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# Here is a place by Me

*“And the LORD said, Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen.”*

Exodus 33:21-23

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## No place?

There was no room in the inn for Joseph and Mary when the Savior was born (Luke 2:7). We live in a time when people also seem to have less and less room for each other: children often find no place in our "overpopulated world," young people find it difficult to find a proper place in their families and in the social system, and for an increasing number of elderly people it is not easy to gain acceptance in our society either.

Although this should not be the case, we as believers experience the negative consequences of these developments. And it is necessary for us to ask ourselves whether we are really setting aside time and space in our lives for our fellow believers, whether we are accepting one another as Christ also received us, to the glory of God (Rom. 15:7). In any case, it is a great assurance to know that God always has room for us, a place of complete safety and security. In His presence there is a place of rest, of shelter from dangers, a place where we are safe. "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (Ex. 33:14).

In our natural condition, we do not know this place in God's presence, because we have turned our backs on Him and have gone astray. Our darkened eyes must be

opened. So we must learn to know this place of safety, and that is only possible by faith. So God said to Moses: "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock." In order to see this place, the eyes of our hearts must be enlightened (cf. Eph. 1:18; 4:18). God's light, the light of the gospel must shine on us, so that we may understand what God has done for sinners in order to save them and bring them into His presence.

## A place on the Rock

It is wonderful that God Himself has prepared a place of safety for the children of men, who were not worthy of it. We were by nature children of wrath and should be removed forever from God's holy presence. Yet God prepared a place for us with Himself. How was He able to do this? Because He has laid a righteous foundation on which people can exist before Him. God has accomplished this in and through Christ, and this is what we see in type in the remainder of this verse in the book of Exodus. Just as Moses was given a place on the Rock, so our feet are set on "the Rock of ages," who fears no faltering or fall.

Christ alone is the Rock upon which children of the dust gain firm ground. He is the foundation upon which faith can build, the basis upon which we are built up personally and also together as the church of the living God. When we come to Him in faith as the living Stone, we partake of the life He offers, and as living stones we are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood (see Matt. 7:24; 16:16-18; 21:42; John 1:43; 5:21; Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-6).

Only on the rock there was a safe place for Moses so that he was not consumed by the glory of God. In Deuteronomy 32, Moses repeatedly speaks of God as the Rock of His people (vv. 4, 15, 18, 30, 31). He is the Rock of their salvation, the God who fathered them. This imagery is also found in the psalms. David took refuge with God as his rock (Ps. 18:2), his fortress and his deliverer. With Him he found a place of shelter in the day of evil: "He shall hide me in the secret place of His tabernacle, He shall set me high upon a rock" (Ps. 27:5).

This place on the rock is also mentioned in Psalm 31:3; 40:2 and 61:2; and it is clear that David then alludes to God Himself as the Rock where he could find complete safety. This is also the place of the believer in the New Testament: he rests in God through Christ. Everything is based on the work of Christ, and He is also the Rock on which the church is now being built.

## A place in the cleft of the Rock

But it goes even further, for Moses was not only given a place on the Rock, but even in the Rock. God said to Moses, "So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by" (Ex. 33:22). God placed Moses in the cleft of the rock and covered him with His own hand.

This is a picture of the position the believer has now received in Christ. God Himself gives us this new position (1 Cor. 1:30-31; 2 Cor. 1:21-22). He no longer sees us in the first Adam, but in Christ. In the same way as Moses was placed in the rock, so we are seen in Christ, united with Him; and brought in a place of complete safety before God, where we are covered with God's own hand. This is God's work ("I will put you in the cleft of the rock"). We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:10). These are the counsels of His grace, which He fulfills in Christ.

Let me point out in passing that the cleft of the rock not only provided a place of protection, but it also provided the people of Israel with water during the wilderness journey (Ex. 17:6; Num. 20:7-11). The Israelites drank of that "spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4). A river of water flowed from the rock to continually quench the thirst of God's people. Likewise, Christ now provides His people with streams of living water, by the Spirit that He has poured out on us. Christ is the Rock where we must come to quench our thirst. And He is the smitten Rock, the cleft where we can hide ourselves in Him. By virtue of His sufferings and death, He has opened up for us an inexhaustible fountain of refreshment (John 4:10-14; 7:37-39; 1 Cor. 12:13).

## A place in God's presence

So the great lesson of Exodus 33:21 is that a place of safety can be found with God. And it is to be found on the basis laid by God Himself in and through Christ. The Hebrew word used here for "place" occurs quite frequently in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy, among other things, we find it for the one place of gathering that Israel would find in the Promised Land. In this place that the LORD would choose, the people could draw near to Him and rejoice in His presence.

Likewise, God gives us a place in His presence today, a place where we come together to honor Him. God has prepared it, for it is His desire that His children gather around His beloved Son. Christ is the Center that God has given for worship. By Him we can draw near to God, and so we can worship the Father in spirit and

truth (John 4:23). That is the basis God has given; only in this way can we serve Him according to His will. He says, as it were: Come to the Lord Jesus, draw near to Me!

But also in the future, God has prepared a place for us with Himself. As the children of God, we have the joyful hope that He will give us a place in His heavenly glory, the glory of God (Rom. 5:2; 1 Thess. 2:12). Long ago He has thought of us in Christ, even before the foundation of the world, to bring us before Him as His beloved children (Eph. 1:4-6). Christ acquired that place for us by virtue of His work, and by faith we can rejoice in it even now. He is our heavenly Head and our Representative in the glory. We have been brought into God's presence by Him, and put in the heavenly places. That is our present position in Christ.

But at Christ's return this will become full reality and faith will be turned to sight. In this connection we can think of the place that the Lord Jesus spoke about in John 14:1-3. He has gone to prepare a place for us in His Father's house with its many mansions. He has finished the work of redemption and He has returned to the Father. So He has opened the door for us and He has prepared a place for all those who are united with the heavenly Man. He is coming back and will take us to Himself, so that we may be where He is. Here is a place by Me, how far-reaching are these words! They speak of the position we now have in Christ before God, a place of complete security and safety. They also testify to the place where we can approach Him, the place of worship that God Himself designates for us. Finally, they allude to the heavenly hope that is given to us: there has been prepared a place of eternal rest with Him.

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