

The Rock

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[0 : 00] May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen. This morning I've been asked to speak about Deuteronomy 32 and verse 4. This one verse. So I'll read to you again. He is the rock. His works are perfect and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong.

Upright and just is he. If you know the chorus, then you'll know it. Although rather surprisingly, in the chorus, in the last line, the word good should be just.

If you know the one, I mean ascribe greatness to our God the rock. Although I'm only looking at one verse, I want to say it in its context. If you've been studying Joshua, either at Growth Group or you've been coming to the evening services, then you'll know exactly where this passage fits in.

[1 : 08] It comes almost immediately before chapter 1 of Joshua. The people are about to cross the Jordan. Moses is not allowed to lead them in.

He is about to die. And this is his message to the people. So this is the thing he wants to say to them. Well, it's important stuff.

And I pray that we'll find it important stuff for ourselves this morning. And perhaps he stresses its importance with those two beautiful verses of introduction.

Verses 1 and 2 in 32. Listen, you heavens, and I will speak. Hear, you earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching fall like rain, and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants.

Now those are the sort of verses that in Glasgow we often find quite difficult. We get excited by sun rather than by rain. But last month I was excited by rain.

[2 : 20] Some of the plants in my garden were looking shriveled. And then it rained. And the tree peony revived. And the inula flourished.

And I was excited by rain falling. Showers on new grass. Abundant rain on tender plants. I've never lived in a desert.

So I don't know what it's like to be excited by rain or dew bringing life. I have to wait in Glasgow for that rare few weeks.

At 9am we often pray for the clergy and people. In the words we pray for the continual dew of thy blessing. So I pray that these words of Moses come to us this morning.

Like abundant rain on tender plants. Giving new life. So what is this teaching that gives life?

[3 : 18] Well it's introduced in verse 3. I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh praise the greatness of our God. The teaching that revives is in fact teaching about the character of God.

I'll read verse 4 again. This time in the ESV. Which is slightly more literal. The rock. His work is perfect. For all his ways are justice.

A God of faithfulness. And without iniquity. Just and upright is he. The rock's like a heading. There isn't a verb.

There isn't even a verbless clause. And there's no actual explanation of its meaning at this point.

The word sur in Hebrew means a rock.

A rocky crag or a cliff. It's used for the rock on which Manoah sacrificed a young goat in Judges 13. It's used for the crags. From the top of which Balaam sees God's people in Numbers 23.

[4 : 28] It's used for the rock at Horeb. From which water comes out for the people to drink in Exodus 17. And it's used for the rock in a cleft of which Moses is put and covered.

Till God's glory passes by. But interestingly about this word. It's used more often metaphorically than literally. It's used more often about God than it is about physical rocks that you see as you're walking about.

And in the Bible as a whole. I suspect that you actually know that it's used frequently to describe God as rescuer and deliverer. The rock of our salvation.

A very classic Bible phrase. Certainly used in a chorus that we sang when I was young. And also that's the phrase that's used in Psalm 95 in verse 1.

I'll come back to that later. But if you think you know all there is about God as the rock from that one phrase.

[5 : 35] The rock of our salvation. You may be on the wrong track. Because here it seems that the word is being used in a slightly different sense.

In this particular passage. And in chapter 32 as a whole. Has seven of the 78 uses of this word in the Bible. It seems to relate more to God's unchanging quality.

Secureness. Solidity. Unshakeableness. Etc. All my life. I've gone down to the same beach in North Berwick. This isn't the main beach. This is a beach off to a different one.

And sometimes when I go down to this beach. There is just sand. I suppose that's what we think of as a perfect beach. Sometimes there are pebbles. And sand.

Sometimes there's seaweed. Sometimes there isn't. But you can measure the depth of sand by looking at the rocks. There's one particular rock I look at.

[6 : 42] And one year the sand can be two foot higher. And one year it can be two foot lower. I don't mean it goes in and out like the tide. But over the years you see the differences.

The sand changes. But the rock doesn't. The rock is secure. Solid. Unshakeable.

Immovable. And so in verse 4 Moses says. The rock. His work is perfect. His work here I assume refers to his work in creation.

In deliverance. In judgment. And Moses says. God's work is perfect. Perfect. Perfect is a word used particularly of sacrificial animals.

Complete. Without blemish. We look at nature. The hills. I particularly like the hills. Or the seaside.

[7 : 42] You can tell already I like the seaside. Wildflowers. And we see that nature is perfect.

Perfect. As Christians we think above all of Jesus' work.

What he did for our salvation. Without blemish. Complete. All done. It's solid and secure because it's done by the unshakable one.

The rock. His work is perfect. Literally. For all his work. Ways are just. His work is unblemished and complete.

Because all God's ways. The way he runs the world. What my dictionary slightly. I can't decide whether I like this phrase or not. Called.

His moral administration. God's ways. His moral administration. Are just. And why does.

[8 : 47] All his ways being just. Mean that his work is. Complete and unblemished. Well. When something's unjust. It tends to get revisited.

It tends to get reopened. We hear of court cases being restarted. Because they were. Perceived at least to be unjust. But not so with things that are just.

They tend to last. All God's ways are just. And therefore. His work. Is complete. Unblemished.

He's a God of faithfulness. Or we might say. Trustworthiness. The Hebrew word is. Emunah. From which we get.

Amen. Amen. In Revelation 3 and verse 14. The Amen. Means. The true and reliable one. God's faithfulness is seen in keeping his promises.

[9 : 50] The rock. Is immovable. So what he says. He does. A God of faithfulness.

And without iniquity. Just and upright. Is he. The thought of justice. Is echoed again. Really.

Several times. Without iniquity. Just. Could perhaps be translated righteous. And upright.

Upright. Upright. Means. Straightforward. Verse. Psalm 92. Verse 15. The Lord is upright. He is my rock.

And there is no wickedness in him. We're often disappointed in our leaders. Was that particularly a recent experience. Yet the Lord is my rock.

[10 : 44] And there is no wickedness. In him. Faithful. Faithful. Trustworthy. Straightforward.

So the introduction says that God's people will. When they read these verses. Enjoy reviving teaching. And verse 4. On which we're focusing today.

Gives us teaching about the Lord. That in him we have a rock. Secure. Unshakeable. Faithful. Upright.

And then there's the rest of the song. Now, I've only been asked to speak at one verse. So I'm not going to go through the whole of the rest of the song. But God's nature is made much more visible. When we see how God's people are so unlike God. It will increase our focus on God. It will increase our focus on God. When we look at some aspects of the rest of the chapter.

[11 : 49] And I'm particularly going to be picking out those that talk about God as the rock. But first. If I just read verses 4b. And then into 5.

You'll see an astonishing contrast. A faithful God who does no wrong. Upright and just is he. They are corrupt and not his children.

To their shame they are a warped and crooked generation. It's very striking isn't it? The rock is immovable. Unshakeable.

But they. That's God's people. Are warped. And why are they warped? Well one reason is that they forget what God has done.

That's why they're easily shaken unlike the rock. That's why verse 7 goes. Remember the days of old. Consider the generations long past. Now when I go down to that beach in North Berwick.

[12 : 53] I go down and look for one particular thing. Other than the height of the sand on the rock. I go and look at one particular rock. Because on that rock. There are the foundations of a castle.

Which my granny built in 1906. She and her cousin took some cement. From a house that was being built nearby. And they went down to the beach.

And they built on this rock. A little sand. A little cement and sand castle. A solid sort of castle. And now.

A hundred and something years later. The foundations are still there. And I go and clean away. Any seaweed that dares attack it. And grows round about it.

So it'll still be there. When my children go and look for it. I'm not encouraging you to do this. The beaches would be ruined. If lots of people did this. And all of granny's castle. Is so small. That you won't.

[13 : 48] It's unlikely you could find it. Even if you looked. She called it Zanzibar. Zanzibar must have been in the news at the time. But I haven't been able to find out. What it was.

In 1906. That was so exciting. In Zanzibar. Maybe it was just the name she liked. And the contrast is. I've made many sand castles at that beach.

And they last a few hours. Sometimes 30 minutes. Depending on how fast the tide comes in. But granny's sand castle. At least its foundations.

Are still there. Because it's built on the rock. And clinging to the rock. And when I go down. I remember her. And I think about the solidity of rock.

And then Moses. Invites them to remember the days of old. And he particularly looks at the way in which. God provided for his people.

[14 : 47] He goes through it in detail. But I'm only going to pick up one picture. Which is the one that uses our particular word. The word sur. Meaning a rock. Verse 13.

The very last line. He nourished him. That's he nourished God's people. With oil from the flinty crag. With curds and milk from herd and flock. And with fattened lambs and goats.

How olive oil came from the rock. I've never been quite sure. Certainly seems to be a picture of God. Providing the most valuable production. From the most unlikely places.

But the point is that God provided for his people. And he provided for them over a period of time. Talk about finding him in a barren and howling waste.

Shielding him and caring for him. Spreading its wings over him. Leading him. Making him ride on the heights of the land. Feeding him. Nourishing him. Even with oil from the crag.

[15 : 47] Producing grapes and everything. He did all this for him. It's a picture I think of consistent love. Constant care. Something that there's a big contrast with the behavior of his people.

Verse 15. Jeshurun. That's Israel. Grew fat and kicked. Filled with food. They became heavy and sleek. They abandoned the God who made them.

They rejected the rock. Their savior. Jeshurun is an ironic name for Israel. It means the upright one. It's certainly ironic in the context here. Those who should have been upright. Like the rock. Kicked over the traces. And abandoned the rock of their salvation.

They went off. They left the rock. Now this one is the classic rock picture. That you find in lots of different places in the Bible.

[16:50] To pick one example. Psalm 27 verse 5. He will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble. He will lift me high upon a rock. It's a really easy picture to get, isn't it?

For me it's the picture of, I'm swimming in a fast flowing river. Perhaps I chose one that was too fast for me. And I'm struggling along.

And then I land on a rock. And I'm safe. I scramble out. And there I am. Safe. It's the rock of my salvation.

The picture often has a personal, experiential quality. There's something splendid about the phrase, the rock of my salvation. Here though, the phrase is the rock of their salvation.

Or here translated, the rock, their saviour. It's the same thing. Probably that's the salvation at the Red Sea. Their deliverance.

[17:54] Amid swirling seas or rushing enemies, the rock is unmoved. You get out of that turmoil. And God rescues you.

Well, you don't so much get out. God pulls you out and puts you on the rock. And you're safe. For God is the rock of provision. The rock of salvation.

And then almost immediately after that, we see the contrast between God as the rock, solid, secure, unchanging, and God's people who are fickle.

Verses 17 and 18. They sacrifice to false gods, which are not God. Gods they had not known. Gods that had recently appeared. Gods your ancestors did not fear.

You deserted the rock who fathered you. You forgot the God who gave you birth. It's very striking, isn't it? We often think of a picture of God as Father, as a New Testament picture.

[18:56] Here it is. Back in Deuteronomy. The rock who fathered you. The God who gave you birth. They've lost their bearings.

They've forgotten that they're God's children. That the unshakable God is both their father and their mother. Takes me back to Granny's Castle, doesn't it?

Its foundations are still there. Because it clings to the rock. The rock is the rock of provision. From which the oil flows.

The rock of salvation. which saves us from the swirling seas or the rushing enemies. The rock who fathered them.

And then there's a section that talks about how God's people are in terrible trouble. And I'm not going to run through that with you now. It talks about a fire. It talks about a fire being kindled.

[19:53] Calamities coming on them. Arrows against them. Fangs of wild beasts. And then it says, unless their rock had sold them.

Unless the Lord had given them up. They did have protection. They had the protection of the rock. But they chose to reject the rock.

And the Lord had given them up. And all this unfaithfulness culminates in rejecting the true rock. And making other gods the rock.

Verse 37 talks about the rock they took refuge in. That's not God. That's other gods they took refuge in. They exchanged Ben Nevis for a sandcastle.

They exchanged a true rock. A true mountain. For something that isn't really a rock at all. For the true rock is incomparable.

[21:05] There is no other rock. I love verse 31. This is my, as we move back towards our main passage.

Our main verse. For their rock is not like our rock. As even our enemies concede. Yes, you can choose another rock. But it's not like the real one.

It's a sandcastle. Not Ben Nevis. But as I've explored these verses about the rock.

From the rest of this passage. I hope we've seen. That the key. That we're being encouraged to by Moses today. Is to look at God.

Unshakable. Incomparable. Perfect. Faithful. Just. And upright. And we also look rather sadly at his people.

[22:07] Wandering. Imperfect. Unfaithful. Unjust. Only ironically called the upright one. God.

Amen. So how can we be God's people? How can. This be held together.

This holy. Amazing. Just God. And us. Well even in the chapter. There are just. A couple of hints.

Mainly verse 36. The Lord will vindicate his people. And relent concerning his servants. When he sees their strength is gone. And no one is left.

Slave or free. That's quite striking isn't it? When they can no longer. When they can no longer achieve anything.

[23 : 03] When they've completely failed. The Lord will vindicate his people. And verse 39 says. I put to death. The Lord says. I put to death.

And I bring to life. I have wounded. And I will heal. And no one can deliver. Out of my hand. I wonder what you would say.

If someone asked you. For the Old Testament verse. That describes God. If you particularly like the chorus. Describe greatness. You might have chosen this one. But I guess most of us.

Would probably choose. Exodus 34 and verse 7. Especially as it's quoted. In many other places. In the Old Testament. The Lord.

The compassionate and gracious God. Slow to anger. Abounding in love and faithfulness. And when you.

[23 : 58] And we love that verse. Because we're sinners. And we love the fact. That God is the gracious God. The compassionate God. And so that's.

We have to. So we bring that verse together. With the one we're thinking about today. The gracious God. And the just God. Which is the emphasis of today's passage.

How are God's grace. And God's justice held together. Grace is giving us. What we don't deserve. And justice. Well that's giving us what we do.

Isaiah began to see. How that might be. But full understanding. Waited for Jesus' coming. Only in Jesus.

Can we be vindicated. Brought back to life. Healed. Despite our wandering. That famous verse. Romans 3.23.

[24 : 56] For all have sinned. And fall short of the glory of God. And are justified by God's grace. As a gift. Through the redemption. That is in Christ Jesus. Whom God put forward.

As a propitiation. By his blood. To be received by faith. It was to show his righteousness. At the present time. So that he might be just.

And the justifier. Of the one who has faith in Jesus. Jesus. It's that that holds it together. Isn't it? Jesus' perfect work.

That we referred to near the start. His death in our place. Paying the penalty for our sin. Means that God can be both. Just.

The penalty has been paid. And the justifier. Declaring us righteous. On the basis of Jesus' perfect work. And it's on the basis of that.

[25 : 57] That we come to this verse. And that we approach God. We come to him. To the rock. We come.

To the upright. And just. And faithful God. We approach him in. Reverend awe this morning. We rejoice in his unchanging nature.

We rejoice in his provision. We rejoice in his salvation. And his fatherhood. His protect. And his protection. And yet we also come.

Challenged by it. We come. Challenged that we make. That he is the rock. And there is no other. That he is the incomparable one.

Reject all substitutes. And we look forward to the day when he returns. When Jesus returns. To put all things right. And his justice will be seen.

[27 : 02] He is the rock. His works are perfect. And all his ways are just. A faithful God. Who does no wrong.

Upright and just. Is he. It's lovely to see people this morning. Who I've not met before. If you want to come and discuss anything with me afterwards. I should be around.

And do my best. Or I'm sure there will be others. Who will be equally happy to discuss. To talk both about this passage. Or about the work of the Lord Jesus. Well.

He is the rock. That was the thing that Moses. Wanted the people. Of Israel to know. Before he died. That's the crucial thing he wanted them to know.

Well that's. A great thing for us. To know this morning. Let's pray.