

# *Blessings Remembered*

God's Word, along with various images and occasional history, are presented on this devotional website page. "Blessings Remembered" will hopefully prompt memories of many personal blessings from God in your lives. May you always trust in God's promised blessings, past, present, future and for all eternity.

*"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."* Hebrews 13:8

***"Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock."*** Isaiah 26:4

Firmly rooted into the rock, a tenacious windblown and weather-beaten tree braves the harsh elements. As long as the rock remains, the tree is able to stand. Yet, without the rock, the tree would not survive.



Photo: Bill VanNostrand

Several years back, the advertising of a popular truck manufacturer made the claim; “like a rock.” The ads sought to convey the assurance of dependability, durability and strength. Throughout His Word, which still speaks true to us, God uses the image of a rock as He speaks about His strength and His solid enduring love and support for His faithful children. Such imagery impresses upon us the never-changing fact that Jesus truly is our only source of life, strength, dependability and security. For, Jesus is not only “like a rock”, He is The Rock, the Rock of our Salvation.

The Psalms tells us; *“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...For who is God, but the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God?...The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation.”* Psalm 18:2 & 31 & 46

An old story tells of a young minister who was traveling through the rugged country near England’s Cheddar Gorge. Suddenly, the clouds burst and torrential sheets of rain beat against the earth. Caught by the sudden downpour, the lone weary traveler was able to take shelter in a mighty cleft of rock, that was located under a rocky overhang. That traveler was the Reverend Augustus Toplady, a minister of the Church of England. Rain storms in that area could last for hours. So, settling in for a long wait he had nothing to do but study the rock and the storm raging around him.

As he considered his situation he fumbled in his pockets for something on which to record the imagery that fired his imagination. Protected from the wind and rain, he began to write one of the Church’s best loved hymns, “Rock of Ages, Cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee.”

In 1776 Rev. Toplady wrote an article for “The Gospel Magazine” which contained the first printing of his new hymn “Rock of Ages”, a hymn which so ably describes Jesus Christ, the Rock of Ages, as the only remedy for all our sin. Could we sinful, fallen, humans help God to achieve our own salvation? No never! We must look to the Cross and depend totally on Jesus. Toplady’s hymn strongly declares that Jesus Christ and His work on the cross is mankind’s only hope of salvation from the judgment our sin deserves. In the years since, his hymn has gained a place of honor among hymns.

While the phrase “rock of ages” is not found in God’s Word, the meaning can be found in the above verse from Isaiah 26:4, *“Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock”*, or in other words, a rock that lasts for all the ages.

The hymn “Rock of Ages” was based on an interpretation of the encounter of Moses with God, where the cleft rock pictures the promised Christ and His salvation. The image of Jesus as a rock opened to provide a place of spiritual refuge for sinful mankind was drawn from Moses’ experience recorded in Exodus 33:19-23. Moses desired to stand in God’s Presence and see His glory, which certainly is God’s plan and purpose for all mankind. However man’s sin meant certain destruction in the Holy Presence of God, unless God provided a way of salvation. God’s provision of the Cleft-Rock for Moses protected Him from destruction, even while he stood in God’s Presence. It was considered a fore-shadow of what God promised. Through Jesus Christ, God would provide access to His Presence and shelter from His eternal destructive Judgment.

This interpretation stresses that we will all certainly stand before the Judgment of a Holy, Righteous God. Yet, by faith, we are hidden in Jesus Christ, our Rock that was cleft on our behalf on the Cross. In Jesus, we are sheltered from eternal death and separation from God and are forgiven, and given eternal life in the presence of His glory.

Sadly, Augustus Toplady only lived to the age of 37. Succumbing to tuberculosis, as he neared the end of his earthly life, Toplady proclaimed, “My heart beats every day stronger and stronger for glory. Sickness is no affliction, pain no cause, death itself no dissolution. My prayers are now all converted into praise.” The closing stanza to “Rock of Ages”, expresses what God in Jesus, the Rock of Ages, has promised to all who faithfully trust in Him.

“While I draw this fleeting breath,  
When mine eyelids close in death,  
When I soar through tracts unknown  
See Thee on thy Judgment Throne,  
Rock of ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee.”

Each person seeks something solid, reassuring and unshakable, especially when troubles relentlessly beat and “rain down” against them. Jesus refers to Himself as our solid rock when He said; *“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”* Matthew 7:24 - 25

The Apostle Paul also took a look back to Moses when he wrote; *“For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. **For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.**”* 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

Jesus Christ is the Lord, the Rock of whom all Scripture speaks. By faith in His suffering, death and resurrection, we are sheltered, delivered from the harsh consequence of sin in our lives. There is no God but the LORD. There is no Rock except Jesus, God Himself in human flesh. Also, the solid confession of the Gospel in Jesus Christ is the Rock, the absolutely vital confession of the Church. *“Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ [Jesus said] ‘and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’* Matthew 16:16 & 18

This truth is lived out among each of us in the Church, the body of believers in Jesus. Even now, as we remember God’s wonderful blessings to us who “hide” in the safety of Jesus Christ, we share our joys with one another. Also, by word and deed, we point others to Him and the blessings received only in Jesus. What’s more, through times of trials and burdens we share with one another the blessed promises and strength, the peace and comfort received through our Rock, Jesus.

Jesus gave us His description of the person who faithfully looks to Him, who hides in Him as their Rock; *“He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.”* Luke 6:48

Each person who by faith believes in Jesus Christ is laid upon, built upon, the Rock of God’s redeeming love for all people for Jesus’ sake. Jesus’ love for us is

tenacious. Yet, unlike the tree pictured above, which by its own power must cling to the rock to survive, Jesus our Rock comes and clings to us. By faith in His Word and Sacraments, He joins Himself to us.

Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah, in looking forward to that time when God would send His Rock to all people, stated what a life of faith needs. ***Listen** to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord: **look to the rock** from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug*” Isaiah 51:1. Eternally vital words for us all, “Listen and look to Jesus!”

Jesus is the Rock Who is with us always, through all our times of need. He is with us to give His strength and His peace, His forgiveness and His life, that we might abundantly live deeply rooted in Him. He urges us to look to Him, to pray to Him, daily, for all blessings, all we need to truly live. Therefore, we pray, as do the Psalms *“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 name’s sake you lead me and guide me...Be to me a rock of refuge, to which I may continually come; you have given the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.”*

Psalm 31:2 -3 and Psalm 71:3

***“He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God.”***

Psalm 62:6 - 7

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All Scripture quoted from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2016) Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles. All underlining and making bold of Scripture for emphasis was done by Rev. VanNostrand