

Devotion on the Hymns of the Church - (Hymn 471 - Rock of Ages) - 14 January 2014,
Anno Domini (Year of our Lord)



7 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 8 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 thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. 9 And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him. 10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? 11 And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. (Num 20:6-11)

4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. (1 Cor 10:4)

Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee;
let the water and the blood,
from thy wounded side which flowed,
be of sin the double cure;
save from wrath and make me pure.

Not the labors of my hands
can fulfill thy law's commands;
could my zeal no respite know,
could my tears forever flow,
all for sin could not atone;
thou must save, and thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring,
simply to the cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress;
helpless, look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly;
wash me, Savior, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath,
when mine eyes shall close in death,
when I soar to worlds unknown,
see thee on thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee.

The beauty, power, and promise of this favorite old hymn are unsurpassed in hymnology. It was born in adversity, and rises to the challenge of its making. Both words and music (Petra) were composed by Augustus Toplady, an Anglican clergyman, in 1775. There is more than one claim that Toplady wrote this hymn after being caught out in a severe thunderstorm, and took refuge in the cleft of a great rock. The incident apparently took place in the cleft rock at Burrington Combe gorge in North Somerset, England, and it has a plaque on it with this claim to fame. For us, Christ is that Great Rock which was cleft for us, and the only source of refuge for the soul of man. *“Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress.”* (Psalms 71:3)

“Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee; let the water and the blood from thy wounded side which flowed, be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power.” That Rock that Moses struck represented that source of salvation for Moses, and all who would cherish The Lord and Savior of mankind. What a Great Rock of Love is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is that Rock that could not be moved even by the passion of the cross. All who claim Him as Lord must strive to be of the same composition and character – chips and stones from that Rock of Ages who deigned to come and die for sinners such as you and me. That Rock was cleft in the Wilderness of Sin for it was called the Fountain of Rephidim which, in the Hebrew tongue means Resting Place. That is right and proper since Jesus has become, not only our Passover, but our Sabbath Rest as well. The Rock that was cleft in the Wilderness was at Meribah which was so called to describe the strife and contention of His people in the Desert of Sin, for it was there that the Israelites murmured against the Lord who was their salvation and mainstay. That Rock was again cleft on the Cross at Calvary and out of that cleft side came, not only water, but blood – the blood whereby we are saved.

“Not the labor of my hands can fulfill thy law’s demands; could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow, all for sin could not atone; thou must save, and thou alone.” Eastward in the Garden at Eden, fallen man discovered that he could not cover his nakedness by his feeble labors at fig-leaf aprons. God had to sacrifice an innocent animal (the very first death on earth) to cover their nakedness. Man must know now as well that his best efforts cannot atone for his sins. Only the sacrifice of the wholly innocent Lamb of God can atone for our sins.

“Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling; naked, come to thee for dress; helpless look to thee for grace; foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die.” We shall leave this world in the same way we came – naked and penniless. But our grasp can hold to the cross even beyond the Banks of Jordan Waters. Even though we may have been Prodigals in time past, if we have received the Father’s Best Robe of Righteousness to cover our filth, a Ring of Authority for our Fingers, and the Shoes of Liberty for our Feet, we shall not be ashamed at the Last Day. If we have washed in that Fountain of Rephidim, we shall be made clean, indeed, whiter than snow.

“While I draw this fleeting breath, when mine eyelids close in death, when I soar through tracts unknown see thee on thy judgment throne, Rock of ages, cleft for

me, let me hide myself in thee." There are no recorded repentances for righteous living of which I am familiar. I have never read of a dying man being remorseful for not gambling, being a greater drunkard, committing more adultery, etc. When the moment of death arrives, and the Ancient of Days stands near the pall, the last thought of man is a solemn and serious thought. If he has not known Christ as his Savior, there may be terror and anguish at that time. What a contrast to those who are "*safe in the arms of Jesus!*" There is a place of dying, known only to God, for every reader of this devotion. It is good that the moment has not been frankly revealed to us. It is at that moment as the rough waters build, and the angry billows roar, that the Christian will behold, at the very banks of the river, that Great Rock cleft for him, and yawning to receive him into safe passage. We shall be hidden from all pains of death and fear in that Ancient Rock. We shall be covered.

I read a very touching story this morning that has some comparable features to the manner in which God views those of us whose sins are covered by the blood of His only Begotten Son. I read a story of a process those who raise sheep in Scotland use to care for orphan lambs. Once their mother is dead, no other ewes will have anything to do with the poor little orphan. If it tries to get suck from another ewe, she will recognize by the smell that the little lamb is not hers and will kick it away. However, if there has been the death of another little lamb, the shepherd will skin the dead lamb and place its coat over the orphan lamb. He will then take that orphan lamb to the mother of the dead lamb and she will then nurse it believing it to be her own. This process is called 'grafting.' How very much like the child of God who is adopted into the family of God through the shed blood of His only Begotten Son. It is not our own righteousness that God recognizes, but that of His dearly Beloved Son. Have you been adopted?