

A SAFE HIDING PLACE

A SERMON

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“And the Lord said, behold, there is a place by me, and you shall stand upon a rock.” Exodus 33:21

“NO man can see my face, and live;” and yet my text says, “There is a place by me, and you shall stand upon a rock;” and yet in the 11th verse of this chapter it is said, “The Lord spoke to Moses face to face;” and in the last chapter of Deuteronomy, when the general character of Moses is summed up, that is, the character that grace constituted him, it is said, “And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.” Here again is an apparent contradiction: one scripture declaring that the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, and another declaring that “No man shall see my face and live.” How do we reconcile these two? I am aware of the way in which it is taken generally, but that does not reconcile it. The way in which it is generally taken is this, that the Lord's glory was so great that it would have overwhelmed all the powers of Moses, and therefore could not be revealed; and that no man in his mortal state would be capable of enduring the presence of the glory of God in Christ Jesus. This I believe is the way in which it is generally taken; but this is not the way in which I intend to treat the subject this morning. Now the matter is very easily reconciled. No man can see God's face on law ground, because every man is a sinner; and therefore, in that relation to God, God is nothing but a consuming fire; consequently, no man can on that ground “see his face and live.” But on gospel grounds they do see his face; by a gospel way they shall “see his face;” for it is written, but then it is written in the gospel sense, that they “shall see his face.” “His name shall be on their foreheads, and they shall reign for ever and ever.” It is under this idea, that we must proceed to the subject before us.

Now, then, here is, first, *the hiding-place*; “there is a place by me.” Here is, secondly, *the stability*; “you shall stand upon a rock.”

First: I notice now first, *the hiding place*; and in so doing, I first notice the necessity of this hiding-place, of this gospel place; for although the place spoken of in our text was a place literally and locally on Mount Sinai, we cannot question but that it has a spiritual meaning. Now the first question that I shall try to settle is, whether we have been brought to see and feel our need of the Lord Jesus Christ, or of God, in gospel relationship; whether the Lord has discovered to us what

we are in our law relationship to him. Let me give you some proofs that this is a truth, namely, the utter impossibility of access to God on law grounds, and the necessity of a place by him, the necessity of a Mediator, the necessity of a Substitute. And that this is a truth that the Old Testament saints were well versed in, I will prove by setting some examples before you; and I will also give you an instance or two from the New Testament. I take first that of Jacob, when he was journeying from Padan-aran, he called the place where the Lord had appeared to him, Peniel; "because," said he, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Jacob knew that if the blessed God had appeared to him there by the burning ire of his eternal law, that then he must have been destroyed; that there was a way, and that way was God's law, in which no man can meet God without destruction; and yet that law, not a jot nor title of it can fail, not one spark, not one immortal spark, of that law ever shall, ever can, or ever will, be quenched by all the sufferings of lost angels or of lost men; and yet all of us by nature are under that law; and I will not believe, I cannot believe, that any man can really appreciate the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, until he is brought to know something of destruction by the law of God. How true the Savior's words are as well as important, when he says, "You must be born again." Nothing but regeneration can bring us from under the law; we are under that law of condemnation by creation; we are under it by nature; and nothing but regeneration can bring us personally out from under the law. We may have the gospel on our tongues, we may make a profession of religion, we may talk of Christ, and talk of free grace, talk of what we believe; but all our talk, if it has not a root is nothing, if we have not been brought to see and feel that there is no access to God by the law. A man who has been brought to feel this, will look to Jesus Christ, and believe the gospel by necessity. Therefore, I say Jacob was versed in this when he said, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Again, we go on a little further, and when the Lord appeared to Gideon, Gideon had such a sight and sense of God's holiness, and of his own sinfulness, that he looked at the contrast between the Lord and himself, and Oh, what a mercy this is, to be brought down into such a state as to see nothing in self and nothing in God, but that which must unite our sin to our destruction, if we are found in our sins, and he meet us here on law ground, how great the mercy to be led to see and to feel there is nothing but destruction. So Gideon trembled, and he said, "I shall die," I shall be destroyed; I have nothing, and I never shall have and never can have; it is not possible for me to have anything but sin; and therefore I shall die; I shall be lost; that will be the result; I see how it is; God is holy, and I am unholy; God is righteous, and I am unrighteous; God is true, and I am liar; I shall be lost. But shall the soul that is thus made to tremble at God, be lost? No, "Fear not, Gideon: for you shall not die." And what did this convey to him? why, a knowledge of sacrifice for sin; a knowledge of the way in which the law became dead to him, and he dead to the law. This revealed to him an open door, a door of life, a door of hope; and therefore, he built an altar there to the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom, "the Lord will send peace." Then again, it was so with Manoah, he could not see the way of mercy; the Lord did not as yet intend he should; he said, "Alas, for we have seen God, and we shall die." But his wife had not only seen the purity and majesty of God, and her condition as a sinner, but the Lord had revealed to her more clearly than Manoah, as yet, the way in which that law should be met by a Substitute, the way in which the holiness and justice of God should be maintained; the way in which sin should be put away, the way in which she should be accepted; and therefore she said, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering, and a meat offering at our hands." Then again, you come to Isaiah; when the Lord appeared to him in his majesty, he was taught the same truth, that no man could see God's face and live on law grounds; and therefore, he said, "Woe is me, for I am undone." And why are you undone? Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips." Why,

if Isaiah had any good works he would have been glad then to plead them. I never heard yet of a criminal in a court of justice that would not if possible, bring forward something that would plead his cause. But Isaiah had nothing to plead; his mouth was stopped; all he could say was, "I am a man of unclean lips," meaning he was altogether unclean; "and I dwell among a people of unclean lips;" that is all I can say, and there is nothing but destruction for me. See how well he was prepared for the mercy of God. "Then flew one of the Seraphim's unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken from off the altar; and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, lo, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." So, when the Lord Jesus Christ, for all judgment is committed to him, when he appeared to Saul of Tarsus, Saul of Tarsus was brought down, and there he lay. Jesus Christ is a God of judgment, as well as a God of mercy, for all judgment, as I have said, is committed to him; Saul of Tarsus was brought down; there he remained, and must have remained if mercy had not raised him up. And see how these convictions prepared the ground for the seed to take saving root; prepared the soul for all the provisions of new covenant mercy. Thus, it was with Gideon, so it was with Manoah, so it was with Isaiah, so it was with the apostle Paul; and if we are taught of God, it will be the same with us. Here it is, the sinner is made as it were to drop dead or hopeless before the Lord. "Sin revived," says the apostle, "and I died." Now after the Lord had said to Moses, "no man can see my face and live," then, "there is a place by me." Thus, you will see the Old Testament saints felt their need of Christ. Of what Christ was, and is, in those characters I shall presently bring before you.

Now the Lord covered Moses with his hand. "I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand while I pass by;" so that not only could Moses not meet God on law ground, but he could not even endure the sight; "the Lord covered him with his hand, and the Lord passed by," in the law sense of the word; passed by him in all the majesty of his holiness and justice, and wrath against sin; Moses did not even see him, he was hidden from him; so that not only could he not meet God, but he could not even see him; It would have been death to have seen him, so awful was the sight. What then, shall we understand by the Lord hiding him? Is there anything in the New Testament analogous to it? Yes, for we have a key to this matter in the New Testament. Here is something in sin that none but Christ was to see; here is something in God's wrath that none but Christ was to see; here is something in our hell, that we, by sin, have entailed upon ourselves, and brought ourselves virtually into, that none but Christ was to see. Here was something in the majesty of God's law, something in the eternal indignation and wrath of that law, that none but Christ was to see; Moses did not even see it.

Now let us come to the New Testament, and we shall see that it has a typical meaning, his covering Moses with his hand; and here lies the key, "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd." What a beautiful representation that is. There are the sheep; here is the Shepherd, "We have strayed like lost sheep, we have turned everyone to his own way," but there stands the Shepherd; that Shepherd is the Surety, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd;" that Shepherd is God's equal; "against the man that is my fellow; smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered, and I will turn my hand upon the little ones." Hence, the disciples were not suffered to see into that pit into which Christ went; they were not suffered to see even that fire that he had to quench; they were not suffered to see even that sword wielded by Omnipotence, that smote the Surety down to death; they were not suffered to see even that cup of bitterness which the Savior drank; they were not permitted to see, and were incapable of seeing, those mountainous, those innumerable sins, that this Almighty Person took away, the sins of past and future ages; and of all nations; of a number

that no man can number, all concentrating upon this wonderful Shepherd. Did Sinai quake at God's presence? No wonder, therefore, if Sinai quaked at the mere ministration of the law, that the earth should tremble, that the skies should be darkened, that the rocks should be rent, that the temple should fall, as it were, partly to pieces at the terrible presence of our sin, and all the wrath of God due thereto. God turned his hand upon the disciples, he covered them, they could not see it. Hence, the dear Savior said to Peter, when Peter said, "I will follow you whithersoever you go," the Lord did not say, "you shall not follow me now;" he did not say that, he said something more instructive; he said something stronger; he said, "You cannot follow me." This will mean two things; first, that there was something that Christ had to go into, infinitely beyond the capacity of the highest angel in heaven; and secondly, that as Peter's name was in the book of life, and Christ was his Substitute, he never could enter into the sufferings which Christ was about to endure for him. And therefore, the circumstance of the Lord covering Moses with his hand, seems to me to point out that Christ alone knew, in perfection the bitterness of sin; that Christ alone knew, in perfection, the bitterness of death; that Christ alone knew, in perfection, the depths of hell: that Christ alone knew, in perfection, the intensity of the wrath of God's eternal law. Ah, my hearers, if ever we have seen enough of the holiness of God; if we have seen enough to make us look to the Lord Jesus Christ, you may depend upon it, that the more we ponder this matter over, whether we look at the penalty of sin in the fallen angels, or at the perdition of lost men, and remember that that which they cannot reach to all eternity, Christ comprehended in his own person, rolled the whole together, bare the whole at once, I am sure it will establish you in the great truth of his eternal Godhead, and it will make his person dear to you beyond all expression; his righteousness unspeakably precious: it will make the new covenant delightful to you; you will glory in it, be happy in it. Ah, you will say, what a hell have I escaped; what a curse have I escaped; what a death have I escaped; what a fire have I escaped; what floods of fury have I escaped; what eternal infamy have I escaped; what an eternity of shame have I escaped! Oh, how have I thus escaped? First, that God the Father wrote my name in his eternal book. No wonder, therefore, that the holy apostle, looking at others who had thus escaped, should say, "We are bound to give thanks unto God, who has from the beginning chosen you to salvation." How have I escaped? I have escaped at an infinite cost; yes, it was at the cost of the dear Redeemer's wondrous life; I have escaped by the good Spirit of God showing me my danger, leading me to the Rock that is higher than I, and giving me to see the greatness of a Savior's work, the greatness of his life, the greatness of his love, the greatness of his mercy; and bringing me to the conclusion, "Who in the heavens can be likened unto the Lord; and who among the sons of the mighty, can be likened unto the Lord our God "There is a place by me " then, where the Lord covered Moses; for he did not see him pass by; So the disciples, "I will turn my hand upon the little ones;" hide it from them. Ah, my hearers, look at that. When the disciples were scattered, yet God's hand was upon them; they were still covered by his hand; they were fearing they had lost everything; little did they think what was going on; little did they think what the Savior was doing; little did they think of the greatness of the stretch of his arm, that brought salvation; of all the stretches of God's power, there is nothing to equal that of salvation. "His fingers," (as the old divines well observed), "made the heavens; but it required the arm of Omnipotence to accomplish eternal salvation." Thus, then the disciples were covered; they were hidden; they were ignorant of it. Moses did not even see, and the disciples did not even see, they could not have endured the sight. But after his resurrection they entered somewhat into these things, but only in part. The apostle Paul knew only in part; the apostles knew only in part; we know only in part; and it may well be said, that the great end is to perfect us in love; and when we come to recognize the depths of a Savior's sorrow, the heights of those mountains that rolled upon

him, and the wonders that he has achieved, and the perfection he has brought in, I am sure there is no danger but that there will be a perfection of living love, flowing on to all eternity. "There is a place by me." Religion, my hearers, it all lies here, in knowing our need of, and receiving this gospel of the blessed God. "Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh." But the time is coming when we shall know even as we are known; though we cannot be too deeply versed now in the death and sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ. The more we are established in that, the more access shall we have to God, and the more we shall be devoted to him. And there is no happiness apart from it; you may depend upon that; without Christ we have nothing; in him we have everything. Thus then, we learn that there is a hiding place, the need of which the Lord brings sinners to feel; and secondly that God's face in the law sense, is so terrible that we could not endure the sight thereof; they never will see it, only as it is manifested in what Christ has suffered. That, is the second idea.

Now the third idea is that of the place, it was on Sinai! What! says one, on Sinai! Why, you are going to make out this morning that it was a hiding place in Sinai. Of course, I am; my text says so. Then you are going to make it out as a place where the curses were. My text says so. Where did Jesus Christ come to when he came into the world? Under the law; that is where we were; that is where our sins were; that is where the curse was. And when the two orders of testimonies were arranged, how were they arranged? The blessings on one mountain, and the curses on the other mountain. On which mountain was the altar? Where the curses were. So here it is indicated that just where God's wrath is, just where our sins are, just where the law is, just where death is, that is just where Jesus Christ is; there is the place for him; it is on Sinai. That is a beautiful Scripture where we read of the Lord coming from Sinai; he comes to Sinai first. Christ came to Sinai, and then, coming to Sinai or to the law, he brings us from under the law, from Sinai to Zion, into the freedom of the everlasting Gospel. People talk now days as though you must come away from the law, and come away from sin, and come away from death, and come away from the world, and come to God; but you may depend upon it, if you come away from the law without Christ bringing you away, you will have to go back again; if you have come away from your sins without regeneration, you will have to go back again; if you have come away from death professionally, and not vitally, you will have to go back again. I venture to say, if I had to visit every one of the sheep, and say, well now, did you come away from the law, or did Christ fetch you? Did you take yourself out of sin, or did Christ take you out? Lazarus, did you come out of the grave, or did Christ fetch you? Did you come from Satan, or did Christ put him under your feet for you? Did you, here you are in your glorified body, did you come out of the grave yourself, and meet Christ half way in the air, or did he fetch you out? I venture to say, that in every instance, the answer would be, that it was Christ. Oh, he will make his people feel that they are fixed in Sinai under the law, and in death; and in this state will they remain, until he releases them. And therefore "He brought me up out of the horrible pit." "Other sheep have I, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring." Almost all religion, you know, in the present day is, Come to Christ! Come to God! Come to God! Why, that is just upside down. I know the Scriptures speak of coming to Christ and coming to God; but real religion lies in God first coming to us. But you must not stop to ask that now days; oh no; if you come to Christ, that will do. As to doubting and fearing, Cardinal Wiseman, and Protestant Dissenters many of them, Church people too, are very much alike on the question of doubting and fearing. Cardinal Wiseman says in his volume upon Protestantism and Catholicism, "The moment you begin to doubt the authority of the Church you are without the pale of the Church, and consequently in danger of damnation." So, we are told by some divines, that

you must not doubt; it is infidel to doubt. So, it is infidel to doubt God's truth, but I do not think it is at all infidel to doubt my own heart, and to call in question my own condition. I do not think it is at all infidel to be very jealous over my own soul. I do not think it is at all infidel to be so fearful, lest I should be deceiving myself, and that I am coming to God without God's coming to me, and coming to his word without his word coming to me. I do not think that is at all infidel; I think that is godly jealousy. I am sure, if I were on a journey of importance, I should not think it infidel if I were not sure that I was on the right road to make every possible enquiry. There is no infidelity in that. To doubt God's truth is infidelity; but to call in question my interest in it is not infidelity; it is self-examination, and wholesome godly jealousy that everyone taught of God must be the subject of more or less. But if we once get into Doubting Castle, we cannot get out until the Lord brings us out; and then good bye to that duty-faith; they know that their religion cannot stand without vital experience; it can stand with the religion that man is the author of, but not with that religion that God is the author of.

Again, my fourth idea is, nearness to God. "There is a place by me." So, by the Lord Jesus Christ we have access to God. Christ is near to God; he always was, he is, and will be forever. Christ is one with God; Christ is God, equal with God, and therefore by him God is near to us, and we are near to him; and there is nothing to separate. Oh, but, say some persons, if we walk contrary to him, he will walk contrary to us. A man that is born of God cannot walk contrary to God's truth. The Apostle says, "We cannot do anything against the truth." There never was such a thing under heaven yet as a real child of God committing sin that grace may abound. There is a great outcry about it, because it serves certain purposes of men; and people are cautioned against going to hear the truth, because, they say, these men deny accountability; and thousands go off and think, oh, that they do. Now if there be any here this morning that have heard that declared, let me just say to you that so far from denying this, we believe that our accountability to God by his eternal law is so solemn, so awful, that none but the Lord Jesus Christ could sustain it, and bear the consequences of it; and we believe that he has taken our law accountability away, and we believe that there is no law accountability left, for if there were we should be lost.

But now comes revelation! "I will pass by, and you shall see my back parts, but my face shall no man see." Now, we come to the revelation of back parts. That, is not, perhaps, the best suited English expression that might have been used to convey the meaning of the original. The back parts mean the after parts; that is, after revelation; and it will mean these three things. First, it will mean substitution; secondly, it will mean order of place; and thirdly it will mean order of time. These are the three things meant by the after parts. First, substitution. Genesis 22. There Abraham says, "Oh I have nothing but death before me, my son Isaac, the promises are in him, yet here he is to be sacrificed;" To all human appearance all hopes were taken away. That is the order of things, Abraham: the law first; there is law work first; that was Isaac's law work. Isaac was bound hand and foot, and he said "Here is the wood, and here is the fire, but where is the lamb?" There is the law work; and the knife was raised to slay him; and no doubt his flesh quivered at the thought of that death he was about to die. But our extremity is God's opportunity. Now then, come to the back parts. Look another way, Abraham; do not look that way any longer; you are looking now the law way; here is the wood; you are looking now in a way that is despairing, look another way "And he turned round and looked behind him, and there was a ram caught in a thicket; and he took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son." What a nice expression, "Instead of his son." in place of his son. So, then the sinner, when he says, here is the wood; my

sins lie like a burden upon me; there is the fire; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? You must look another way! another way! But as your time is nearly gone, and my sermon not half done, I must hasten to the conclusion. The back parts, or after parts, after revelation, also means order of time. "Gather yourselves together, you sons of Jacob, that I may show what shall befall you in the last days;" gospel days, latter days. Therefore, the after parts will mean the ultimate parts of God's dealings; that is meant by after parts. Revelation will mean, then, as I have shown, substitution; and will mean that which comes after the law. It has been his order in all ages, in his dealings with his people; conviction first, manifestation of mercy afterwards. Cast them down first, raise them up afterwards; wound them first, heal them afterwards; condemn them first, pardon them afterwards; bind them hand and foot, and loose them and justify them afterwards. It is God's order: my face in the law sense, no man can see, and yet his face in the gospel sense shall all his people see.

But again, the Lord made a threefold promise to Moses; and I suppose with that I must close. He prayed the Lord would show him his glory; and the Lord answered him, that he would. He gave him this threefold promise, besides, this in our text, "I will make all my goodness to pass before you;" that is one. How does the Lord do that? Here is the answer; first, by making his dear son pass before us; there is God's goodness. Christ is God's goodness, his saving health; Christ is God's saving health to us. Christ passed on before us; he is our Forerunner; he has gone before us. He went before the Old Testament saints in covenant. Ah, said they, Christ is not yet gone before me personally and actually. Prophets and wise men longed to see that. They saw it was done in counsel and covenant, but not yet in actual operation; but they saw that Christ had gone before in covenant: cast sin down, cast Satan down, magnified the law, swallowed up death in victory, brought life and immortality to light. Hence Isaiah, in his 53rd chapter, speaks of the future sufferings of Christ, in the past tense. And, therefore, to make his goodness pass before us, is to make Christ pass before us; Christ has passed on before us, and he is our Forerunner. That is one idea. The other idea of making his goodness pass before us, is his gracious dealings with us by Christ. Now take these two ideas, and say them together. First, Christ goes forth our Forerunner; and second, the Lord's dealings with us by Christ Jesus. I am afraid we have not much faith, in this matter, friends, some of us; namely, the Lord's dealings with us by Christ Jesus. I know that all his dealings with us, have been by the worth and worthiness of his dear Son. All afflictions, all troubles, all trials, all losses, all crosses, they are all blessings in disguise; all things must be subservient to the purposes of his love. The apostle reckons up all this, when he says, "Our light afflictions that are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory." That is making his goodness pass before us; first in the person of Christ in his work, and then in his gracious dealings with us by him. And then, the third idea is eternal glory, "I will make my goodness pass before you." The goodness of the first covenant passed away; the salvation of Egypt became a matter of a mere past event; but the goodness of God, in and by Christ Jesus, will be in possession and before us to all eternity. After we have been in heaven for innumerable, ages, his goodness, all his goodness, will still be before us; always joy to come, always pleasures to come, always triumph to come.

I must leave the remaining part of my text until next Lord's day morning.