” (Psalm 31.2-3) “I say to God, my Rock, ‘Why have you forgotten me?’” (Psalm 42.9) “He alone is my Rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken.” (Psalm 62.2, 6) “On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty Rock, my refuge is in God.” (Psalm 62.7) “Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my Rock and my fortress.” (Psalm 71.3) “You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!” (Psalm 89.26) “The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.” (Psalm 92.15) “The Lord has become my stronghold, and my God the rock of my refuge.” (Psalm 94.22) “Let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation!” (Psalm 95.1) “Blessed be the Lord, my Rock.” (Psalm 144.1) “My Rock and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge.” (Psalm 144.2) When people were in distress, whether it was a powerful king like David or just a common person dealing with the day-to-day realities of life, people turned to God with words like these, knowing that there was only one *Rock* who

could save them, deliver them, be their place of refuge, be their strong fortress in times of woe.

But sometimes people *forgot* to call on the Lord for help; people *forgot* that he was their Rock. Isaiah, in particular, had to remind them: “You have forgotten the God of your salvation, and have not remembered the Rock of your refuge.” (Isaiah 17.10) “Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord God you have an everlasting Rock.” (Isaiah 26.4) “Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! There is no other Rock; I know not one.” (Isaiah 44.8)

Eight hundred years later, Jesus reminded his hearers to stand on the Rock. “Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is, wise, like a person who builds house on solid rock.” (Matthew 7.24) “When the floodwaters rise and break against that house, it stands firm because it is well built.” (Luke 6.47-48) After Jesus’ death and resurrection, Peter had an epiphany: Isaiah 28.16 had said, “I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation.” That cornerstone, they realized, was Jesus Christ. Psalm 110.22 had said, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.” That stone, they realized, was Jesus, on the cross. Isaiah 8.14-15 had said, “He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall.” “They stumble,” Peter realized, “because they do not obey God’s word.” (1 Peter 2.8) The apostle Paul had another epiphany: when the Israelites left Egypt, they were “guided by a cloud that moved ahead of them, and all of them walked through the sea on dry ground.” Paul realized: “All of them ate the same spiritual food, and all of them drank the same spiritual water. For they drank from the spiritual rock that traveled with them, *and that rock was Christ.*” (1 Corinthians 10.1-4) The Rock that provided strength and salvation to ancient Israel, is the *same* Rock that gives strength and salvation to *us*: Jesus Christ.

Now, what difference does any of this make? Well, simply put: *How’s your prayer life?* When the rain pours down, when the floods come rushing in, when the earth quakes under your feet, when the bad news comes, when you get the diagnosis, when the money’s just not there, when someone betrays you, when you’re hurting or lonely or angry, when you’re trying to make the next big decision that will affect the course of your life, when you feel like you’re being tossed to and fro in the chaotic storms of life, when some people are saying that the world’s coming to an end, *how’s your prayer life?* Do you turn to the Rock of your salvation? The Rock that bore you, the God who gave you birth? Your shield, your refuge, your stronghold, your fortress? Do you take your heartfelt cries directly to God, opening your mouth in hope and trust? The Psalmists sure did: “To you, O Lord, I call!” “Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me!” These people *talked to God*. They poured out their cries, *directly* to God. Too often, we Christians expect *other* people do the praying *for* us. Maybe we’re not sure how talk to God (does the specific words matter *that* much?) Maybe we’re not sure that prayer works (should that prevent us from trying?). Maybe you think God doesn’t really listen to *your* prayers (what makes you think that God considers your prayers less important than anybody else’s?). God – Jesus – they don’t want to be Rocks for just *some* of us. They want to be Rocks for *all* of us. You want strength and support in life? You want guidance? Safety? Refuge? Healing? Hope? *Talk to the Rock!* When the rain pours down, when the floods come rushing in, when the earth quakes under your feet, when the bad news comes, *open your mouth*, and *cry out* to the *Rock* of our salvation!

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