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SERMON

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PSALMS XXVII: 5.—“He shall set me upon a rock.”

THE tribulations of the present life, are frequently compared in scripture to the deep mire, or the troubled waters. Safety from troubles, and security against enraged and persecuting enemies are presented under the figure of having the feet placed upon the rock. These metaphors are often employed in their respective applications by the inspired Psalmist; who often found himself in the vicissitudes of life as one sinking in the miry clay, or in the deep and tumultuated waters. “Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul. *I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing. I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.*” Psalms lxix: 1, 2. His deliverance and security he presents under the figure of being set upon a rock. “He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.” Ps. xl: 2.

In general under this metaphor, our blessed Redeemer is presented, “In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust, for thou art my rock and my fortress.—The Lord is my rock and my fortress.” This Lord is “Immanuel—God with us.” A man shall be as a hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest, as the shadow of a *great rock* in a weary land. “This man is the man Christ Jesus.” “They drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.” “God manifest in the flesh,” is the rock of the believer, the secure resting place of his feet, amidst the billows of tribulation. “He shall set me upon a rock.” *This rock* is Christ.

In illustrating the text, I propose to shew:

- I. What is implied in Christ being a rock.
- II. What is implied in being set upon him.
- III. Some practical reflections.

1. *His durability.*—One of the primary ideas which a rock suggests, is that of durability. If we examine the globe on which we live, we perceive its substratum to be the rock. The bases of the “*everlasting hills*,” are composed of the rock. Although the earth has undergone partial changes by the deluge and the earthquake; yet its general configuration is the same at present, as at the beginning “when God fastened the foundations thereof, and laid its corner stone.” As the foundations of the earth, and as the pillars of the mountains, reared upon its surface, the rocks remain as “ordained of old.” Though the waters also have endured from the beginning as to their elements, yet they have been subjected to vicissitude. One while they preserve their fluidity, again they are indurated by frost, again they are afloat upon the wings of the wind in the form of cloudy vapours, and perhaps the entire original waters in the lapse of nearly six thousand years, have undergone the latter transformation; but the rock has *endured, as fastened* by the hand of the Creator, as the foundations of the earth: a suitable emblem of the *unchangeableness* of our Redeemer; instructing us, as far as a creature can, that “He is from everlasting to everlasting, God—Jesus Christ, *the same yesterday, and to day, and forever.*” This was the sentiment of the prophet in his animating exhortation “Trust ye in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah, is the sure *olem* *rock of ages.*” He is the ‘*same*’ or *himself* “forever” Immutible in his nature, “I am the Lord, I change not.” Immutible in his will, “He is of one mind and who can turn him, “His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure.”

2. *Stability.*—A substance may be durable but not *stable*; the sand has endured from the beginning, but it is unstable as the waters. By reason of its instability, men do not trust in it, they do not lay it as a foundation for their habitations. It is a “rolling thing,” easily driven before the winds, or swept away by the floods.

Stability is the property of the rock, it abides the violent “rushing of many waters,” and the fierce impetuosity of the tempest. Christ is stable, more stable than the rock. The time will come when he will roll away the foundations of the mountains, and move the earth from its place, but he abides himself immoveable. As God—man—mediator—he occupies the eternal throne, he is “the head over all things to his church.” Earth and hell are at war with him, and would cast him down from his throne; he sits at his Father’s right hand, unmoved and immoveable. The empires of past ages, reared by satan in hostility to his throne, have been overthrown and removed from the earth. Babylon, “the glory of the Chaldean’s excellency” hath fallen, to rise no more forever; but our Redeemer abides unshaken upon his throne, the stable “rock of ages.” “Of old hast thou laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands; they shall perish, but thou shalt endure, yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment, as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed, but thou art the same.” “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his *Christ*, saying, let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords

from us," he that sitteth in the heaven shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision, yet, *have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.* Immoveable himself, he is immoveably *set* upon his throne. "*He is a rock.*"

3. He is therefore a *sure* foundation. We have seen the rock fastened as the stable foundations of the everlasting hills, we have seen that men do not heap up the sand as the basis upon which to rear their habitations; they build upon the rock, and confide in the stability of the foundation. "The rains descend, the floods come, the winds blow and beat upon that house, it falls not, *for it is built upon a rock.*" Such a rock is Christ, and upon him as upon a *sure* foundation, his people are built. "To whom, coming as unto a *living stone, disallowed* indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also as living stones, are built up a spiritual house. Therefore thus saith the Lord God, behold I lay in Zion, *for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation,* he that believeth shall not make haste, shall not be confounded." With this, corresponds the declaration of Paul to the Corinthians, "other foundation, can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." As he is the *eternal son of God, manifested in the flesh,* and the only mediator between God and man, as he hath finished transgression, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in an *everlasting righteousness,* as he hath redeemed us from the *curse of the law,* being made a curse *instead of us,* as he hath delivered himself for us that he might redeem us from *all iniquity,* and purify to himself, a peculiar people zealous of good works, "as we have redemption through his blood, *even the forgiveness of sins,* and as he *washes us from our sins* in his own blood," he is our *only* and our *sure* foundation. He is "the Lord our righteousness, in him have we righteousness and strength." He is *thus* "the foundation of all the hopes, and comforts, and happiness of the people of God. The sure foundation on which his people may securely rest, one which will never fail them, and by whom they will never be deceived. On his merit alone, they depend for pardon—for holiness—and for heaven; and this rock of their dependence does not disappoint them. He is the only foundation of the entire church, in opposition to the claims of the Pope of Rome. The Pope founds his claims as the alledged successor of the apostle Peter upon Matt. xvi: 18. "And I say unto thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

The Greek word for Peter, "is petros, a stone; and strictly speaking, such a stone as we can *handle,* or *turn over,* and *move from its place.*" The Greek word for rock, is petra, an *immoveable rock.* As it is employed here, it is contrasted with petros a *moveable stone.* The *article* is prefixed to it, which always designates *some particular person or thing already known.* "Thou art petros," a *moveable stone,* and consequently unsuitable for a foundation. "But upon *ταυτη τη πετρα,* *This the rock*" that you have so often read of in the Old Testament, "the rock that begat thee," the rock of ages, the rock of salvation, the rock of refuge, the rock of habitation, "I will build my church," as upon an immoveable foundation.

Who indeed, but the stable "rock of ages," is sufficient as a foundation, to sustain the stupendous edifice, *the church*? Certainly no moveable stone like Peter, tossed as he was, *by the hand of a feeble maiden*, for against such a foundation, the gates of hell would easily prevail. Not so, the rock Christ, the durable, stable, and sure foundation the gates of hell *cannot* prevail against *him*. "*Their rock is not as our rock.*"

4. He is a secure *refuge*. "A man shall be as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort, for thou art my rock and my *fortress*. He shall cry unto me, thou art my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. But the Lord is my defence, and my God is *the rock of my refuge.*" These passages, with many others, present the Redeemer as the *fortress* of every believer; the impregnable fortress of rock. It is one of the precious promises made to him, that "he shall dwell on high, his place of defence shall be the munitions of rock," and his prayer based upon this promise is, "when my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy." In all this, the Psalmist and Prophet have a reference to the practice of nations in erecting their strong holds of the rock. There is moreover, a reference to some of the prominent features of the land where they dwelt. "Palestine being a mountainous country, had also many rocks, which were part of the strength of the country; for in the time of danger the inhabitants retired to them, where they found refuge against any sudden irruptions of the enemy. When the Benjamites were overcome and almost exterminated by the Israelites of the other tribes, they secured themselves in the rock Rimmon. Sampson kept garrison in the rock Etam. When David was persecuted by Saul, he often hid himself in caverns made in a rock; as at Maon, at Adullam, at Engedi, where there was a cave of vast extent, in which David and his people concealed themselves, and Saul entered into it, and continued for some time without discovering them.—*Cruden.*

These features of the land afforded the prophets happy illustrations of that refuge, which they enjoyed in the Messiah, the God of Israel. He was to them "a rock of habitation," in the day of calamity. He is still the "rock of the believer's refuge." To him as "the rock that is higher than he is," he resorts when his heart is overwhelmed by the sorrows of life; or when pressed by his fierce and relentless enemies, he finds him a more secure hiding place, than Rimmon, or Adullam; as the shadow truly, of a great rock in a weary land. His covenant, his love, his promises, his power, his *blood*, his *complete salvation*, he finds his "munitions of rocks," his "walls and bulwarks," and to these he has unobstructed access, when his soul is overwhelmed by the waves of either temporal or spiritual tribulation. "Flee ye to the strong holds, ye prisoners of hope."

5. He is a source of unfailing consolation. "Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought

thee forth water out of the rock of flint." "He made Jacob to *suck honey* out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock." "I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil." The God of Jacob turned the rock into a standing water; the flint into a fountain of waters; "and they thirsted not when he led them through the deserts, he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them; he clave the rock also and the waters gushed out."

These beautiful passages refer either to a stupendous miracle wrought for the Israelites, in the great and terrible wilderness, when Moses smote the rock of Horeb, and the waters gushed out, and the refreshing stream followed them through the land of drought, or to a peculiarity pertaining to the land of Canaan, and described in the promises, "a land flowing with honey," "a land of oil-olive, and honey." "The Lord settled his people in the land of Canaan, which was a mountainous country of great fertility; the hills of which were loaded with vines and olive trees, and of which the very *rocks* were filled with swarms of bees, by which means the inhabitants had abundance of honey." *Cruden*. The olive tree, flourishes in a rocky soil, and its fruit yields an excellent oil, which "forms an important article of food; it imparts a greater degree of pliancy to the limbs, and agility to the whole body, it asuages the agonizing pain, and promotes by its sanative influence, the cure of a wound; it alleviates the internal sufferings produced by disease; it illumines at once, the cottage and the palace; it cheers by the splendour of its combustion, the festive meeting; it serves to expel the deadly poison of venomous reptiles, and it mingled perhaps, from the first of time, by the command of Heaven, with many of the bloodless oblations which the people of God presented at his altar. "From the creation of the world, the fatness of this tree, signally displayed the Divine goodness and benignity; and since the fall of man, it symbolizes the grace and kindness of our Heavenly Father, and the precious influences of the Holy Ghost, in healing the spiritual diseases of our degenerate race, and in counteracting the deadly poison of moral corruption."—*Paxton's Illustrations*.

"What," is the inquiry of the companions of Sampson, "is sweeter than honey?" "It appears to have been reckoned among the greatest delicacies at the sumptuous table of Solomon," Song v: 1. It symbolizes the word of God. "How sweet are thy words to my taste, yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth; sweeter also than honey and the honey comb." "And what is more grateful to the renewed soul, than the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel, and the pure and sanctifying injunctions of the law, which regulate all his steps, supply all his wants and lead him up to spiritual perfection, and the full enjoyment of his Father in heaven? No sweets of nature, no composition of art, can fully express the value he sets upon the blessings of salvation, nor the holy delight, which, in the possession of them, diffuses itself over all his bosom.—*Item*.

We are all familiar with the value of "water to him that is thirsty, and floods of water to the dry ground." In the great and ter-

rible wilderness, wherein there was no water, but where a consuming drought reigned over the burning sands, the rock, the *flinty* rock, was made to yield copious and refreshing streams. "That rock was Christ," it symbolised the Redeemer in the abundance of his consolations, as he is "smitten of God."—"The just, instead of the unjust." Out of him, as our "spiritual rock," flow rivers of living water. "With him is the fountain of life," and he makes his people to drink of the river of his pleasures. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all. As the child of God travels through this world, to him "a great and terrible wilderness," wherein are fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, and where there is no water of consolation, he finds his Redeemer in the fulness of his grace, "a spiritual rock" from whom flows a river of life, the streams whereof refresh and gladden him. In a word, what is more improbable and contrary to the nature of the thing itself, than, that the "flinty rock" should yield water, and oil, and honey? Yet God to his people Israel, brought forth water out of the rock of flint, and made them to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock, and made it pour out to Job rivers of oil. Thus Jesus Christ appears to the carnal mind. He is a stone *disallowed* of men; yet, to him that believeth, he yields spiritual drinks; nourishment more delicious than honey, and the "oil of gladness;" and whilst the men of the world are drinking of its "bitter waters," and its "waters of strife," he drinks of the lucid river of divine pleasures, and his very sorrows of life, like the *flint*, by the efficacious grace of his Redeemer, are turned into fountains of waters, "waters break out to him, and streams in the desert," so that he "thirsts not" as he treads the burning sands.

Lastly and briefly, though thus fraught with blessings to them that believe, he is *a rock of destruction* to his enemies. "He shall be for a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel." "But Israel which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith; but as it were *by the law of works*; for they stumbled at that stumbling stone, as it is written, Behold I lay in Zion, a stumbling stone, and rock of offence; And he that believeth on him shall not be ashamed." "Jesus saith unto them, did ye never read in the scriptures; The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes; and whosoever shall fall on this stone, shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." *Tremendous effect of unbelief—broken—ground to powder!!* Oh that the unbeliever would now tremble! For the day is coming when he would rather that *any other rock* should fall on him, than the rock Christ. He shall say in that day to the rocks, "fall on me and hide me from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?"

Let the *broken* and *ground* Jews be a warning to every man. The Jews fell by unbelief and were *broken*, and the stone hath fal-

len upon them, and hath *ground* them as the dust of the summer threshing floor, and they have been scattered by the winds of heaven.

II. What is implied in being *set* upon the *rock* Christ. In the illustration of this point brevity will be studied.

1. In the expression "*He shall set me upon a rock,*" there is evidently implied the *purpose* of God to do so, *made known* to the psalmist. We cannot conceive of the salvation of *any*, in *opposition to the will of God*. It is equally certain, that all "*upon whom he will have mercy,*" shall be saved, for he will do all his pleasure. There is involved, therefore, in the phrase under consideration, the primary idea of "*a covenant of grace,*" in which the Eternal Father laid for a foundation *the stone* "*chosen of God and precious.*" There is also implied the *revelation* of this covenant to the Psalmist, and moreover the guarantee of its unspeakable benefits to him in the "*precious promises.*" Upon no other view of the subject could he have been assured of the protection which he expresses with so much confidence and beauty in the text and context. In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavillion. In the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me. He shall set me upon a rock. And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me. The foundation of this "*strong faith*" is to be found *in a revealed covenant of grace, and its exceeding great promises.* Hence the royal Psalmist when he was approaching the valley of the shadow of death, "*feared no evil.*" His hopes were based upon the covenant. "*Thou hast made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure, this is all my salvation, and all my desire.*"

2. It imports an *actual interest* in Christ. David evidently had laid hold upon the covenant, had "*tasted that the Lord was gracious.*" It was from an experience of past protection, according to the promise which enabled him to say "*In the time of trouble he shall set me upon a rock.*" He had been "*in deep mire*" and "*in deep waters,*" but had been delivered, and had his feet placed upon the rock, and his goings established. He was *already set* upon the rock. There is a *union* between the rock *as a foundation*, and that which is *set* upon it. This union David experienced. He *felt* himself, as it were already upon the rock, and that it was an *immoveable* foundation, and upon it he should continue. By the grace of the covenant, having been enabled to "*come to him as unto a living stone,*" he "*as a lively stone was built*" upon him, as an integral part of the "*spiritual house.*" By the bonds of the spirit, and faith of the spirit's operation, he was *cemented* to the rock, the sure foundation.

3. There is implied in the passage a *sense of present security*. While floundering in the deep mire, or tossing upon the breaking waves, a *sense of danger* possesses the soul. The psalmist had experienced this, "*Save me, O God, for the waters have come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.*" His soul in these circumstances was filled with dread, and as he feels himself *sinking* in the depths, he cries out, "*Help Lord or I per-*

ish," But as one who had escaped a shipwreck, and finds himself safe upon a broad and immoveable rock, surveys with *a sense of security*, the raging billows, and the floating fragments of the wreck whence he had escaped; in like manner the psalmist, knowing his feet to be upon the "rock of ages," surveyed with calmness, the gathering and raging multitude of "his enemies and foes" "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid."

Finally, the passage imports a *strong confidence in relation to the future*. There is a manifest distinction between a sense of present security, and confidence in relation to future troubles. The man who has escaped a shipwreck, though he may feel secure from the dangers of the seas whilst his feet are upon the rock; yet he is not willing immediately to breast again the rolling waves, or in the frail barque to meet the rushing tempest. David, however, was animated by this heroic spirit, and dared to adventure upon the dark future, and engage in other conflicts with his restless and relentless foes. "Though a host *should* encamp against me, my heart shall not fear, though war *should* rise against me, in this will I be confident." Confident in what? *In this*, "In the time of trouble, *he shall* set me upon a rock;" "And my head shall be lifted up above mine enemies round about me."

### III. A few brief practical reflections.

I. In the time of trouble it is natural for men to seek a place of refuge. Where however, shall "the world that lieth in wickedness" secure itself against "the great and terrible day of the Lord?" "For behold Jehovah is coming out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity:" Who will abide the day of his coming?

The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and an high wall in his own conceit. Will it secure him in the day of the Lord's anger? It will not, "For we are not redeemed by corruptible things such as silver and gold; and no man can pay a sufficient ransom for his brother."

Alas! Alas! The vast multitude have betaken themselves to refuges of lies." In themselves they trust, or under falsehood they have hid themselves, but all in vain. "Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come." In vain have such "made a covenant with death, and with hell are at agreement." In vain do they say, "When the everflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves." The overflowing scourge shall *come* to them "in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow." Wo to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters; But God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee afar off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind."

2. Seek my friends to be built upon the rock Christ Jesus. He is the only rock of refuge, of habitation, when the overflowing scourge shall pass through. In the day of this earth's calamity, when the nations shall rush like the rushing of mighty waters, he will be the munition of rock to his people. The wicked of the earth may like the Kenite of old have a "strong dwelling place," as they suppose, may encourage themselves, "that they have put their nest in a rock;" but like the Kenite of old, they shall be wasted. "The pride of thy heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock; whose habitation is high, that saith in his heart, who shall bring me down to the ground. Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, "Thence will I bring thee down saith the Lord." The rock of such, O believer, "*is not as our rock.*" He that believeth on the rock Christ, shall *never, never* be confounded. The man who hath built his house upon the sand of the sea shore, may tremble for his safety, when the tempest rusheth in its strength, and the mighty waves of the sea lift up their voice, and beat in their wrathful fury against that house. But not so, the man who hath built his habitation upon yonder rocky cliff, which hath repelled the fury of the mighty waters for ages. He can look with composure from his "rock of habitation" upon the gathering tempest, and the rolling billows of the vexed ocean, as their huge strength is broken and dissipated at his feet.

Greater is the security of the man who hath made the Redeemer his rock of habitation. With unspeakable calmness in the great, and dreadful, and last day, when Jehovah shall come upon the wings of the mighty winds, shall he view the heavens rolling away, and the earth driven before the "tempest of his ire," as a rolling thing before the whirlwind. "Flee ye, flee ye therefore to this strong hold, ye prisoners of hope; trust ye in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah *is the rock of ages.* Amen.

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## UNIVERSALISM.

### LETTER XI.

#### *Reply. Ignorance of Universalism.*

WE have often found ourselves greatly at a loss during this discussion, to express what the truth seemed to require, without using language which it is alike foreign to our habits and our taste to employ. We have not even thought it worth while, to notice—so little have we regarded, what was, no doubt, meant to be personally offensive to us.—But the absolute destitution—of the least respect for the plainest teachings of God's holy word, which you have constantly manifested; united with the total want of all preparation for *any* investigation, which every where marks your comments on it;—have often led you into a grossness of error and impiety, which has perhaps too deeply moved us. If proof of this, beyond that contained in our two last letters be needed, it will be found in this.

1. In your 5th letter you quote a number of texts of scripture to prove "that the absolute certainty of the salvation of *all men* is de-