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GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

At the Lord's Table

By Bruce Burgess

“Come let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the Lord is the great God, the great king above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care” (Psalm 95:1-7).

Notice the imagery. We are *beneath* God. God is elevated over us. While this may seem obvious, we are required to remind ourselves of this reality regularly, to prevent ourselves from getting too uppity in our evaluation of ourselves. Daily we are to bow the head and the heart, and kneel before God. Doing so is a tangible reminder of God's greatness and our smallness.

It's just too easy to go through our days managing everything on our own. Maybe praying at the beginning of the day, asking for guidance, and then scooting through the rest of the day on our own without actively seeking the guidance we prayed for.

The Psalmist reminds us that we are the sheep, the servants, the followers, the ones who need God's touch to keep us on the path of obedience and faithfulness. Sheep

don't *lead* the way. They follow. Jesus described himself as the 'Good Shepherd.' He calls the sheep by name and leads them out. They follow him because they know his voice. Do we know the voice of God? Or do we just listen to our own voice and assume God will be in agreement?

Sheep need a shepherd—mostly because they are not very bright! We might not like to think of ourselves in those terms, but it is true, for it is how we are described repeatedly in Scripture. If that is how God describes us, we should pay attention and respond accordingly. Perhaps we should adopt a 'bowing' attitude; allow ourselves to be still long enough to hear God's still small voice.

One of the reasons we celebrate communion on the first Sabbath of the month is to create an opportunity to contemplate God's goodness to us and our utter dependence on God. When we gather around the table, we remember how God showed his love for the world by sending his Son into the world, calling us to faith and to abundant and eternal life. This Son—this Good Shepherd—laid down his life for the sheep. Why do we need to remember this? Because his sacrifice

reminds us of the extent of God's love in the face of our foolishness and need.

The Psalmist writes: *“Come let us sing for joy to the Lord, let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.”* Jesus is the rock of our salvation and the center of our celebration of the Lord's Supper. The Communion supper, more than any other in worship, reminds us of our communion with God and one
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EDITORIAL . . .



Pastor Ron Allen

“And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything” (Acts 17:25).


Creator of all life that he is, and sustainer of everything he has made, God does not himself need to be sustained. Idolatry is the shrinking of God by means of the magnification of man. Idol worship tames God, domesticates him, and recasts him in manageable proportions. Idolatry obliterates the appropriate chasm between God and his creature, man. We long for a god we can control. God made man in *his* image. We want to make God in *our* image; so instead of us needing him, he needs us.

Genuine worship makes for a particular kind of humanity; subservient, humble, pliable, teachable, reliant and grateful. Idolatry produces another kind of humanity: independent, autonomous, proud, arrogant, defiant and self-interested.

Much trouble flows from the contortion created when men and women worship gods no greater than themselves. They continue to be religious, but the object

of their devotion is needful of their cleverness, their inventiveness, their sobriety, dutifulness and all-round decency. They supply God. He is accessory to and beneficiary of their being. It is his role to be impressed and indebted. There is far too much religion of this sort. The world be better off without it.

Far from a suggestible, impressionable, needy God, who can be manipulated by things humans say and do, we need a God who fashions us and our environment so that we will “*reach out for him and find him*” (Acts 17:27). God made us to need him, to seek him, and to find him. This means that even before we look for God, he has already found. He will for us to know the joy of ‘finding’ him, and to go on discovering in him, new depths of grace and love.

“*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you shall search for me with all your heart*” (Jeremiah 29:11-14). 

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another—members of the same flock, following the same shepherd. Communion is the great leveler, for there is no one worthy to make a claim on the grace of God. No one comes to the table to demand anything. We can only come to humbly celebrate God’s goodness in Christ.

There is a call to the Lord’s Supper which many of us have heard. It goes like this: “Come to this sacred table; not because you must, but because you may. Come to testify, not that you are righteous, but that you sincerely love our Lord Jesus and desire to be his true disciples. Come, not because you are strong but because you are weak; not because you have any claim on heaven’s rewards, but because in your frailty and sin you stand in constant need of heaven’s mercy and help. Come, not to express an

opinion, but to seek a Presence and to pray for a Spirit.”

Communion is an action we take that is designed to provoke in us gratitude and humility as we intentionally contemplate the saving actions of our Lord. Jesus instituted this action so that we would have an ongoing, regular opportunity to reflect on God’s astonishing goodness. Jesus told us to thus remember him whenever we eat or drink. Most of us have incorporated this command into our saying of grace before a meal. And the purpose of this grace is to thank God for Jesus, more than for food.

We are under God’s care. But that truth does us no good if we will not submit to that care. God is actively speaking to us, gently prodding us, always ready to help us learn a new lesson, ever present to grant forgiveness when we stumble, consistently available to bring us comfort, hope or deliverance. →

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Editor

Pastor Ron Allen

Graphic Designer

Debbie O’Brien

Proofreader

Philip Rhodes

Molly Clayton

AFFILIATE ADDRESSES:

Canadian office:
222 Olive Avenue
Willowdale, ON M2N 4P6
Canada

The Lord is Our Rock

By Daniel Robinson

I had the pleasure of hearing that song sung from an old hymnal book—a rare event today indeed. Song number 324 was written by Vernon J. Charlesworth in around 1880. It is interesting to know that the writer was the headmaster of the Charles Spurgeon Orphanage in Essex, England. As the headmaster, he oversaw the transformation of many young fatherless boys. He instilled a righteous fear of God and an understanding of how God would never leave them or forsake them.

“A man shall be... like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” (Isaiah 32:2).

So often there are tragedies and even deaths that we face in life. Knowing our God is covering us gives a peace that surpasses all understanding.


The song says “a shelter in time of need” is what we need. Sometimes it is food; sometimes it is simply the comfort of knowing we have security. The Greek word *petros* is interpreted as rock or cave. How comforting it is to know we are in a cave and sheltered from the elements outside. We have a warm and comforting sensation that the Holy Spirit puts in us in times of need. We belong to the Kingdom of Righteousness. In a Bible study I was leading at the local county jail, a man asked, “What is righteousness?” I replied that “Unrighteousness is a lack of moral principles. We can choose to help or hurt others.”

The second verse in the song says, “A shade by day, defense by night.” He is our rock; we can stand secure in him in the heat of the day. The illustration that Charlesworth used can be felt on our skin if we simply imagine the heat of day and the comfort of shade. My mother is Greek, and I had the luxury of living in an area just outside of Athens when my dad was in the military. I remember walking on the hot sands of the beach



in Glyfada and rushing to get under the cool refreshing shade of a canopy. My feet immediately found the covered sand to be refreshing as I dug my toes in.

I think of the goodness of God in my life. He changed me from a man who was lost and standing on sand to one who is found and now stands on the rock. The rock of our salvation is Jesus who gives us victory over death and eternal life. The never-ending love of the Rock of Ages gives us a safe retreat and is the best helper we could ever have.

The world is full of self-seeking, unrighteous people who don't know about the Rock. Our help comes from the Lord, our Rock, who made heaven and earth. This is the message we are to share with the world, and I am honored to share in that task with you, the reader of this article. May God always be your rock, your best helper, your safest retreat. 

We often labor under the assumption that we have to take care of ourselves. I have heard Christ-followers, and others misquote the following: “God helps those who help themselves.” You won't find that anywhere in Scripture, and yet people have been quoting that all over the place because they're uncomfortable with the suggestion that they need help, that they are not the masters of their own destiny. News flash: sheep don't manage their own destinies. If they tried they would manage ‘baaaahdly!’ It would be ‘shear’ chaos; it ‘wooly’ would!

Israel was deeply committed to community worship. It served them with opportunity to praise God collectively, to acknowledge their God as the Great God, the Great King above all gods. It also served to remind them of their total dependence upon God; using the metaphor of God as shepherd and Israel as God's flock.

Think about it. We are unable to care properly for ourselves. Left to our own devices, we will mess up; we will fail; we will sin. History has proven this is a self-repeating reality. The God who made us for so much more could quite easily give up on us, abandon us and leave us to stumble our way to our eventual demise. But God is a God of love, compassion and

forgiveness. He has mercy on us and decided instead to shepherd us; to ensure that goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our life.

The good news is all about God, not about us. The good news is not that we are worthy to enter the kingdom. The good news is that God has provided a way for us to enter the kingdom which is not a response to any initiative on our part. This is hard for lots of us to accept. Many think that we chose God. It's one of the failings of the evangelical tradition in many churches. In the Evangelical Church, people want to know the day and hour of your decision for Christ. If you aren't completely clear about that, there can be some suspicion about the authenticity of your conversion. “The exact time of your decision.” As if it was our decision at all, or that our decision was the most important action we could take.

Such language reinforces the idea that *we* chose God; that it was our doing. We forget the words of Paul about being saved by grace, reminding us that even our faith did not come from ourselves.

Another example is the language used around bringing others to faith. I was at an Ordination Council where the

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Christ All-Sufficient

By C.H. Spurgeon

To suppose that the Lord Jesus has only half saved men, and that there is needed some work or felling of their own to finish his work, is wicked. What is there of ours that could be added to his blood and righteousness? Even if we had any righteousness in which we could boast; if our fig leaves were broader than usual, and were not so utterly fading, it would be wisdom to put them away and accept *that* righteousness which must be far more pleasing to God than anything of our own. The Lord must see more in his Son than in the best of us. *The best of us!* The words seem satirical though they were not so intended. What best is there about any of us?

It is most glorifying to our Lord Jesus Christ that we should hope for every good thing from his alone. This is to treat him as he deserves to be treated. It is to treat him as he loves to be treated for he bids; for he bids all those who labor and are heavy laden to come to him and he will give them rest.

The nature of the Lord Jesus should inspire us with the fullest confidence. As he is God, he is almighty to save; as he is man he is filled with all fullness to bless; as he is God and man in one majestic person, he meets man in his creature-ship and God in his holiness. The ladder is long enough to reach from Jacob prostrate on the earth, to Jehovah reigning in heaven. To bring another ladder would be to suppose that *he* failed to bridge the distance.

To come to Jesus with a price in our hand would be insufferable pride, even if we had any price that we could bring. What does he need of us? What could we bring if he did need it? He is not reduced to making a market of himself. He will give freely as beseems his royal love; but he that offers a price to him knows not with whom he is dealing, nor how grievously he vexes his free spirit. Empty-handed sinners may have what they will. All that they can possibly need is in Jesus.

The reason why we may hope for forgiveness of sin, and life eternal, by faith in the Lord Jesus, is that God has so appointed. He has pledged himself in the gospel to save all who truly trust in the Lord Jesus, and he will never run back from his promise. He is so well pleased with his only begotten Son that he takes pleasure in all who lay hold on him as their one and only hope. The great God himself has

taken hold on him who has taken hold of his only Son.

Faith saves us because it makes us cling to Jesus Christ. I am told that, years ago, above the falls of Niagara, a boat was upset, and two men were being carried down by the current, when persons on the shore managed to float a rope out to them, which rope was seized by them both. One of them held fast to it, and was safely drawn to the bank. But the other, seeing a great log come floating by, unwisely let go the rope and clung to the great piece of timber for it was the bigger thing of the two, and apparently better to cling to. Alas! The timber with the man on it went right over the vast abyss because there was no union between the wood and the shore.

The size of the log was of no benefit to him who grasped it. So, when a man trusts to his works or his prayers, almsgivings, sacraments, or to anything of that sort, he will not be saved because there is no junction between him and God through Jesus Christ. But faith, though it seems to be like a slender cord, is in the hand of the great God on the shore. Infinite power pulls in the connecting line. O the blessedness of faith because it unites us to God by the Savior whom he has appointed; even Jesus Christ.

C. H. Spurgeon. AROUND THE WICKET GATE.
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candidate was asked the question: "How many people have you led to the Lord?" The candidate responded in general terms about trying to model Christ in her relationships, and to be a positive influence in the lives of others, allowing the Spirit to do His work. But the questioner was not satisfied, insisting on an exact number. Another news flash: none of us lead anyone to faith. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. To be sure, we can be used by God in the process, but it is the height of arrogance to say, "I led someone to Christ. It is much more accurate to say that we have had the privilege of playing a small part in someone's faith journey.

The best we can do is to help someone recognize God's call, but it is always God that makes the final difference as it should be. So that it is God who receives the glory. We decrease so that Christ will increase.

In this Psalm, there is no lifting-up of anyone but God. Humans are to accept their designation as sheep in need of a shepherd, and a community committed to extolling their God. This is to help us not think too highly of ourselves. God is God: Majestic, high and mighty, gracious, faithful, merciful, forgiving, loving, always present, and actively working for good in our lives. Who are we? In a word, we are human; flawed, small, frail, prone to sin, and selfishness. Once we accept this about ourselves, we realize even more how astonishing God is. We want to impress people about God, not about ourselves. Our job is not to dazzle others with our righteousness or faithfulness, but God's. We are not to brag about our accomplishments, but about God and what he has accomplished through Christ. We are to humbly accept who we are and give God thanks and praise for loving us, and saving us, and granting us eternal life. It's all about God! 