

MY ROCK AND MY SALVATION

PSALM 62:5-12; 1 CORINTHIANS 7:29-31
LETHBRIDGE MENNONITE CHURCH
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This morning's sermon is about two words.

My sermon will be a bit *longer* than two words, mind you, but two words stand behind everything that I want to say to you this morning.

Rock. Salvation.

Two words repeated two times in virtually identical fashion in our Psalm this morning, once in 62:2 and again in 62:6:

Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.

Actually, three times if we count 62:7 which just reverses the order:

My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge.

As I read this Psalm over and over again this week, my mind kept returning to these two words.

Rock. Salvation.

It seems to me that the totality of the Christian hope could fit inside these two words. So much of what we need from God, so much of what God promises his people if found in these two words.

I want to dig around inside these two words today. What do they signify? Why are they such prominent biblical descriptors for God? Why does David cling to them so tightly in this Psalm?

What do these two words mean for *us*, all these years later, in our walk with God?

Rock.

This is not a real rock, but it looks like a rock. ☺ It sits on a shelf beside my desk as a reminder of passages like this one from Psalm 62.

It's not hard to see why this is such a cherished metaphor for who God is and how God functions in the life of faith.

Rocks are solid, virtually indestructible. They have stood the test of time.

This is why we are so drawn to the mountains, isn't it? When we spend time in the mountains we have the strong sense that we are in the presence of something that is almost timeless, something that cannot be moved, something whose size and scope make us feel very small.

Rocks are things that were there long before we arrived on the scene and will be there when we are nothing but a distant memory.

Rocks speak of permanence.

In a world of plastic (like my prop ☺) and cardboard and disposable products and planned obsolescence, in a world where so much seems to have so little staying power, rocks have weight, solidity, durability.

When we say that God is our "rock," we are saying that God is solid, unyielding, unmoving, ever-present in the face of all that threatens us.

Last weekend, I spoke at a Young Adults retreat out in the mountains (among the rocks!). The question we were looking at is, *What is it that sets us apart as followers of Jesus?*

I spent at least two sessions chipping away at our tendency to make idols out of that which is *not God*.

Perhaps we tend to think of idols as objects of wood and stone. Or we think of money and status or technology or more familiar present-day idols.

But the first idol that human beings ever bowed down to, way back in Genesis 3, was *themselves*.

What did the serpent say? *For God knows that when you eat of [the fruit] your eyes will be opened, and **you will be like God**, knowing good and evil* (Gen. 3:5).

The first temptation, the first sin was to put *ourselves* in the place of God.

We've been bowing down to ourselves ever since. We do this in overt ways when we deliberately reject God and say, *I will live for myself, thank you very much!*

But we do it in countless more subtle ways every day,

One of these, I am convinced, is our persistent human tendency to place our hope and our identity and our trust in our ideas and beliefs *about* God rather than God himself.

Christians have often given the impression to ourselves and to the watching world that the life of faith is mostly about being right about stuff. And that we are the rightest people in the world.

We are right about:

- existence of God
- divinity of Jesus
- work of atonement
- “inspiration” and “authority” of Scripture
- specific positions on controversial issues (sexuality, politics [Israel], science-related controversies, etc.)
- beliefs about the ultimate fate of those who aren't Christians

RIGHTNESS matters a great deal to many Christians!

There can be enormous pressure to *make sure you get the stuff in your head about God right!* I heard this over and over again from the Young Adults last weekend. There were a few question and response sessions on Saturday and behind *many* of the questions that were asked there was a *fear of getting it wrong!*

It reminded me of myself at their age.

For a good chunk of my twenties, I think that I looked at life and faith as something like, “whoever arrives at the most right answers at the end wins” kind of deal.

My faith was kind of like an intellectual fortress that I was building, brick by brick, and I seemed implicitly to assume that each level, each brick, each piece had to be examined and scrutinized and approved, or else the whole structure would come crumbling down.

There were good things about this. Thinking and questioning and building are important things. It's important to scrutinize what we believe and why. It's important to strive for coherence and consistency in our views of the world.

But, after living a few more years, after seeing a few more things, after wrestling with a few more questions for longer periods of time, after walking with Jesus through circumstances that my younger self couldn't really have imagined, my views have changed a bit.

When I looked at these young adults last weekend, when I thought back to my university self, I wanted to (and did) tell them that the life of faith is not an intellectual game where whoever arrives at the "rightest" theology at the end wins the prize.

What I wanted to (and did) tell them is that if you think that faith and discipleship are all about coming up with enough right answers to enough hard questions and enough defenses against other worldviews, than you will be chasing shadows for the rest of your life.

And you will end up, finally, making a god in your own image—a god that fits your need for certainty, for control, for predictability, for superiority over others, for a whole host of other things...

Your faith will become mostly about *you*, about the worldview that *you* have constructed, the beliefs that *you* can defend against all rivals, the way of life that *you* can prove is better than others...

And I don't know about you, but I tend to make a pretty lousy rock.

This does *not* mean that our beliefs about God don't matter. Far from it.

We have a duty to think about God, to seek to know and be known by him and, of course, to look at the God made known in the face of Jesus and answer his piercing question, *Who do you say that I am?*

But our ideas and beliefs *about* God are not God.

Our beliefs are not—*cannot be*—the foundation, the rock bottom reality of what my life is based upon.

God is.

This can be strangely liberating. We don't have to play the rightness game. We don't have to scramble to acquire enough right answers before we die to impress God or compel him to grant us eternal life.

I've been wrong about God at various points my life. And so have you.

The church has been wrong. A quick tour through church history and theological development will quite quickly yield the conclusion that the church has gotten God *wrong*, at times.

This is why there are reformations and renewal movement, to call people *back* to the God they had forgotten, or to call people *ahead* to a place God was leading that nobody had considered (think of the abolition movement in the 1800's, or the changing status of women in the church in the twentieth century!)

We all see through a glass darkly (1 Cor. 13:12). None of us is right about everything. All of our views are partial and clouded by sin and selfishness.

And, more importantly, if the point of a human life was to become right about enough stuff, we would have no need for a Saviour, would we?

Which brings us to our second word.

Salvation

The Hebrew word translated “salvation” or “deliverance” in Psalm 62 is a variation of the word *yeshua*.

Jesus. Of course.

I have another visual for “salvation.” My daughter Claire made this for me last night.

Wood. Nails. A cross. An X, which is also the Greek letter “Chi” which is the first letter of “Christ” and was and is often used as an abbreviation for it (think Xmas).

Jesus.

The one who saves, the one who delivers.

The one who does for us what *we cannot do for ourselves*.

The one who is obedient where we are stubborn and selfish.

The one who is generous when we are stingy and acquisitive.

The one who tells the truth when we are mired in falsehood and error.

The one whose faith is stronger and more reliable than our own.

The one who loves when we gravitate toward hatred and suspicion.

The one who forgives when we cling tightly to offenses against us.

The one who is just and merciful when we are calculating and manipulative.

The one who understands completely, totally, comprehensively, where we only ever see in part.

The one who dies, so that we might live.

The one who rises to new life as the firstborn of all creation, and promises a future of peace to all who look to him, who cling to him, who turn away from the idol of self and receive his forgiveness.

Jesus did not come to earth and die on the cross and rise to new life to substitute one crippling burdensome religious system for another.

In Jesus, God puts an end to the endless human religious striving to reach up to God, to figure him out, to unlock the riddle, to build our intellectual and religious castles in the sky.

In Jesus, we see that God comes down to us and does for us what we cannot and could never do for ourselves.

We can never believe rightly or comprehensively enough to impress God. We can never behave rightly enough to impress God.

We cannot save ourselves.

We are lousy rocks *and* lousy deliverers.

What we *can* do is cast ourselves on the mercy of God himself and say...

For all that I cannot understand, all that I cannot do for myself, for all of my fears and failures... for all this and more, I cast my lot with the One who came down to me so that I do not have to climb up to him.

My rock and my salvation.

Two words.

Rock — Our God is solid, reliable, foundational. Someone to lean on in the present, in the midst of the “unfinished” state of the world and our own lives...

Salvation – Our God is mighty to save, to deliver, to forgive, to offer hope *through* and ultimately victory *over* all that threatens us, all that we don’t understand, all that wounds and grieves us.

How desperately we need these two words to remind us that God is God and we are not.

This is the God that David found refuge in, when enemies sought to kill him, when his own sin threatened to engulf him, when his kingdom seemed fragile and ready to crumble.

This is the God that we find refuge in.

In Psalm 62:8 we read,

Trust in him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge.

All times.

Good times, bad times.

Times when we are tempted to be afraid.

Times when we God seems absent, silent, impotent. Times when God seems close, powerful, present.

Times when God's love seems to surround and envelop us. Times when our souls are crushed with sorrow (some of you are going through the valley of the shadow of death right now). \

Times when we are anxious about the future, when we are tempted to worry about our kids, our parents, our jobs, our school situation...

Times when the economy seems to be crumbling... Times when the future looks bleak...

Times when evil seems to be stronger than goodness in the world. Times when social and political and religious conflict seems never-ending....

Times when the future of the church looks shaky, when we wonder what's going to happen.

Times when we wish God would just wipe it all away and usher in his new creation, as Paul was desperately hoping for in 1 Corinthians 7... Times when we long for the present form of the world to pass away and give way to God's *shalom*.

Times when we have no idea what the times mean or how to interpret them. Times when we wonder why God is so slow in his coming.

Trust him *at all times*, Psalm 62 says, and *pour out your hearts to him*.

Be honest with God. Don't hold back. Don't dress things up in meaningless pieties or "religious" language.

Tell this God what makes you afraid, anxious, sad, happy, excited... Tell him what shakes your soul with rage... Tell him what melts your heart... Tell him what confuses you. Say to God, *I don't know!*

For God is our refuge. A safe place in the storm.

Our rock. Our salvation.

You can't see it, but there is a crack right through the middle of this piece of wood, beginning at the bottom. This crack is symbolic for me. It stands for the simple reality that there is a crack that runs through everything we think and do as human beings.

But the cross stands *over* it. It covers the gap.

God is our rock and our salvation so that we have to be neither.

Thanks be to God.

