

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds: Pictures of the Lord

In many ways the Bible is a picture book. Pictures painted with words that quickly and simply convey their meaning to us. Well-known phrases from the Bible come to mind to illustrate this. Think of the first line of Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want". Immediately we can have a mental picture of a sheep enjoying the protection and care of a good shepherd without whom the sheep would be scared and vulnerable. Another picture I really love is found in 2 Samuel 23:4: "shall be as ... a morning without clouds". Isn't it wonderful to wake up in the morning, open the curtains and see a cloudless blue sky! And this verse is telling us that the return of the Lord Jesus will be just like that - a wonderful cloudless day!

This week we are going to continue looking at pictures of the Lord Jesus using the well-loved hymn by John Newton as a loose framework. Verse three of "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds" reads,

*Dear Name, the Rock on which I build,
My Shield and Hiding Place,
My never failing treasury, filled
With boundless stores of grace!*

I would like to spend our time looking at this verse by dividing it up into the following four sections, and putting a portion of Scripture alongside each.

- "Dear Name";
- "the Rock on which I build";
- "My Shield and Hiding Place"; and finally
- "My never failing treasury, filled with boundless stores of grace".

Dear Name

First I am going to read several verses from Acts 4 and notice how many times the word "name" appears. "And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, 'By what power or by what name have you done this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. 'Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.' Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marvelled. And they realised that they had been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, 'What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.' And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus." Acts 4:7-19.

This passage of Scripture sums up the two fiercely opposing feelings in relation to the name of Jesus. On the one hand there are the disciples who loved it and preached it and were prepared to die to defend the honour of the name of Jesus, and on the other hand there were those who hated the name and all it stood for. The same divide exists today. "Dear Name" How much do we really value the precious name of Jesus?

So often we hear it used in blasphemy or mockery, and it has always provoked huge opposition and animosity. In the Old Testament we read, "My enemies speak evil of me, 'when shall He die and His name perish?'" Psalm 41:5. It is also very noticeable that in the early chapters of the Book of Acts, the religious leaders on more than one occasion instructed and even threatened the disciples of the Lord Jesus "not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus."

But I don't want to dwell on those who hated the name of Jesus but on those who love His name. What John Newton in his hymn calls the "Dear Name" and what James calls the "Worthy Name" (James 2:7). I have often thought it was the name written on His cradle, on His cross and on His crown. Even before the Lord Jesus was born, Joseph was told by the angel, "you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Matthew 1:21. Pilate wrote on the cross, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews". Matthew 27:37. In the Letter to the Hebrews we read, "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour." Hebrews 2:9.

The narrative of the Gospels flows with the use of the name of Jesus. It was how He was known, and as we just read in Matthew, it spoke of His mission here: "you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Think as well of the blind man in John 9, when asked who had healed him, he replied, "A Man called Jesus". This man, as well as hundreds of others who had felt the touch of the Saviour, would surely love His name. Whilst it is true that many in the Gospels would have known Him as Jesus, I do believe that today it is right that we call Him "Lord Jesus". In Acts 10:36 Peter, speaking to the Roman centurion Cornelius, says, "Jesus Christ – He is Lord of all" and in a coming day everyone will bow to Jesus and acknowledge that He "is Lord to the glory of God the Father" Philippians 2:11.

The Rock on which I build

When we come to the second phrase, "Dear Name, the rock on which I build", I suppose we immediately think of the story that the Lord Jesus told. "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." Matthew 7:24-27.

Again in just a few words, the Lord Jesus paints us a simple picture with a very obvious message. We can all understand the need for strong foundations for our houses, but a firm foundation for our lives is equally if not more important. We have all shared the financial pain of the recent credit crunch, when to our dismay we discovered that the apparent prosperity of the last decade was just a house of cards built on empty promises. But what foundations we build our lives upon have consequences not just for this life but for eternity.

The Lord Jesus, after hearing Peter's confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" declared that it was "on this Rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Matthew 16:16-18. The Lord's Name and Person were to be the solid foundation on which the Church of God would be built and all the opposition of Satan through the centuries would not prevail against it. Surely if such a glorious edifice as the Church of God can be securely built on Christ the Rock, then I can safely build my life on Him as well!

So what in practical terms does it mean, "Dear Name, the Rock on which I build"? Do you not think that all the schemes and plans we have for our lives and for our families need to be entirely in line with what would be suitable to the Lord Jesus? So many people go through life never ever giving any thought to God or seeking His help. They are, in effect, building on sand. As Christians we shouldn't be like that. In the story the Lord told, it wasn't a matter of if the storms came but when the storms came. It is at times of stress and storm that the foundations of our lives are tested. Bible principles must be the basis for the general direction of our lives. The more we read and meditate on God's Word, the more we will understand what pleases Him. We will be guided by Him and if we heed the warnings in the Bible we can avoid many of the pitfalls along the way. If we had read and heeded Habakkuk 2:6-7 we could even have avoided the worldwide credit crunch! "Woe to him who increases what is not his. And to him who loads himself with many pledges? Will not your creditors rise up suddenly?"

My Shield and Hiding Place

The next line of the hymn develops this theme but in a slightly different way. The emphasis is not so much that the Lord Jesus is a Rock, a firm foundation on which we can build, but rather He is a Rock and "My Shield and Hiding place". There are many verses that teach us this. "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe." Proverbs 18:10. This is a wonderful truth! It is a truly marvellous thing that Jesus is the "Rock of our salvation" Psalm 95:1. He is the only One able and willing to secure our salvation by dying instead of us, and the salvation Jesus secured is eternal and unshakeable.

But in addition to this we learn that not only are we saved but we are safe! Sometimes we find this hard to believe and accept. Or should I say sometimes I find this hard to believe and accept! I have trusted Jesus Christ as my Saviour having gratefully accepted the forgiveness He offers me, but He has also promised to look after me day by day! He is my Shield and Hiding place! I know this and believe it but so often my actions contradict my belief. The verse from Proverbs read, "The name of the LORD **is** a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe." Proverbs 18:10. Notice

the word run! When danger threatens we don't stroll, we run! The reality is that when I am faced with difficulty or danger in my Christian life, so often I will try this scheme and that scheme and only as a last resort run to the Lord.

There is another wonderful Bible verse that I would like to share with you. "A man will be as a hiding place from the wind, and a cover from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Isaiah 32:2. This again is another great word picture! The writer pictures a traveller out in a howling gale with wind and storm and says that there is a man who will be a hiding place! He envisages a hot and dry desert and pictures a man who can provide refreshment even in a place like that. "Rivers of water in a dry place" and then concludes with "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Sometimes there seems to be no relief from the relentless heat of the sun, the problems and pressures of illness, various anxieties, financial concerns and cares about family members. This verse is telling us that in a desert place when there is no shade offered by anything else, Jesus is "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

I mustn't forget that John Newton in his hymn says "My Shield and Hiding place". I don't think John Newton meant that we have to build a shield and hiding place, but rather that the Lord Jesus is "My Shield and Hiding place". My thoughts go back to what God said to Abraham after he had returned from rescuing his nephew, Lot. Abraham seems to be feeling discouraged and God said to him, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." Genesis 15:1. I believe Abraham walked a quite lonely life of faithfulness and faced many enemies, but God promised to be his shield.

King David was another faithful follower of God, but he too faced many difficulties and enemies and he wrote, "As for God, His way perfect; the word of the LORD proven; He a shield to all who trust in Him. For who God, except the LORD? And who a rock, except our God?" 2 Samuel 22:31-32. A shield is placed between us and those who would cause us harm. This is exactly what the Lord Jesus promises to do! When the soldiers came with Judas to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said, "If you seek Me, let these [My disciples] go away". In a very practical way He shielded His disciples and He will shield us too.

My never failing treasury, filled with boundless stores of grace

The last line of the verse of our hymn reads "My never failing treasury, filled with boundless stores of grace!" Can we read a few more Bible verses "God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us together, and made sit together in the heavenly in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; is the gift of God". Ephesians 2:4-8.

If we have believed on the Lord Jesus as our Saviour we have experienced God's grace, but what is grace? I have seen an acrostic which spells out the word grace as "God's Riches At Christ's Expense". Grace is so much more than mercy. Mercy is undeserved pardon and relates to my great debt, but grace is God's matchless favour towards me. Mercy is not giving me what I deserved; grace gives me what I don't deserve. And this is what these verses from Paul's letter to the Ephesians are saying. God is rich in mercy. He didn't punish us in the way we deserved but instead He has saved us and raised us up to sit with Christ Jesus in heaven. We have been saved by God's grace and we will continue to need His grace until we are at home in heaven, and there is no possibility of God's grace being exhausted! "My never failing treasury, filled with boundless stores of grace!"

I can remember reading or hearing about a spokesman for Rolls Royce who was speaking at the launch of their latest fabulously expensive new car. He was being pressed to say how powerful the car was and how fast it was capable of going. He declined to answer the question directly, only saying that he thought the power was "adequate"! A marvellous understatement! We have another marvellous understatement in 2 Corinthians 12:9 when the Lord speaks to the Apostle Paul and says, "grace is sufficient for you". Of course it was! Paul felt his personal weaknesses a great deal, and had asked God for relief from them. At first he was disappointed with the reply he received, but then God said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" 2 Corinthians 12:9.

Paul is content with this answer; in fact, he is more than content, he is glad: "most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." 2 Corinthians 12:9. Paul was happy that through his own weakness the power of God could more clearly be seen, and all the glory would be given to God.

In Zechariah, one of the last books in the Old Testament we have another picture that helps us to understand how important God's grace is for us. Pretty much everything had gone wrong for the nation of Israel because of their disobedience their kings had been killed, the capital Jerusalem burnt down and the whole nation taken into captivity. After seventy years, a tiny number are allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple and city walls. Zerubbabel, their leader, takes charge of this seemingly impossible task. The builders are often attacked, discouraged or distracted and progress is slow. But God says, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple;

his hands shall also finish it." Zechariah 4:9. The moment is pictured when the final or capstone is brought out. The last stone is put in place and all the people cry, "Grace, grace to it" Zechariah 4:7.

It is in the context of these verses that we get the well-known phrase, "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD of Hosts". God is more than capable of completing the work that He has commenced in the lives of each one of us. He is bringing many sons home to glory and we will all arrive safely there! We might be desperately weak, sinful, under attack or just distracted with the busyness of daily life, but God's grace will secure those whom God's Son has purchased with His own blood. We will arrive home safely. When we do we will gladly acknowledge that it is "Grace, grace" that has achieved it. "My never failing treasury, filled with boundless stores of grace!"

I hope you have enjoyed thinking about the Lord Jesus as portrayed in the lines of this hymn. When the Lord was walking and talking with the two discouraged disciples who were trudging back to Emmaus, it is recorded that "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Luke 24:27. Whilst the Bible is full of stories of many different men and women and the history of nations, first and foremost it is full of pictures of the Lord Jesus. On more than one occasion when the Lord Jesus was living here on earth, God the Father declared that it was in Jesus He had found His delight. Peter writing in his first letter twice speaks of Jesus and calls Him "precious" and then goes on to say "Therefore, to you who believe He is precious" 1 Peter 2:7. I hope He is precious to you too.

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