

The Rock of Escape!

Call to Worship: Psalm 18:1-3

Hymn #296- *Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken*

1st Scripture: Psalm 54

Hymn #80- *How Firm a Foundation*

2nd Scripture: 1 Samuel 23:19-29

Hymn #81- *A Mighty Fortress*

Introduction:

David is presently hiding out in the wilderness of Ziph, continuing to flee as a fugitive from King Saul. Weighed down with much grief, sorrow, fear and discouragement over recent events, we last found David in great need of encouragement. And God graciously sent his servant, Jonathan, to strengthen David's hand (to encourage David) in God. Making good use of the promises of God, and reassuring David of his own support, Jonathan succeeded in this mission of encouragement, and then headed back home.

As we move forward this morning, we will find that Jonathan's encouragement was necessary, not only to help alleviate the weighty burden of sorrow that David was already bearing, but furthermore, to help prepare him for the continuous trials that lie immediately in front of him.

I. The Ziphites Betray David

Apparently, not too thrilled to have David (and his now six hundred men) dwelling in their land, the people of Ziph go to King Saul, and inform him of David's whereabouts in the Wilderness of Ziph. And they encourage Saul to come down to them, so that they might deliver David into his hand, when he arrives. Indeed, the lesser David has a few encounters with his own "Judas Iscariots," and this is one of them.

Saul then responds with another one of his blasphemous, slanderous, misuses of the name of God, who is certainly not with him, in verse 21. "Blessed are you of the Lord, for you have compassion on me." Only time will tell, brethren, how many demonic souls; kings and popes and religious leaders, have blasphemously offered the "blessing of the Lord," when they themselves had no access to Him. Know for certain, that not everyone who bears a smile, and the Lord's blessing on their lips, is a friend of God, in any respect. Many, who have offered the sign of the cross; and many who have lifted up their hand to bless a weary soul, have found themselves, and

will find themselves, unwillfully embracing the fiery flames of God's wrath in hell. The name of God on the lips is meaningless, if the life of God is not in the soul. And so, the blessing of Saul, placed here on the Ziphites, is rather the curse of God, from the standpoint of heaven.

Following his flattering blessing then, and seeking to make good use of David's betrayers, Saul appoints them unto the task of finding David's precise location, so that he can come down and lay hold of him, without any further interference of escape. [Read verses 22-23]

"Look, go back and observe him. Ask around. See where he hides and where he travels, and take note of it. He is a slick young fellow, and has a habit of sneaking away. Then come back to me with that information, and I will come down and lay hold of him, even if I have to search out all of the cities of Judah."

The Ziphites then leave, and they find that David has left the Wilderness of Ziph, having travelled about five miles south, to the Wilderness of Maon. They then report this new information to Saul, and he comes down to lay hold of David. And once again, a God-sent, informant, warns David of Saul's intentions, and David heads down to a place called, "The Rock," where a mountain is present. Saul is given this information, and he pursues David there. And yet again, it seems as if David has reached the end of the line. He is on one side of the mountain and Saul is on the other. Saul divides his army into two groups, sending them around the mountain, in order to flank David from both sides. And as they are encircling the mountain and closing the gap between them and David, providentially, a messenger comes to Saul with urgent and alarming news, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land!"

Wow, what timing, huh? Indeed, even the enemies of God serve His purposes. For, this news forces Saul to call off his pursuit of David, that he might deal with the attacking Philistines. David then escapes, and settles in the strongholds of Engedi, some ten miles east, on the western shore of the Dead Sea. And they called the place where David had narrowly escaped from Saul, "The Rock of Escape."

II. The Rock of Escape!

Brethren, why would they call that place the "Rock of Escape?" What is the significance of memorializing a place in this way? Well, in closing, let me suggest to you three implications to be taken from this label:

1) In a sentence or two, rehearse again what has happened here. David and his men were surrounded, with no place to run. Saul and his army were closing in on David from both sides, and it was the end of the line for David and his men. But, at just the right time, a messenger arrived, informing Saul that the Philistines were attacking the land. And this forced Saul to withdraw, in order to deal with the very pending threat. He had to forgo his opportunity of catching David, in order to tend to more urgent business. And David and his men narrowly escaped.

Why then did they label this place the, "Rock of Escape?" Nothing about the mountain itself, provided the way of escape, right? But David and his men, realized very obviously, that God, by means of the Philistine army even, had delivered David and his men from Saul's hand. And so, they memorialized the place; they commemorated the location, as a means of reminding them of the sovereign, invisible hand of God, which intervened and had delivered them right there, when they were incapable of escaping themselves. When the noose was closing in, around their necks, a divine intervention pulled them off of the gallows, and set them in a place of safety and rest. And now, in but a few words, they could recall to mind this supernatural intervention, when God righteously worked through the wicked intention and will of the Philistines, in order to deliver David and his men. In the future throes of difficult and painful providences; in the future seemingly hopeless situations, they could always look back to this time, and whisper a word of hope into each other's ears, "Remember the 'Rock of Escape!'" "Remember, that our God is yet sovereign. He neither slumbers nor sleeps; indeed, He is here with us. Behold the salvation of our God!" And perhaps the encouraging words of Jonathan, rung yet again, loudly in the ears of David, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel..." (vs. 17).

And brethren, let us make much of the very specific ways in which God intervenes in our lives. As we personally experience the guiding, governing and delivering hand of our God, reigning over our lives, and over our circumstances, let us take careful note, and never forget, lest we lose sight of His reality, when the dark clouds of providence reside above us for a time. We must and ought to carry God's past deliverances and acts of faithfulness with us, in the present; we must rehearse them, pray over them and wear them as protective armor, so that we will stand firm in the face of new, difficult and uncharted trials. Indeed brethren, the theology of God's sovereignty and the experience of that theology, form a powerful duo, with

whom we would always want to acquaint ourselves, so that we will have them always with us, when we tread the dark, deep and lengthy valleys of affliction, trial and suffering. But praise be unto God that our "Rock of Escape" commemorates not merely *the place* of God's sovereign act of deliverance, but furthermore, the Person of that deliverance as well!

2) A second implication to be taken from this label, involves not only *the reality* of God's sovereign deliverance, but the very *Person* of that deliverance as well.

Every benefit, every deliverance; indeed, every blessing, comes to us; is mediated to us, in, by and through the "Rock of Escape," who is The Lord Jesus Christ, Himself! You see, brethren, we look to Christ, our Rock of Escape, most of all, as our deliverance from sin, but as great as that is, it is still far too limited in its scope. He is our Lord, our God, our King and our Prophet, as well as our Priest and our sacrificial atonement. He is all of these and more, and as such, He is our deliver in *every* respect. He intercedes for us indeed, but He also reigns *over* and *for* us! He uses the wicked Philistines, for the benefit and growth of His church! And so, brethren, we have a Rock of Escape to which we look, in all circumstances, and at all times. We have no reason to ever turn our eyes away from Christ, as if He is of little or no use, in any circumstance of life.

Do you find yourself struggling with sin, and naturally unfavorable to God, in your own right? Do you find gaping holes of contamination, in even the best of your works and services unto God? You look to the Rock of Escape (to Christ) for grace; for hope, for forgiveness, for acceptance and deliverance! Do you find yourself overcome with fear and doubt; anxiety and sorrow? You look to the Rock of Escape (to Christ) as the compassionate Savior, who sympathizes with you in your weakness; who was tempted in all points as you are, yet without sin; who experienced the terrors of Gethsemane and the torments of the cross, and you find a place of refuge in the One who resonates with your fear and pain, and who promises to never leave you nor forsake you in it; who vows to finish the work, which He has begun in you! Do you suffer pain and hardship? Not without the understanding Rock of Escape, who Himself was a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief! Do you suffer persecution and shame for your faith? Know for certain that the Rock of Escape, even Christ, looks upon the Saul of your persecution, and says, "Why do you persecute *Me?*" Do you enjoy a time of relative peace and joy? Indeed, even then, you look to the Rock

of Escape, who has settled you by a well of refreshment (in the wilderness) for a time, so that you might refresh yourself and drink water, from the Rock, which is Christ Himself!

You see, brethren, implied here, is not merely the *place*, or even the *reality* of God's sovereignty, but also the *Person* of God Himself, given us in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Rock, who was struck for us, so that we might drink of the water of life, freely in Him! [Jn. 1- In Him was life; Moses struck the Rock, and a river came out of it; that Rock was Him!]

And so, brethren, let us not merely look to the "past tense" work of Christ, but rather, also to the "present tense" Personal reality of Christ, who still applies that "past tense" work unto our "present tense" need, in every regard. Christ is living, acting, interceding and reigning now! He is a very present help in a time of trouble! He is shaping, forming and moving history, daily, unto His desired end! All authority in heaven and on earth are given Him, by the Father! The same Jesus, who poured out His Spirit in Acts 2, with the accompanying sound of roaring winds and tongues of fire, and all manner of miraculous signs and wonders, is actively building His church today! Fix your eyes on Him, the Author and Finisher of your faith, and your Rock of Escape, at all times! He sees, He knows, He understands, He sympathizes, and out of an unquenchable jealousy for His own glory; and out of sincere love for all of His precious sheep, He will prosper you!

3) Lastly, the final implication here is for the unbeliever. There is a message here for you, as well, friend. You see, there is only One way of escape; only one way out of a naturally impossible situation. Saul and his army would do well to picture the nature of your sin, my friends. You may not realize it, but your sin; your offenses against God; your breaking of the Law of God, is ultimately unto your own utter downfall. The things you enjoy now, in your rebellion against God, are actually closing in on you, from every side, and there is no natural way of escape. You have broken God's Law, and that has consequences; indeed, very grave consequences. You have sinned against your holy God, and you owe a very weighty debt; an eternal debt to God's Law. And if you die in your sin, you will perish in eternal torments forever and ever and ever, in hell! Friends, hell is the place of God's wrath. It is not run by the devil; it is run by God; it is the chamber of His judgment, where He will pour out His express wrath on the unrepentant forever!

And so, your sin encircles you at this very moment, waiting to overtake you forever, without any hope of escape, once you die, and stand before God in judgment. But there is indeed, one Rock of Escape in the present; there is a place of refuge, in Jesus Christ, if you will but repent and flee to him by faith today! You see, the weight of God's wrath fell upon Christ already, when He came into this world and bled, and died on behalf of sinners. He bore sin in His own body and He took it to the cross; and He extinguished its debt in full, by bearing the wrath of God in the stead of all who flee to Him by faith! And God raised Him from the dead, three days later. And He has ascended to the right hand of God, offering Himself as the Rock of Escape, for all who repent and believe in Him in truth. Friends, be saved from your sins, before they overtake you forever! Flee to the Rock of Escape, before it is too late! Don't die in your sins!

The Rock of Escape commemorates the place of God's sovereign deliverance, as well as the Person of Jesus Christ, the Deliverer in every respect!

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25