

Rocks
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Text: Psalm 18:2a *"The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock."*

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours, from God our Father, His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

(illustrating two rocks) Today I brought a couple of rocks for you to see. The first time I went to Israel in 1996 I was still serving you as pastor; I've been blessed to return a bunch of times. Seven years ago on a pilgrimage I brought these back. In Israel, just a mile east of Jerusalem, you're already out in the desert; that is the Judean Wilderness. You could walk downhill for two days from Jerusalem to the Jordan River, then back uphill further to the east, all in that wilderness. I was in that **Judean Wilderness**, high on a hill, looking down at the **old footpath** leading from Jericho "up" to Jerusalem. There is little doubt that Jesus walked here and that John baptized in that part of Jordan River near here. "Repent!" he shouted. (Matthew 3:1-11)

"Repent!" – Seek forgiveness of sins, and turn.

"Repent!" – Bear fruit in keeping with repentance, or be more like Christ.

"Repent!" – Don't imagine because you were raised in the church, or because you have great parents who opened your eyes and hearts to the wonders of God, or because you're a good person and only have good people as friends—don't imagine these things get you anything. The crowds around John the Baptist were Jews and Abraham was their father, but John saw mountains of rocks all around him. He said that God could instead create new children of Abraham from these rocks. **Here is a rough rock** from high on that hill in the Judean Wilderness, windblown, rarely touched by a raindrop, just like billions of other rocks.

How useful is a rock? How useful can a rock be? Do you remember what happened in 1 Samuel 17 (David and Goliath)?

*Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle. And they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and encamped in the **Valley of Elah**, and drew up in line of battle against the Philistines. And the Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them.*

On the eastern side of the valley is a stream. David took 5 smooth stones from that same stream, and put one deep into Goliath's forehead. **Here is a smooth rock** from that stream in the Valley of Elah, with all of its rough edges worn down. How useful was the rock that David used to take Goliath's life and save Israel?

How useful is a rock? Do you remember when Jesus asked His disciples who He was? Peter, or Petra (Greek for "rock") said that Jesus is the Son of the Living God. And Jesus said that upon this rock, upon this solid profession of faith, He would build His church.

How useful is a rock? Remember Golgotha, likely a barren rocky place outside the city wall of Jerusalem? Probably hundreds of people were crucified here by the Romans, along the main road leading into town from the north and east. Here our Savior earned forgiveness for the sins of all mankind, from Adam and Eve to the last person He creates. It's here that our Savior earned your forgiveness and mine.

If Golgotha were the end of the story, and Jesus only died on Good Friday, St. Paul says our faith would be foolishness. **(The Garden Tomb)** Not far from Golgotha was a tomb – they laid Him there, and three days later the stone was rolled away and He began showing Himself to others, alive.

(Showing the wilderness rock) A rock like this can be useful but is untested, untried, not much yet. (Showing Valley of Elah rock) This rock worn smooth, may have begun like other rock, but tumbled in brook, banging against other rocks, tested, tried, did not have it easy getting to this smooth state.

Where are you? Are you an untest untried rock, a hard-headed rock, when God's Word is heard but not taken in? Repent, and return to being the rock whose faith is clear and obvious to all. Be the rock who knows that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God, that He's not a carving or a tree or a product of one's imagination. Be the smooth rock, the instrument of God to be used in ways perhaps only He sees. Who would have thought a small smooth rock could slay Goliath? **(Psalm 18:2)** But in the hands of David who was himself in the hands of the Lord, our real Rock.... Join with other rocks as a community solidly, even defiantly, aligned with God and His will, as numerous as the rocks in the wilderness, as numerous as the children of Abraham. Join with other rocks, whose hope of heaven rests solely on the forgiveness Jesus earned, as we strive each day to become more like Christ. Always for His glory, and for us – His creation and those whom He loves. Amen.

May the peace of God not defy our understanding but be something we contemplate and which becomes core to who we are; may His peace keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, into life everlasting. Amen.