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The Rock of Ages

SERMON preached at Union Chapel,
Bethersden, by the Pastor, Mr. H. Dawson,
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THE ROCK OF AGES

Psalm 105.41.

"He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river."

This is a word which, at the first reading of it, as you are all aware, stands in connection with a memorable chapter in Israel's history of old, as they journeyed through the wilderness to the promised land; but the Word of God makes it plain that there is more than history in this word, yea there is a mystery, even that mystery of godliness, God made manifest in the flesh; and that which is recorded as an incident in Israel's wanderings in the wilderness preaches the Gospel of the grace of God, and is one of those things of which the Word of God says: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort in the Scriptures might have hope." In approaching the subject I would just remind you that as you look into the Old Testament, reading the pages thereof, do keep in your minds that the New Testament will often give you a sweet, blessed unfolding of it, and far beyond what you may have in your mind as you read what is written in the Old Testament. I will give you two instances to help you ponder in your heart what I want you to do: when Solomon was raised up by God to be he who should build the Temple, at the time when the Temple was dedicated; God made a statement concerning him: "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to Me a Son." As you read it it does refer to Solomon, and a mercy for Solomon that it did, but if you look into the Epistle to the Hebrews you will find that it refers to a greater than Solomon, for there the Apostle Paul makes it plain that it refers to Jesus Christ, and so you will see therein a greater than Solomon is here: Not only so, another illustration of what a deep couches beneath: when you read Psalm 8, which is very beautiful to read for its sublime language, you would think that godly David was out one evening when the stars were brilliant and the moon was shining, and he was wrought upon to pen a Psalm concerning it: "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man that Thou art mindful of Him and the son of man that Thou visitest him." It seems as though David is overcome with the beauty of the evening sky, and his heart was filled, and he was wrought upon to give glory to God as the Creator: "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy Name in

all the earth, Who hast set Thy glory above the heavens." Now turn again to the Hebrews, and what do we read? "But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou visitest him? Thou madest Him a little lower than the angels, Thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of Thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that He put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus." You can read it in chapter 2, The Epistle to the Hebrews, and you will find the Apostle Paul goes nearly through that little Psalm 8 to refer it to Jesus Christ, He, Who is that Man Who must always be recorded with a capital. You will find many an instance in the New Testament where things recorded in the Old Testament are referred to, and set forth as to the underlying truth that is designed to be proclaimed thereby, and yet to read it often it seems just a little piece of history, and very interesting to read. The Psalmist in this word before us has been speaking about the dealings of God with Israel of old, and emphasizing as usual Israel's unfaithfulness and God's mercy, the people's rebellion, and God's clemency; and so he brings before us this subject, which I want to look at as the Lord shall help me: "He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river." I would like to work it out from three viewpoints as grace is given. First of all there is the **Mystery**, "He opened the rock," and what is to be understood thereby; then there is in the second viewpoint the **Manifestation**: "The waters gushed out"; the third viewpoint is the **Mercy** of it all: "They ran in the dry places like a river." Now to go back to the history, first of all, which outlines what is the mystery in our subject as you read about it in the book of Exodus: "And the Lord said unto Moses, Go on before the people and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb, and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it that the people may drink, and Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel." Now that is the first reference, but then Israel went on, and it is very evident that while the waters did gush out and run in the dry places like a river, thirty odd years afterwards you read this; and there must be a background to this subject: "Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation into the desert of Zin in the first month, and the people abode in Kadesh Barnea, and Miriam died there, and was buried there. And there was no water for the congregation and they gathered themselves together against

Moses and against Aaron." It goes on to show how, as they stood before Moses and before Aaron, and before God, they drew a contrast between how they had been living in the wilderness, and how the elders of Israel had lived in Egypt where there were figs, and vines, and pomegranates, and here "neither is there any water to drink." The underlying teaching here is, as I understand it, that Israel had had to learn "If you walk contrary to me, I will walk contrary to you." Now, follow this along, as it leads up to our subject which I hope to open up, as the Lord shall enable me to do; "And the Lord spake unto Moses saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes, and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock so shalt thou give the congregation, and their beasts, drink. And Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them"—here is where Moses spake unadvisedly, where he, godly man that he was, slipped, "And he said unto them, Hear now ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice" (he was commanded to speak to it), "And the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also." "And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the Lord, and he was sanctified in them." Now that act of Moses kept him from going into the promised land, as you are all aware. In the record of this rock, and the water being brought out of it, it says in our text: "He opened the rock"; and in the records I have read to you: "He smote the rock", and later on, in referring to it in Isaiah, there is yet another reference: "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." You have three words, opened, smitten, and claved; that brings us to the starting point of the subject, the mystery of it. "He opened the rock"; you will think at once, all of you, that it is the Rock of Ages which is being referred to. Of a truth the rock was opened in the wilderness waste, and the waters did gush out, "and they ran in the dry places like a river", but the Apostle Paul in the Corinthians' Epistle,—here you see again the New Testament opening up the Old Testament teaching,—"They drank of that Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ"; and so the subject is Christ cruci-

fied, the Rock of Ages, and it must be Christ crucified. Every time any of us try to preach the Gospel we must remember: "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Much might be said as to how Jesus Christ is referred to as the Rock. When you think of a rock you think also of stability, for it sets it forth, and so does Jesus Christ as the Rock of Ages: "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His"; and when you think of the Rock of Ages again, you may think of that word, again to be found in Isaiah, where it says: "A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of waters in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land". Here you see the Rock of Ages not only set forth in His wondrous stability, as "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and for ever", but in the blessed shelter He affords, inasmuch as you and I—(dare I say that of all of us?)—you and I have proved, many of us: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, therefore will not we fear" Then this word brings before us the Rock of Ages from another viewpoint,—not only stability, not only shelter, but we now think of supplies: "He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river." Here you see what you sing about:

"A fulness resides in Jesus our Head,
And ever abides to answer our need".

You might think of how that is referred to in the Word of God, dear friends: "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell", and godly John makes an amazing declaration, O that you and I may be able to make it too with humble faith, it is a sweet, hallowed experience: "And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace". It says "He opened the rock", and you sing:

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me".

There you see another word relating to the fulness of God. It is one of the most outstanding words in the Word of God,—there are quite a few outstanding words, but I would say that this is the most outstanding of all: "In Him there dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead **bodily**". Ask God to help you to understand it. You dear young people, following on to know the Lord, pray over that wondrous declaration, and you will see Jesus; you will see:

"The God shines gracious through the Man",
and you see the Rock of Ages is verily God, verily Man, other-

wise the waters could not run "in the dry places like a river", and you be able to drink thereof, for these waters—(do understand)—flow down to you, to me, by Calvary's Cross, and what was done thereon by Jesus Christ when He died in the stead of poor sinners like you and me.

"Thee we own a perfect Saviour,
Only Source of all that's good;
Every grace, and every favour,
Flows to us through Jesu's blood."

"He opened the rock", O, blessed Rock of Ages, here you find stability in all the world's uncertainty and instability; here you find shelter from all that earth and hell can do against you; here you find supplies when all around you things are just dried up, and men's hearts are failing them for fear. "My God shall supply all your need"; "Bread shall be given, water shall be sure"; and "As thy days, so shall thy strength be"; "My grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect in weakness". I want to look at this expression, because there is an amazing depth in it: "He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out". What does this mean, "He opened the rock"? It is to show to us, O, that you and I may have our hearts enlarged to receive the truth of it, and our understandings enlightened to ponder it aright; I say it is to show to us the sufferings of Christ. If you would have a commentary on how He opened the rock you will see it in another wonderful chapter in Isaiah,— maybe it is very familiar to you in the reading of it, but there are two or three words in the chapter which none of us can go down into because it is such a depth that we have but a little understanding of it: "He is despised, and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"; and it says this: "But he was wounded for our transgressions", margin—have you ever noticed the margin word—tormented for our transgressions; hell is torment:

"Our sins a hell procured,
And He that hell endured".

Mark the personal pronoun, be sure about it, referring to you: "But he was wounded for **our** transgressions, he was bruised for **our** iniquities, the chastisement of **our** peace was upon him and with his stripes (margin, with his bruise) we are healed; he was oppressed, and he was afflicted yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth"; and here is another of those tremendous words, inspired by the Spirit of God for Isaiah to

record, you must think on it, as it were, like Moses when he stood before the burning bush, and took his shoes from off his feet, for the place whereon he stood was holy ground: "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him". Think of His Father doing it, and yet it had to be done, "He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him". All this was essential in the sufferings of Christ that the Rock of Ages might be cleft for you and me,—opened; and I think of that word "smitten," and in the records you read on each occasion that Moses smote the rock with a rod. "He smote the rock, and the waters gushed out". Here you see the justice of God as the rod: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts; Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn my hand upon the little ones". You and I must think upon it like this:

"Sinner, thou hast done the deed,
Thou hast made the Saviour bleed;
Justice drew its sword on Me,
Pierced My heart to pass by thee."

Thus "He opened the rock", and you get that truth opened up again in the Hebrews' Epistle,—I have read this to you many times: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness (margin, liberty) to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith". O, much might be said under that heading. It is a wondrous mystery, "And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh", and it was an absolute necessity:

"Sin to pardon without blood,
Never in God's nature stood;
Think not that He can or may
Pardon any other way".

The foundation of forgiveness of sins—"Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins",—but there was the shedding of blood,—"He opened the rock", yes, and now

"Jesu's blood, through earth and skies,
Mercy, eternal mercy, cries."

"He opened the rock"; you will see then that this opening of the rock brings before us the unspeakable sufferings of Christ:

"Of His sufferings so intense,
Angels have no perfect sense."

This opening of the rock was not only by what the Father

was pleased to do in bruising Him on our behalf, Satan added to those sufferings, doing all that he could with hellish ingenuity; he assailed the dear Son of God as every opportunity was afforded not only when in the wilderness, after Jesus Christ was baptised, He was tempted forty days, and forty nights of the devil. If you remember how that record ends: "Then the devil leaveth Him for a season"; yes, but there were other seasons not recorded in the sacred pages when Jesus Christ, as verily Man, verily God, fought with hell, and with Satan as the head of hell and all its minions. "In this was the Son of God made manifest, that He might destroy the works of the devil", but there was in it as the rock was being opened, exquisite suffering which no preacher can begin to say much about:

"What He endured, no tongue can tell,
Which must have sunk our souls to hell",

otherwise. Then you must not forget what you read: "He was taken by wicked hands, and crucified and slain". The world added to His sufferings, filled up the cup by doing all that it could do wickedly against Him, and fulfilling the Scripture: "He is despised, and rejected of men". What suffering there must have been, of another nature when "He came unto His own, but His own received Him not". He came unto His own people,—the Jews as a nation; He came into His own land of promise, and they that dwelt therein received Him not.

I must look at the subject from another viewpoint, but, O, that you might find it in your hearts: "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, and be made conformable to His death". "He opened the rock"; It is a **great mystery**, it is a **great mercy**: "God so loved the World that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Look at the second viewpoint, **The Manifestation**, "The waters gushed out". This word "gushed" is a word to lead our thoughts to the abundance of the waters as they came forth. You must never think of God in dealing with His people doing anything on their behalf for their good, otherwise than doing it abundantly: "I will abundantly bless her provision, I will satisfy her poor with bread". There is a word in Isaiah that is helpful, where it speaks about "There shall be floods on the dry grounds", equivalent to the waters gushing out, and running in the dry places like a river. "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed and my blessing upon thy offspring; and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the watercourses". Here

you see the interpretation, as I understand it, "The waters gushed out", but the waters represent the Spirit of God: "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground, I will pour my Spirit" which is the water "upon thy seed, and my blessing" in the abundance of it "on thine offspring". Don't you think we have seen just a little fulfilment of that under Union Chapel roof? When you look back over the history of our Church, at least during my Pastorate, there are the fathers and the mothers, and the sons and daughters following on: "One generation shall praise Thy works to another", "I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, My blessing upon thine offspring." Thanks be unto God for His dealings with us. "He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out". We may say that these waters are indeed waters of life because they represent the Spirit's influences, His gracious, holy operations. You may think of these waters even as you sung in the hymn before the sermon began:

"Sovereign grace o'er sin abounding",

and that sovereign grace gushes out from the Rock of Ages, The God of all grace, and it is plenteous grace, sovereign grace, and you must remember that when water flows on its own initiative it makes its own course, which denotes the sovereignty of God, and it says in our subject: "He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river", and that "River of God which is full of water" has made its own course in the world at large, where God in His sovereignty has ordained it to flow, and there it gushes out, and poor sinners are wrought upon by the Spirit of God, and they come unto God to drink of the waters that He alone can give. "Whosoever shall drink of the water that I shall give him, it shall be in him a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life". Do remember the sovereignty of it: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy"; and here you get back again to the illustration of fulness: "The waters gushed out"; and there is one thing here which is very striking—"They ran in the dry places like a river". Now this must have been before the eyes of Israel of old an everyday miracle, as they found those waters gushing out in their encampment, and they had the privilege and pleasure to drink thereof, because they were dwelling in a wilderness, and you cannot make water run along the dry sand and remain as a river, a stream; it sinks, and leaves no trace, hardly. You see our little dears on our Dymchurch day, when they are playing on the sand, bringing their little buckets from the sea to fill up the trenches they have been digging—ere they can get back with some more water to add to what they have

already put in, the water has run out and gone, and they have to start afresh. Here "It ran in the dry places like a river", and it was always "The river of God, which is full of water". "He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran"—not just a trickle, there was power, there was a spate—"They ran in the dry places like a river". It tells of fulness, and it tells of freeness:

"O bring no price, God's grace is free,
To Paul, to Magdalene, to me".

Look at the mercy of it. "They ran in the dry places like a river". What are these dry places? Maybe most of you dear people, some of you dear young people too, if you began to interpret what these dry places are, you would look within and say you often felt a dry place in your own breast as regards the things of God, and that you too often in your soul's feelings are like the parched ground, and much in need for the waters to gush out where you are that you might have a thorough soaking. Then there are other dry places; although you have a correct interpretation, and I am very glad if you could tell of some dry places you have felt in your soul's experience, because that means that your soul is alive unto God. As you are born, you are dead in trespasses and sins, and you would have no concern whatever to drink of these waters, nor would you be aware in your soul's experience of what are dry places, therefore that is encouraging for you to think on. "The waters gushed out, they ran in the dry places like a river". I believe that these dry places primarily mean all the nations of the earth, and there these waters will run, in accordance with eternal purposes; do remember, you must remember what you read in the Word of God, and not let it go, People of every kindred, tribe and tongue shall:

"Dwell on His Name with sweetest song",

then these waters shall run in the dry places where all those varied nationalities are to be found, and thus: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature"; and "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled". Not only does it refer to, as I said, people of every kindred, tribe and tongue, but it could especially refer here—I speak with great reverence—preaching to those whom we term unconverted, and there is a great necessity that that should be done: "Preach the Gospel to every creature" the Saviour said, and that will often mean if you are doing that in the open air, that you will be addressing the unconverted; but even there you have got a guarantee, if it is laid on you to do it, if you have authority,— a com-

mission, to preach the Gospel to every creature, then you can plead that the rock may be opened, and the waters to gush out, and to run in the dry places like a river. Go back a hundred or so years ago, and think of Whitefield, and think of the Wesleys, preaching to twenty thousand people at a time at five o'clock in the morning, before many of the people were going to work, and there they gathered, and there the Spirit of God wrought, and countless multitudes were wrought on, born again, lived well, died well, and that was a fulfilment: "He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; and they ran in the dry places like a river". O, that the Spirit of God would appear for us in England as a nation, and raise up more of His dear servants, and send forth labourers into His harvest (as Berridge puts it), that they might preach:

"With a voice to raise the dead".

I sometimes wish that I was younger than I am, and at other times I do not feel like that. I have wished that I was younger than I am that I might be spared to preach the Gospel longer, but that I must leave. One thing is sure, wherever God ordains a man to preach His Gospel, He will also guarantee that the rock will be opened, and the waters will gush out, and they will run in the dry places like a river. To you, as you gather together, week in, week out, your heart, your understanding, your soul's experiences are so often the dry places, and you come if so be the rock may be opened, if there might be the river of God flowing where you are in your soul's experience:

"I thirst, O Lord, and come to Thee,
Some living water give to me,
Or I shall droop and die".

What a wonderful mercy this is: Here are you in the attitude of worship, dare I say that every one of you can say: "My soul thirsteth for God"; are you here "After the spirit, the things of the spirit"? Are you here the subject of an aching void which the world cannot fill? The Lord bless you. "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

There is just one more thought, and I must keep you a minute: "He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river." Now, if you as a poor sinner have a living interest in this great subject, and this wonderful mystery: "He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out", then you will find your heart is opened to receive the water of life which flows therefrom; you will find your ear is opened to be attent to the proclamation of it, and you will

come inside that Scripture, "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound, they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance"; and your eyes will be opened, that when you are found in the attitude of worship, or whenever you approach to the throne of grace, you will have that feeling: "We would see Jesus".

"Nought will content our hearts,
But fellowship with Him."

There is just one thought you can prayerfully think about flowing from this great truth: "He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river." Surely, surely there is to be a greater fulfilment of this word yet than the world has ever known, otherwise what does this word mean: "The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ"? Shall we leave off singing

"Jesus shall reign where'er the sun,
Doth his successive journeys run;
His Kingdom stretch from shore to shore
Till moon shall wax and wane no more"?

We shall still sing it as grace is given, and we believe it, and that day will ultimately dawn when the waters will gush out from the Rock of Ages, and run in the dry places, north, south, east, west. The Saviour taught His disciples to pray: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven".

"Great God, Thy Kingdom come,
With reverence we would pray;
May the eternal Three-in-One,
His sovereign sceptre sway".

Amen.