

The Rock is Christ

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Preacher: Colin Campbell

[0:00] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Verse 1 in Exodus 17. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Colin asked the question last week when he was speaking about the passions of Christ, and he said, what brought you here? And he said there'd be many different reasons for people coming, going through your mind.

Some are listening on YouTube, and I know that there's one or two listening in because I'm preaching and they know me, and that's their reasons. I know some friends of mine are here as well.

And what Colin was getting at was the passions of Christ, what brought you in your mind here. But what I can say on the authority of the Word of God is what brought every single one of you here, and the reason every single one of you are listening in on YouTube is the providence of God.

Whatever reasons are going through your mind, whatever desires you have, every single one of you is here in the providence of God. And if you look at verse 1 in Exodus 17 there, we speak of Israel being very disobedient.

[1:11] It's known, anybody who's been in the church and heard some preaching for any length of time, Israel's wanderings in the desert are well known and their disobedience is spoken of. But here if you look at verse 1, as they come to Rephidim, which is called the place of rest, it's quite clear they're here by the commandment of the Lord.

This time it's not disobedience. This is according to the commandment of the Lord. They're here in the providence of God. And I want to speak a little bit about the providence of God.

Let me give a brief definition. The providence of God is his ongoing care and rule over all creation, by which he preserves all things and directs every event according to his will and for his wise and good and loving and gracious purposes.

Let me give some examples of the providence of God. And they are, of course, by no means exhaustive as we go through some events in the Old Testament. Think of Pharaoh, this mighty king of Egypt, when Israel were under bondage in Egypt and Moses was called to be the spokesman, to be the servant of God and to lead Israel out of Egypt.

And God came to Moses immediately and he said, I will be your mouth, I will be with you, but know this, I will harden Pharaoh's heart. I'm going to harden Pharaoh's heart and he will not let your people go until I have performed mighty works.

[2:48] There goes a wet carpet. It's only water. I will perform mighty works. The providence of God was working in this king.

400 years of bondage, 400 years of slavery. God called Moses and even said to Moses at that time, this is not going to work as smooth or as nice or as easy as you might like it to happen, because I'm going to harden Pharaoh's heart.

God's providence was at work all the time throughout that 400 years and in Pharaoh's heart and through Moses. But the circumstances when Moses went to Pharaoh would be contrary to our expectations.

So, he's called to be the deliverer, he's called to be the spokesman, and he keeps on going to Pharaoh and life keeps getting harder for Israel. Not what we would expect if you were Israel, not what you would hope, not what you would look for.

And Moses must have cried out sometimes during then, thinking, thinking, what can I do here?

[4 : 04] God's called me, God's told me he's going to deliver Israel, and look at the opposition he faced from Israel, from his people who he came to deliver.

But God's providence was at work and ultimately Israel were delivered. Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, in the first verse of Daniel he says, you know, about Jehoiakim king of Judah, and he speaks and he says, the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into Nebuchadnezzar's hand.

Again, the people of God, God's people of promise, here they are, and who is God using? It's not Pharaoh this time, it's Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, pagan empire, and they are being used to discipline the people of God, to bring about God's purposes, he's using Nebuchadnezzar.

And if we go further forward, look at Cyrus. Isaiah 45 speaks of Cyrus, again, another pagan king in charge of a pagan empire, hostile to the people of God, hostile to the church of God, hostile to God himself.

And the Lord turns around and he says, Cyrus my servant, Cyrus my anointed, I've anointed you to accomplish my purposes, and you will actually deliver my people from Babylon.

[5 : 40] And I will do this so that you will know that I am the Lord God, that you will know there is no one like me. And if you look at Isaiah 45 in verse 4 or 5, he says, And I am doing this for the sake of my people, my people Israel.

I'm doing this for their sake. I'm using this mighty empire, this great king, for the sake of my people. Even further forward, if we think of Esther, and this Achmedian empire at that time, the Persian empire at that time, covered 2.1 square million miles.

Huge empire. And it's estimated between 40 and 50 percent of the world's population at the time, when Ahasiris was in charge of the Persian empire.

And even there, God's providence, contrary to what we would see, contrary to what we would think, was working through a young girl called Esther.

A young girl chosen for her beauty, chosen from nowhere, who ended up being the wife of the king. And it's really important we don't romanticize what happened to Esther here.

[6 : 58] And what I mean by that is, this wasn't nice and clean. This wasn't a king looking for a noble woman. Though ultimately, Esther, it was her character that shone through.

Esther was part of a huge harem. There would have been hundreds of these women. They would have been taken in, night by night, into the king's bed for one purpose only.

And even in something as sordid, as unclean, as dirty as that, God had his person there.

God had Esther for such a time as this. And Esther, this young Jewish girl, ended up being the one in front of the king that allowed God's people to be saved.

A young girl, 44%, they say, are the world's population. And here she is. She is the one that God, in his providence, was working to save the people of God at that time.

[8 : 02] And surely the greatest example of providence is the Lord Jesus Christ and his crucifixion. Acts chapter 2, in Peter's sermon at Pentecost, what does he say?

He says, it was according to God's deliberate plan, foreknowledge, purpose, and will that Jesus Christ was delivered over to you. God's providence working at that moment.

God's providence delivering Jesus Christ over to be crucified. And in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, Paul writes, had the rulers of this world known, he says, he speaks of the wisdom and the decree of God.

And he says, had the rulers of this world known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. What does he mean? The rulers of this world, at the very moment when the rulers of this world thought that they were, that darkness was overcoming light, that evil was overcoming good, that sin was overcoming righteousness, that the Lord himself was being crucified, that the darkness of this world thought they had the victory, was the very moment in the providence of God when God was declaring victory.

When light and life and salvation was coming to the world through the crucifixion of Christ was the moment when the rulers of this world thought they had won.

[9 : 35] And the providence of God often works in this way. At these moments when we think God is not working is the very moment that God is accomplishing his purpose for the church, for his people, and for his glory.

Christ was crucified by the will of God. Christ was crucified by the will of God, and the rulers of this age did not know it, that in the very moment they were fulfilling the purpose of God.

They were doing as God decreed to fulfill his purpose to bring salvation for all. And so in our own lives the providence of God is always at work.

And very often it's contrary to what we would see, what we would expect, what we might hope, but God's providence is always at work. What does he say in Matthew? Matthew, Matthew chapter 10, not a sparrow falls to the ground without your heavenly Father knowing, and the hairs of your head are all numbered.

In our very ordinary lives, most of us live very ordinary lives. And we might not see the providence of God at work. We might not think that the providence of God is at work.

[10 : 50] God's providence is always at work. And God's providence is working for you, for God's people. He is the heavenly Father who cares for you, and his providence is working for you.

My second point, I have three points by the way, providence, testing, and provision. So anybody who is just here curious to see how I've got on a Presbyterian pulpit, you'll be pleased.

It's a three point sermon. Testing. True faith and genuine faith will always be tested.

True and genuine faith will never not be tested. There are no exceptions. In the hands of God, true faith is always tested.

And if we look at Israel here, the test is very serious. They're without water. Now, they've been three days approximately this time without water.

[11 : 55] Three days, and we estimate, there's estimated between a million and two million people at that time in total. The skins of water will probably run out by this time.

And, you know, it's very easy to have a quick reading of it and think, well, look at Israel. Look at that. They're complaining straight away again. But it was a very, very serious situation. And if you've ever read of people who have been in those extreme circumstances in the desert, prisoners of war who were working in the Burma railway, people caught out in deserts.

When thirst hits, nothing in the world matters. Absolutely nothing else in the world matters but getting that drink of water. And people say how it drives them.

In fact, you know, there's a, in my work, there's guys, the last couple of years, there's been a sort of trend for guys fasting. A day, two days. Some of them only in an eight-hour window.

And that's really taken off the last couple of years, certainly offshore. Some guys even go four, five-day fast regularly. I know one guy a few years ago, and he would go four, five-day fast regularly.

- [13:10] I mean, I thought he looked horrendous, but he was very pleased with himself. But none of them, none of them would go without water. They cannot go without water.

You will not manage without water. So the situation that Israel is in is very serious. It is serious. It's not a light or trivial matter to be without water in the desert with families there.

And we can look at that and we think, and they start complaining. They start moaning. They start turning to Moses and accusing him.

But Moses is sharp enough to see, you're not really accusing me. You're accusing God. And what's often put is Israel, and it's only six months at this point since Israel have left Egypt.

And they've seen the great deliverance from Egypt. They've seen the Passover. They've seen all the plagues. They came through the Red Sea. They saw it parting.

- [14:10] They saw Egypt. The Egyptians killed when the waters covered them. They had the manna from heaven. They already had water turned sweet at Meribah. And they have the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.

And the pillar of cloud is there. The pillar of cloud is still there. And they're doubting God. But I want to put to you, are we so different?

Are we so different when the tests come? When the trials come? When the pain and the suffering hits us? Are we so different?

Remember, Israel are the church of today. Israel of the Old Testament are God's people of today. And as we read in 1 Corinthians, these things were written down as examples for us.

Examples and instruction. And what's essential for us as God's people of today, as Christian men and women, is that we know what God has done for us.

- [15:08] If you look at Peter and Paul's writings in 1 Peter 1 and Romans 5, what does Peter write? He says, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And this is before he gets on to suffering and trials. He says, he gave us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Into an inheritance that will never perish, spoil, or fade.

And this inheritance is reserved for you who are protected by the power of God. Here's three things I want you to think of. That you must, if you're going to endure the tests and the suffering which will come.

Peter's writing first and he says, you must know this, that you have been given new birth by the power and the mercy of God. And no matter how you feel in this trial, no matter how painful it might be, you will not be unborn.

You are a child of God and you always will be a child of God. You have an inheritance that's laid up for you. And that inheritance is not going to perish, never be defiled, it will never fade.

- [16:15] Like all worldly and earthly possessions, this inheritance will never perish or fade. And that's reserved. It's kept in heaven for you. That will never change.

And you are protected by the power of God through faith. Now, when you're in the midst of the test, when you're in the pain, when you're in the suffering, and some tests may break you.

I defy anyone who's been in the Christian life for a long time. And if you have been in the company of older Christians, and there is a savour coming from them, a fragrance coming from them, a beautiful faith, I guarantee you they have been crushed and broken at some point.

And for those moments, the only thing that will keep you going is not your own flesh, not willpower, not stoicism, not your determination.

It is knowing what God has done for you, done in you, and that does not change. You are born again, you have an inheritance, and you are protected by the power of God.

[17:30] And the other thing you have to know is that when Peter writes, he says, however, you rejoice in these things, and rightly so. But if necessary, if necessary, you're having to endure some suffering.

If necessary, God may deem it necessary that you have this trial. In the same mercy that caused you to be born again, the God of infinite wisdom deems it necessary that this trial is for you.

And that trial will be perfectly fitted for you. It's not for anyone else. It is for you. The trial is for you.

To form you, to change you, to mold you into the image of Jesus Christ, and to build you. And he says in that, you know, Peter says in that, he says, what's the purpose?

What is the purpose of these trials? He says it's to bring forth your faith as gold. You know, I used to enjoy, oh, I'm dear. I used to enjoy reading a lot of biography, and I liked some stuff on the Special Forces because of what they go through, what they endure.

[18:52] And whenever you read about sort of SES, SBS, extreme forms of Special Forces training, that training is, that test is unbelievably difficult.

And that is why they're the elite. That's why so few go through it. And some guys spend years, literally years, preparing themselves to go through this test to get into the Special Forces.

Now, all of them who get through, and there are not many who get through, most fail. Most fail. But those who get through, you will never hear any of them say they enjoyed the test, they enjoyed selection, they enjoyed the training.

It's utterly brutal. What keeps them going? What keeps them going is the goal at the end. They know what they want. They know what they're after, and this is a process they must go through.

Now, when Peter is saying your faith has been tested, he's saying so that your faith comes forth as gold, as precious gold.

[20:01] And when Peter's saying that, he's using gold as a picture of that which is most valuable materially in this world. Now, some of you technically might be able to Google NEI and go, yeah, gold's not actually the most valuable thing in the world.

There's this and that. Okay, that's not the point. The point that Peter is saying, he's trying to say is there is nothing more of any more material value in this earth than gold, and there is nothing of any greater value for you than your faith.

Nothing. Nothing is of greater value, and that test and that trial is bringing forth that of the greatest value to fruition.

He's bringing forth your faith as gold. Paul says the same in Romans. In Romans chapter 5, in terms of testing, Paul says something similar. He says, you've been justified by faith. You have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

You stand in grace. You rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, and you then have trials, and those trials are so that you produce endurance. And James writes something similar.

[21:10] He says, you know, rejoice, my brothers and sisters, in trials, because your faith has been brought to completion. You are being made complete. So, trials and tests always have a purpose.

But the only way we can endure through these trials is by knowing who we are in Christ, what God has done, what is laid up for us, and what God's purpose is in our lives.

Some of you, in a room this size, and with this amount of people, it is highly unlikely, I would say impossible, that some of you are not in the midst of very painful trials at this moment.

I know this, God's providence is still working for you. God is bringing forth that faith as gold. You still stand in grace.

You are still at peace with God. You still have that inheritance. You are still born again. You are still God who has begun that good work in you, will carry it on to completion until that day when Jesus Christ returns.

[22:16] Think of Joseph and his tests. Think of Joseph as a young man, a teenager, and his brothers wanted to put him into slavery and wanted to see him dead.

Teenager, think of it. Family, siblings wanted to see him dead. And even in Genesis chapter 50, right at the end, that very well-known verse, you meant it for evil but God meant it for good.

We always think of, the good part of that is God meant it for good and rightly so. But think of it, even then, he is still able to say, you did mean this for evil.

You didn't mean this for evil. You didn't mean for me to die. And you're my brothers. You meant it for evil. That was Joseph's test, one of Joseph's tests.

And further on down the line, we're aware of him keeping his integrity, holding fast to his integrity, refusing the advances of the captain of the guard's wife and finding himself languishing in jail.

[23:27] So here is a young man who has done nothing wrong. He has behaved with incredible integrity and God is testing him to the limit. Brothers want to kill him and he's languishing in prison.

But that was God's preparation for Joseph. That was the test. And the test for you is always right. And the test for Israel. The test for Israel and the test for us all, no matter what that is, no matter what, it could be family, it could be work, it could be ill health.

There are many, many forms in which testing can come. But the point of the test is always the same every single time for all of us.

And it is this. God is saying, will you trust in God? Will you trust me? Will you obey me? God is wanting to bring us to that point when we say, God is sufficient.

God is my all. God is sufficient. I trust in God. And that is the point of every single test. That is the question being asked of us.

[24:37] Will we trust in God in this situation? And so Israel and Rephidim. So what do they do? They start complaining.

They start mourning instead of just calling out to God. They start blaming Moses. And as I said, Moses sees that they're not really blaming Moses.

Moses is God's spokesman. They're blaming God. They're holding God to account. And I'll come to this in my third point. They're putting God in the dock. The test was to the people of God.

And instead the people of God turn around and they test God. And they say, is the Lord among us or not?

Why have you brought us here? Let's take that again back to our own experience. Are there not times when we have been in that place where we say, is God really among us?

[25 : 37] Is God really with me? Why have you brought me to this place? This is Rizio's accusation. Instead of seeing the God of all providence, the God of all provision.

We'll move on. We'll move on. Okay. We'll go on to providence. Providence. Provisions, sorry.

Provisions. Provisions. Provisions. God's provision. So, as I said in the last, God is in the dock. And they refuse to trust in the God.

You know, when I went through the points of providence, they refused to trust in the God of all providence. The God who had brought them to that place. The God who was present in the pillar of cloud. The God who brought this world into being.

The God who is in control of all the nations. You know, Isaiah chapter 7, can I go back to the first point in terms of the nations?

[26 : 35] Isaiah chapter 7 is rightly read as we approach Christmas time. It's Ahaz and the prophecy of Christ as the Messiah. But there's a verse in Isaiah chapter 7 that I've always loved where it speaks about God whistling for the fly that is in Egypt and the bee that is in Assyria.

It's as if, to God Almighty, the nations, kingdoms, and empires are but a bee and a fly. They're just mere insects to God. That's all they are.

And nothing has changed. Name the nation. Russia, China, Ukraine, Europe. Insects before Almighty God.

I've always liked that verse. He whistles for the bee and the fly. It's like the nations, the kingdoms, the empires, the rulers, the dictators.

They are at God's beck and call. God directs them as He wills. And God does with them as He pleases to fulfill His will and His purpose. And this is the God that they are not trusting in.

[27 : 41] And this is the God they are trying to hold to account. This is the God they have placed. C.S. Lewis wrote a book, God in the Dock. God is in the Dock.

And so, Moses rightly cries out to God. And he's instructed by God to take the staff and to strike the rock.

The staff was a symbol of the power and the presence of God. It's the same staff Moses used for parting the Red Sea. And God comes to him and says, strike the rock and I will stand before you.

I will stand before you, says God. Think of that. And in the reading we had in Corinthians, what it says about the rock being Christ.

Is the picture coming clearer? Israel, guilty of sin, guilty of unbelief, guilty of accusing God, and there is no punishment for them.

[28 : 50] God is saying, I will stand before you and you strike the rock. God has been struck. God has been struck.

Isaiah chapter 53, stricken by God, smitten and afflicted. This staff is the staff of God's judgment. And when Moses strikes the rock, God is saying, I will take that upon myself.

I will take the punishment. I will take it. You are guilty. But I will take it. 2 Corinthians chapter 5, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses and their sins to them.

This is the picture. God is not imputing the trespasses and sins of Israel. He's taking it in the striking of the rock, the rock that is Christ.

And it's really important that we see this, really important that we see the work of the cross here, and what happened with Israel, so that we are not hung up on our sin, on our guilt, on our shame, because God is saying, I will take it.

- [30 : 08] Christ is saying, I will take it. Give me your guilt. Give me your sin. Give me your shame. Repent and come to me.

I take it all on myself. This is the cross, and this is the picture that we're seeing in the rock. Now, we know the rock isn't Christ. We understand it's a symbol. It's a picture.

It's a representation. The physical rock was not Christ, but it's symbolizing Christ. And when that rock is struck, comes forth the water.

It comes forth the living water. Now, as I said, between one and two million people. Any of you who have looked at the children's Bibles, you see this little rock with a wee puddle coming from it.

There was enough water here for one to two million people. Psalm 78 and Psalm 105 speak of rivers, of gushing, of abundance, of streams. Twice the population of Glasgow, say.

- [31 : 10] There was enough water for twice the population of Glasgow. Had it been ten times the population of Glasgow, God would provide enough water to satisfy their thirst. God provided.

The rock was struck. And the water flowed. Put that to the cross. Jesus Christ said, if you thirst, whoever believes in me, if you come to me and you're thirsty and you drink of me, he said, out of your belly will flow rivers of living water.

This, he said, of the Spirit. When Christ was struck and the blood was shed for our sins, and we can come to Christ and be washed, that thirst is satisfied.

That's what Christ was speaking of when he spoke of the living water. The rock points to Christ. The striking of the rock points to the crucifixion. And the water that's flowing from it is a picture of the Holy Spirit.

And when John says, when John writes of Christ saying, he who believes in me, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. I want you to think of what is being said here.

- [32 : 32] He's not just saying, you will be given living water. He's not just saying, I will satisfy the thirst of your soul. He is saying, from you will flow rivers of living water.

From the Christian who has turned to Christ, who seeks Christ, who drinks of Him, will flow life. Christian men and women, you stand out from the world because Christ is in you.

And if you drink of Christ, you bring life. Whether you see it or are aware of it or not. Because Christ said, from your belly, from you, will flow rivers of living water.

Living water. Living water. No matter what anyone accomplishes in this life, in this world, their influence, their power, their wealth, their charisma, their looks, their talent, their gifts, they are dead without Christ.

And they do not bring rivers of living water. You do when you follow Christ. You bring rivers of living water.

- [33 : 42] You become a source of life. And I encourage any of you, do you know this Christ? When he met the Samaritan woman at the well, he said, she came there at midday.

And the Lord said to her, you've had five husbands. And the man you live with, he's not your husband. You're here in the middle of the day. Why are you here in the middle of the day? Because of your shame.

Because of your guilt. Because of your sin. Because you're ashamed to be out in public. Because of your past. I think it's fair to say she was a lost and empty and desperate soul.

And what did Christ say? He said, if you knew the gift of God, and who is it speaking to you? You ask, and he would have given you.

I, says Christ, would have given you living water. And you will never find that living water anywhere in this world. You can have 5,000 husbands. You can have all the money and all the wealth and all the power.

[34 : 48] And Christ says, the only living water to be found is in Christ. And I want to ask you, do you know this Christ?

Have you drunk of this living water? Christ says, repent and come to me. And like that woman, that Samaritan woman, I will give you life.

I will forgive you. I will renew you. I will strengthen you. And to the Christian, Christ says, come and drink of the living water. Are you struggling, Christian?

He says, come and I will strengthen you. Come and drink. Are you sinning? Come. If you confess your sins, I'm faithful and just, and I will forgive your sins.

Come and drink. Come and drink. And that drinking for the Christian will never end.

[35 : 50] In Revelation chapter 21, I want to read this. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, behold, the tabernacle of God is with men and he will dwell with them and they shall be his people.

God himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying.

There shall be no more pain. For the former things have passed away. Then he who sat on the throne said, behold, I make all things new.

And he said to me, write, for these words are true and faithful. And he said to me, it is done. I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end.

I will give of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. You know, some of you have lost loved ones in recent years.

[36 : 57] And I don't know how many are in this room. Who knows if a year from now we will all be here. Who knows? But here's what I know for the Christian.

When Jesus Christ says to come and drink of the living water. And the water of life. That drinking never ends. Never ends.

The one who is the alpha and the omega. The first born from the dead. The ruler of the kings of the earth. Christ who is on the throne says now and forevermore.

Come and drink. Amen. Amen. Amen.