

Sunday 17th January: Psalm 18 – ‘The Rock’

Just south of the lovely town of Keswick in the Lake District there's a famous rock. Known as the Bowder stone, it's 36 feet high, 62 feet long and weighs nearly 2,000 tonnes. It sits in the countryside, looking for all the world as if it might roll down towards the lake at any minute. But it's been there for as long as anyone can remember, and has been attracting visitors for well over a century.

There's something humbling about being in the presence of a massive rock. Even though it's only a tiny fraction of the size of the mountains around it, to stand next to it and feel its sheer size and weight and sense of permanence.... When we were there last summer, we climbed the ladder which is now helpfully there for tourists like us and spent a moment stood on the Rock while the rain came down.

Last week we looked at roots – today we switch our focus to a different foundation. In Psalm 18 we're invited to see **God as our Rock**. And I think it's quite helpful to imagine God like this massive Bowder stone. Whilst, at one level, all of humanity walks on rock permanently – it might be covered in a thin layer of soil, but to all intents and purposes the earth is one big rock – there's something more dynamic about taking a *particular* rock and choosing to stand on it.

The fact that you have to choose to stand on the Bowder stone is perhaps a better analogy for David's famous song of praise. This psalm is in fact one of the few that appears in the historical books of the bible too – in 2 Samuel 22, you can read this psalm coming from the lips of King David, and its text is repeated more or less word for word here as Psalm 18. David had been rescued from particular trials and dangers and, like David often did, he declared God's faithfulness and rescue in song.

Obviously the meaning of the Rock idea is what we find when we look down. It's where our feet are planted that matters. To call God our Rock is to be stood on a solid foundation, one which doesn't move. It's also a place of protection: to be on top of a big stone like the Bowder stone means that God is also your refuge and your stronghold, just as David declared all those years ago. These are great truths, and ones we need just as much today. We need all the reassurance of a permanent resting place at present, a sure and certain hope which doesn't move or crumble. How good it is to know that God is our Rock!

But this is not just a psalm about looking down. It is also a psalm of looking up. 'I called to the Lord' David says, and God heard his cry. David looked up: and in the part of psalm we didn't read God came down – He thundered from heaven and scattered David's enemies. Later in the psalm we read that God also keeps the light burning in David's heart, and arms him with strength. This Rock is not something inert, but active. God hems us in: behind and before. He is the Rock beneath our feet and the Almighty Lord of heaven above us.

To be in the presence of a great Rock gives us a true sense of our frailty, and therefore restores our humility. We recognise that we are in the presence of something bigger and stronger than ourselves. And I think it's this humility that David picks up on in v27: 'You save the humble, but bring low those whose eyes are haughty.'

So today, we too come in humility, seeking the refuge and protection of our great Rock. And the thing about Rocks is: they last. The Bowder stone is millions of years old. And it'll last a good long while yet.

In a few moments' time, we'll remember God's faithfulness in bread and wine. And perhaps today, we can remind ourselves that it was on another rock – Mount Moriah – that Jesus won our salvation. The eternal Rock himself gave himself for us on the Rock of Calvary: 'Rock of Ages, cleft for me: let me hide myself in thee.'

Today, let us look down, and remember where our feet are planted. And look up, to where God in heaven hears and acts. And may we too cry, like David: *The Lord liveth! And blessed be my Rock! And may the God of my salvation be exalted! Amen.*