

The Book of Ruth

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INTRODUCTION

A peculiar charm attaches to the story of Ruth making this short Book of the Bible especially attractive to the most casual reader. It is a love story of other days in which sorrow and joy, failure and devotedness, life and death, are intermingled, all leading at last to the day of the marriage and the birth of the heir. The very setting of the story is restful to the spirit; for we are carried into pastoral scenes to find ourselves in company with harvesters and gleaners.

For the Christian, however, reading the sacred page with Christ before his soul, the story of Ruth has a deeper interest, and a richer meaning, for therein he discerns, as "in all the Scriptures," "the things concerning Himself."

Historically the Book of Ruth presents important links in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus after the flesh. The Book closes with a short genealogy of ten names ending with David the King. In the opening chapter of the New Testament these ten names have an honoured place in the genealogy of the King of kings, but with this difference that the Spirit of God has introduced, in connection with these names, four women — one of them being Ruth the Moabitess. It is significant that with each of these women there is connected a story of failure and shame, only making manifest that "where sin abounded grace did much more abound." So that historically the Book of Ruth is the record of the grace of God that, thirteen centuries before the King came, was securing the line by which He was to come, and, in so doing, triumphing over all the failure of the people, and magnifying grace, by bringing a Moabitish stranger into the line of the King.

It was a day of failure and weakness among the people of God and yet it becomes clear that, undeterred by all failure, God was pursuing His way and carrying out His purpose to establish His King. Yea more. God was using the circumstances of the day, and the very failure of the people, to bring these purposes to pass. Who would have thought that a famine in Bethlehem would have any connection with the birth of the King in Bethlehem thirteen centuries later? Yet so it was, for the famine was one link in the chain of circumstances that brought Ruth the Moabitess into the line of the King.

For ourselves, living as we do in days of yet greater failure and weakness among the people of God, it is comforting to the heart, and calming to the spirit, to realise that underneath all the failure of

man in responsibility throughout all the ages, God is, and ever has been, carrying out His purposes in Christ for the glory of Christ and the blessing of His people, whether earthly or heavenly. Moreover no power of the enemy, no opposition of the world, no failure of His people, can hinder God from bringing His purposes of blessing to their glorious fulfilment. As in the story of Ruth all leads to the day of the marriage, so in Israel all is leading to the establishment of their relationship with Christ, and so too, the Church is moving on to the great day of the marriage of the Lamb.

Typically the Book of Ruth sets forth the fulfilment of all the promises of God in connection with Israel on the ground of sovereign grace, after the nation had lost every claim to blessing on the ground of their responsibility. It thus presents a striking contrast to the preceding Book. The Book of Judges sets forth the ever increasing failure of man, in spite of the intervention and help of God, ending in scenes of darkest gloom and moral degradation. The Book of Ruth presents the activities of the grace of God, in spite of the failure of man, ending in a scene of joy and blessing.

Apart, however, from its historical and typical import, the story of Ruth is rich with moral and spiritual instruction in which we learn something of the faithful and gracious ways of God in the history of our souls, whether in bringing us out of nature's darkness into the light of His purpose for us in Christ, or whether it be His ways of restoring grace when we have wandered far from Him. It is mainly in view of the moral instruction that we would for a while meditate upon this touching story.

RUTH THE STRANGER

Ruth 1

"The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind: the LORD raiseth them that are bowed down. . . The LORD preserveth the strangers; He relieveth the fatherless and the widow." (Ps. 146: 8, 9)

From the opening verse we learn that the Book of Ruth deals with events that "came to pass in the days when the judges ruled." From the last verse of the preceding Book we learn that the days of the judges were marked by two things. First, "in those days there was no king in Israel." Second, "every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

Serious indeed is the condition of any country that has given up kingship involving, as it must, a people without a directing head or governing authority. Where such is the case it follows that every man does that which is right in his own eyes ending in nothing being right that is done.

The loss of kingship involves the rise of democracy leading to the reign of self-will, the flinging aside of all restraint and the indulgence of every kind of license. To such a condition were the people of God reduced in the days of the judges. Alas! in very many respects this low condition finds its counterpart in the world of our day and amongst the professing people of God. The same principles are at work producing the same results. The self-will of man, impatient of all restraint, is increasingly casting off authority. Kingship is fading before the will of the people every man seeking to do that which is right in his own eyes. Democracy is sapping authority in every department of life. The people are seeking to rule in place of the King and his representatives: men are seeking to rule in place of masters, and children in place of parents. The result being that the whole world system is being demoralised and fast falling into ruin and chaos.

But alas! the same principles that are bringing confusion into the world, are at work amongst the people of God, with the same sorrowful results. Hence we see they too are divided and scattered, and

the work of disintegration still goes on. The exercise of self-will shuts out the authority of the Lord and the direction of the Head. Like the world the mass of Christians do that which is right in their own eyes. These principles were at work even in the days of the Apostle Paul, for he has to warn the saints that they were in danger of not holding the Head, and confesses with sorrow that "all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."

The instant we cease to draw all our supplies from Christ, the ascended Head of His Body the Church: the moment we cease to act under the direction of the Lord and the control of the Spirit, we commence to do that which is right in our own eyes. It may not be that we do anything morally wrong in the eyes of the world, indeed we may be very active in work, and perfectly sincere; but if in our activities the claims of the Lord, and the direction of the Head, are ignored, it will simply be our own wills doing what is right in our own eyes.

The sorrowful result of the low condition of Israel is portrayed in the opening verse of this first chapter. It brought about a "famine in the land." In the land that should have been the place of plenty in this world a land flowing with milk and honey — there was not enough to supply the needs of the people of God.

Alas! the same evils have brought about a similar result in Christendom. Christians, no longer holding the Head, and not giving the Lord His place of authority, have done what they consider best in their own eyes, forming numberless sects in which the people of God are starving for lack of spiritual food. The House of God which should have been a place of plenty, has become in the hands of men, a place of famine.

1.

The time of famine becomes a time of testing for the individual believer. The famine tests our faith. Elimelech was in the land of God's appointment for Israel. The tabernacle was there; the priests were there; the altar was there, but, in the governmental ways of God with His people, the famine was there; and the test for Elimelech was this, could he trust God in the famine and remain in God's appointed path in spite of the famine? Alas, this man of Bethlehem was not equal to the test. He was willing enough to dwell in the land of God's appointment in separation from surrounding nations in the time of plenty, but he abandons the land under the pressure of the famine.

So in the history of the Church many were content to be connected with the people of God, and the testimony of the Lord, when thousands were being converted, when all that believed were of one heart and one soul, and when "great power" and "great grace" was upon all. But when the professing Christians commenced to do that which was right in their own eyes, when all sought their own things, and Paul the great Apostle was in prison, and the gospel in affliction, then indeed the famine set in. And with the famine came the testing time, and under the test the faith of many broke down, for Paul has to say "All they which are in Asia be turned away from me," and again, "all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."

Nor do we escape the testing of the famine in our day. God in His mercy has once again enlightened many as to the true ground on which His people can meet together, and many attracted by the ministry of the word have gladly accepted the path of separation. But when the test comes, when the numbers are few, when the outward weakness is manifest, and there is but little ministry then they find the place too straight for them, the weakness too trying, the conflict too severe. Under the pressure of circumstances they abandon the position and wander into some place of their own choosing in which they hope to find a way of escape from trial, and rest from conflict.

Thus it was with Elimelech. Very significantly his name means, "Whose God is King." It may be that his parents were pious people who, recognising that there was no king in Israel, desired that God should be King to their son. But alas! as so often is the case, we are not true to our names. When the test came Elimelech fails in rendering obedience to the King. If God is King He can sustain in days of famine as well as in days of plenty; but Elimelech's faith was not up to the profession of his name, and so was not equal to the pressure of circumstances. Thus it comes to pass he takes the path of the backslider, and not only so, others are turned aside by his lack of faith. His wife and two sons very naturally follow him.

Having abandoned the land of Jehovah, he wanders into a place of his own choosing. And worse still, having arrived in the land of Moab, he "continued there." It is easier to continue in a false position than to abide in a true one. The place that he chooses is significant. The countries that surround the promised land, doubtless typify the world in different forms. Egypt represents the world with its treasures of wealth and pleasures of sin; and moreover the bondage of Satan that the pursuit of pleasure must always bring. Babylon sets forth the world in its religious corruption. Moab too presents a different phase of the world. Its spiritual significance is indicated by the prophet Jeremiah when he says, "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been poured from vessel to vessel." (Jer. 48: 11). Moab stands for a life of ease in which one seeks quiet retirement from all distraction, where there is little movement, and life flows along without much change. To use the prophet's figure there is no emptying from vessel to vessel.

Egypt with its gross pleasures, and Babylon with its corrupt religion had no attraction for Elimelech. But Moab with its ease, and retirement, made a strong appeal as a way of escape from conflict and trial. And in the presence of the famine Moab is still the great snare for those who have once accepted God's ground for His people. In the presence of the famine such may find the conflict in maintaining the separate path too painful, the constant movement in that path too testing, and they are tempted to give up the good fight of faith and quietly settle down in some retired valley of Moab, no longer to be poured from vessel to vessel, but to stagnate in their own things. But like Elimelech we have to learn, often by painful experience, the bitter result of backsliding.

As we have seen, not only Elimelech came to Moab, with his wife and two sons, but they "continued there." For Elimelech there was no recovery. For him the land of Moab became the valley of the shadow of death. He sought to escape death by famine in the land of Judah, he walked straight into the arms of death in the land of Moab. The very step he took to avoid death brought him into death. A wrong step taken to avoid trouble leads into the trouble we seek to avoid. Moreover to seek rest in this world, even in things in which there is nothing morally wrong, is to seek rest in things which death can take from us, or from which we can be taken by death. Over earth's fairest scenes there is the shadow of death. But Christ is risen, death hath no more dominion over Him, and far better to be with the risen Christ in a famine, than surrounded with this world's plenty in company with death.

Elimelech dies. The sad effects of his false step, however, are not confined to himself. Naomi — his wife, and his two sons had followed him into Moab. The two sons form alliances with the women of Moab, contrary to the law of Jehovah. Ten years pass and then death claims the two sons, and Naomi, bereft of husband and sons, is left a lonely and childless widow in a strange land. The Lord has indeed stripped her and brought her to desolation, but He has not forsaken her. The hand that smote this sore stricken woman was moved by a heart that loved her. The chastening of the Lord prepares the way for her restoration.

2.

If in Elimelech we see the path of the backslider, in Naomi we see the way of restoration. Away from Jehovah's land ten long years she had sought ease in the land of Moab and found only sorrow. But at last the chastening of the Lord had effected its work for we read, "She arose with her daughters-in-law, that she might return from the country of Moab" (v. 6). What moved her to return? Was it the sorrows she had endured and the losses she had sustained? Ah no! it was the good news of the Lord's grace that drew her back. It was when "she had heard . . . how that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread" that "she arose . . . that she might return" (v. 6). Sorrows will not move us to return to the Lord, though they may teach us how bitter it is to wander, and so prepare the heart to listen to the good news concerning the Lord and His grace to His people. It was not the misery and the want, the bitter bondage, the husks and hunger of the far country, that turned the prodigal homeward, but the remembrance of the plenty of the Father's home and the grace of the Father's heart that led him to say, "I will arise and go to my Father." It was not the misery of the far country that *drove* him back, but the grace of the Father's heart that *drew* him back. So with Naomi, in the land of Moab where all had been taken from her, she hears of the land of Judah where the Lord is "giving" to His people. And with the Lord before her she is lifted above all her failure and arose to return. As we sometimes sing, it is

"the thought of Jesus' love

Lifts our poor hearts this weary world above."

Her first step in the homeward path was to get entirely clear of the false associations of Moab. "She went forth out of the place where she was" (v. 7). And this very practical step had an immediate effect upon others. Her two daughters-in-law went "with her." To witness against a false position and yet remain in it, will produce no effect on others. If the place is wrong the first step must be to separate from the false position.

Thus it came to pass in the case of Naomi. She went forth and her two daughters-in-law with her. They leave their wrong associations and they have the right place before them for "they went on their way to return unto the land of Judah."

3.

Alas! separation from a fallen position, and having a right one in view, will not necessarily prove the reality of all who thus act. Of these three women Naomi was a backsliding saint in the way of restoration; Ruth a witness of the sovereign grace of God, marked by faith and devoted affection, and Orpah a fair but empty professor who will never reach the promised land.

Both Ruth and Orpah make a profession of devotedness to Naomi. Both profess to leave the land of their fathers, and both have their faces towards the land of Jehovah. But, as ever, profession is put to the test. Naomi says, "Go, each return to her mother's house" (v. 8). They have opportunity given to return. This will bring to light whether the thought of their minds is in accord with their outward profession. If they are "mindful" of that country from whence they came out they have opportunity to return (Heb. 11: 15). At once the mind of Orpah is revealed. Her heart clings to the land of her birth. Ruth as we shall see desires "a better country." None the less, Orpah makes a fair profession, but only profession. Her feelings were deeply moved, for she lifted up her voice and wept (v. 9): her affections were stirred for she "kissed her mother-in-law" (v. 14): and her words were fair for she said, "Surely we will return with thee to thy people". (v. 10). It is, however, significant that Ruth makes mention of Naomi's God, but with Orpah it is only Naomi, and Naomi's people. Thus it came to pass in spite of her words, her tears, and her kisses, she turns her back in Naomi, and Naomi's God, and the land of blessing and returns to "her people," "her gods," and the land of the shadow of death.

4.

How different the history of Ruth; she becomes the witness of the grace of God. Ruth also makes a good profession; she too utters fair words; she too is deeply moved, for, like Orpah, she lifted up her voice and wept. But with Ruth there is more, for with her are found the "things that accompany salvation," faith, love and hope (Heb. 6: 9-12).

With Orpah there was only the outward expression of love. She could kiss and leave Naomi, even as, at a later date, Judas could kiss and betray the Lord. Of Ruth it is never actually said that she kissed Naomi; but if there was no outward expression of love there was the reality of love, for we read Ruth "clave unto her" (v. 14). Love if real, cannot give up its loved object, and must be in the company of the one that is loved, and hence Ruth adds, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee."

Moreover her faith is equal to her affection. In the energy of faith she overcomes the attraction of the land of her birth, the home of her mother, her people, and her gods. She accepts the pilgrim path, for she says, "Whither thou goest, I will go." She embraces the lot of a stranger, for she says, "Where thou lodgest, I will lodge." She identifies herself with the people of God, "Thy people shall be my people." Above all she puts her trust in the true God, for, she not only says, "Thy people shall be my people," but she adds, "Thy God my God." Death itself cannot turn her back, for she can say, "Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried." In life, and in death, she wholly identifies herself with Naomi, and henceforth claims Naomi's people as her people, and Naomi's God as her God. And all this at a moment when, for sight, she had nothing before her but an old broken-down woman; for as one has said, she casts in her lot "with Naomi in the hour of her widowhood, her strangership and her poverty."

To the prudent man of the world Ruth's choice looks very foolish. To leave the ease of Moab, the comforts of home, and the land of her birth, and take a wilderness journey of which she knows nothing, to a land that she has never seen, in company with a poverty stricken widow, looks indeed the very height of folly. This however, is only the beginning of the story, the end is not yet. It doth not yet appear what she shall be. Faith may take its first step in circumstances of poverty and weakness, but in the end faith will be justified, and have its bright reward, in circumstances of power and glory. At the beginning of the story Ruth is whole-heartedly identified with an aged and desolate widow; in the end she is displayed as the bride of the mighty and wealthy Boaz; and yet more, her name is handed down to all generations enshrined in the genealogy of the Lord.

Moses in his day with every advantage that nature could confer, with all the glory of this world within his grasp, became a shining example of like faith. Turning his back on the pleasures of sin and the treasures of Egypt, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, he forsook the world and all its glories to find himself in a wilderness scene in company with a poor and suffering people. What utter folly in the eyes of the world! But in his day faith might truly have said, "It doth not yet appear what he shall be." Faith must wait sixteen centuries before it begins to appear what he shall be; then we are permitted to see Moses appearing in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration in company with the Son of Man the passing vision of a glory that will never pass away. And when at last Moses enters into the coming kingdom glories in company with the King of kings, it will be manifest that the glories of this world which he refused, were small indeed compared with the eternal weight of glory that he gained.

Nor is it otherwise in our day. The path of faith may seem in the sight of this world the very height of folly. To refuse this world's glory to identify oneself with the poor and despised people of God, to go forth unto Christ without the camp bearing His reproach — may appear to human reason,

and natural sight, sheer madness. But faith still replies, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." Faith judges that "our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And faith will have its bright reward; for when at last the day of glory dawns, and faith is changed to sight — when the great day of the marriage of the Lamb is come — then His poor and despised saints will appear with Him, and like Him, as "the Bride, the Lamb's wife."

Moreover, if the things that accompany salvation — faith, love and hope — are in exercise it will result in purpose of heart. It was thus with Ruth; she had no respect to the country she was leaving, no vain regrets, but "was stedfastly minded to go." And thus it came to pass, "they two went until they came to Bethlehem." Good for us if we too, animated by faith, love and hope, forget the things that are behind, reach out to the things that are before, and pursue looking towards the goal for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus.

5.

This portion of the story of Ruth closes very naturally with the reception of a restored soul. We have seen the bitterness of the path of the backslider and traced the Lord's gracious way of restoration. We have now to learn that the true answer to the Lord's restoration is found in reception among the Lord's people. With their faces towards God's land, and God's people, the restored saint, and the newly converted soul, press on "until they came to Bethlehem." And it came to pass when they came to Bethlehem, that *all the city was moved about them.* "Alas! we have to admit there is little power for restoration today, and may it not be it is because there is so little compassion for those who fail? Saints fail, and the evil may be refused, and the evildoer rightly dealt with, but we are very little "moved about them," and hence how seldom the backslider finds his way back to the people of God. The world is full of sad hearts and broken hearts, and wandering saints, and so seldom are they restored, and so little are we moved about them!

Nothing will so complete the work of restoration in a soul, as the compassion of the saints for the soul. It was so with Naomi. The loving reception that she received, opens her heart and draws forth a beautiful confession that attests the reality of her restoration.

1. She owns that however much she had failed the Lord had not given her up. Speaking of the days of her wandering she owns, "The Almighty hath *dealt* . . . with me." We may cease to have dealings with Him, but He loves us too much to cease dealing with us. And well that it is so, for, says the Apostle, "If ye endure chastening God *dealeth* with you as with sons . . . But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." (Heb. 12: 7, 8).

2. Naomi confesses that if the Lord deals with us in our backslidings, these dealings will be very bitter, so she has to add that the Lord dealt with her "*very bitterly.*" So too the Apostle reminds us that "no chastening at the time seemeth to be joyous but grievous" (Heb. 12: 11).

3. Naomi very beautifully takes all the blame for her wanderings. She says, "I *went out.*" In the story we read it was "a certain man went to sojourn in the country of Moab," but she breathes no word against her husband. She does not blame others, and she does not excuse herself.

4. If Naomi takes all the blame for her backsliding, she rightly gives the Lord all the credit of her restoration. She can say, "*The Lord hath brought me back.*" I did the going out and the Lord did the bringing back. And in like spirit, David can say, "He restoreth my soul" (Psalm 23: 3). We may think in our moments of self-confidence, and self-sufficiency that we can return to the Lord when we think well, but no backslider would ever return to the Lord unless the Lord restored. The Lord's prayer for Peter before he failed, and the Lord's look when he had failed, broke Peter's heart and led to his

restoration. Peter followed afar off, and Peter failed, but it was the Lord that brought him back.

5. Moreover, Naomi does not simply say the Lord brought me back, but "The Lord hath brought me *home*." When the Lord brings back it is into all the warmth and love of the home circle. When the Shepherd picked up His lost sheep He brought it to His own home. He seems to say, "Nothing less than my home will do for my sheep."

6. Nevertheless, she has very touchingly to own that though the Lord brought her home, He "brought me home again *empty*." We make no spiritual progress in the days of our wandering from the Lord. The Lord may indeed deal with us to strip us of much that hinders soul progress. As with Naomi we have to confess, "I went *out full*, and the Lord hath brought me home again *empty*." As with all who wander, Naomi has to suffer. Very blessedly she is restored; very truly she gets back to her home, the Lord's people and the Lord's land, but she never gets back her husband and her sons. They are gone for ever. She sought ease and rest from conflict and exercise; she found only death and loss. She was brought back empty.

7. But if the Lord brings us back empty He will bring us back to a place of plenty. It was so with Naomi, for when Naomi returned it was "the beginning of barley harvest."

What a comfort for our hearts to know that if we fail in our compassions to one another, that there is no failure with the Lord. In yet a little while the Lord will bring home His poor wandering sheep, not one will be lacking at last. Then, in love's eternal home, we shall enjoy the fulness of heaven's great harvest — it will be the "beginning" of a harvest of blessing and joy that will have no end.

RUTH THE GLEANER

Ruth 2

"When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest . . . thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger" (Lev. 19: 9, 10).

If in its beginning the story of Ruth portrays the grace that saves, this portion sets forth the grace that sustains. The grace of God not only brings salvation to us but, having done so, it teaches us to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. As we come under the teaching of grace so shall we make spiritual progress. It is this growth in grace, or spiritual progress, that is so attractively illustrated in this chapter.

It is blessed indeed for a young convert to start well by making a definite break with the world and accepting the path of faith in company with the people of God. A good start however, is not enough. If we are to be maintained in the path of faith there must be growth in grace. If, says the Apostle Peter, Christians are to enjoy "grace and peace" in abundance if they are to enjoy all things that pertain to life and godliness, and to escape "the corruption that is in the world through lust" it will only be "through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord" (2 Peter 1: 2-4); therefore he closes his Epistle by exhorting believers to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3: 18).

The Corinthian believers, though they made a good start were very slow in making spiritual progress. They were hindered by worldliness and the wisdom of this world. The Galatians made a good

start, for, says the Apostle, "ye did run well," but he has to ask, "Who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" (Gal. 5: 7). They had been hindered by legality through coming under false teachers. So today many appear to start well and give promise of being devoted Christians, but, alas! in after life they make little soul progress. They do not grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They fall before the attractions of the world and become worldly, or under the influence of false teachers and become legal.

This portion of Ruth's story will discover to us the secret of *growth in grace*. Here it is evident that Ruth is viewed as a gleaner. In verse 2 we find her saying to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and *glean*." In verse 7 she says to the servant, "Let me *glean*." In verse 17 we read, "So she *gleaned*," and again in the last verse, "So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to *glean*."

Ruth then is presented as a gleaner. But what is the spiritual significance of gleaning? We must remember that the first chapter ends by telling us that it was "the beginning of barley harvest." Naomi and Ruth found themselves in the midst of plenty. But however plentiful the harvest unless gathered in it will be useless to feed the hungry. The reapers and the gleaners must do their work or otherwise they will starve in the midst of plenty. By gleaning Ruth appropriated for her own need, and that of Naomi, the rich supply put at their disposal by the lord of the harvest.

May we not therefore say that spiritually gleaning sets forth the appropriation by the believer of the spiritual blessings to which God has given him a title. In the history of Israel God gave that nation an absolute title to the land, the boundaries of which were set forth with great exactness; nevertheless God said, "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon that have I given you." They had to take possession. So too Paul can say with the utmost confidence that believers are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, but this did not hinder him from praying that there might be a special work, by the Holy Spirit in the inner man, in order that the saints might comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of all these spiritual blessings.

It was a wonderful day in our history when the Lord called us to Himself, and we learned that our sins were forgiven, and we were sealed with the Holy Spirit and were thus made meet to be partakers of the portion of the saints in light; and though there can be no growth in meetness for the glory, yet the Apostle does look for growth by the true knowledge of God (Col. 1: 10, N. Tr.). And yet, alas! what poor gleaners we have been. How little we have entered into the unsearchable riches of Christ.

2.

How is it we have been such poor gleaners? Is it not that gleaning demands conditions with which we are not always prepared to comply. This becomes manifest as we note the qualities which made Ruth such an excellent gleaner.

First she was marked by a spirit of *humility and subjection*. She says to Naomi, "Let me now go," and again she says to the servant, "Let me glean." She did not act independently of others who were older and more experienced than herself. She did not despise guidance and counsel. She did not suffer from an unbroken will, leading her to do that which was right in her own eyes. Peter can say, "Ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5: 5). Subjection and humility are linked together by the Spirit of God. The proud man does not like to submit to anyone. An unbroken will is the greatest hindrance to growth in grace.

Secondly, Ruth was marked by *diligence*. As we read in verse 7, "She came and hath continued even from the morning until now, her sitting in the house hath been little as yet" (N. Tr.). Again in

verse 17 we read, "She gleaned in the field until even." Is there not a great lack of diligence with believers in the things of God? We are diligent enough in the things of this world, but alas, the things of the Lord too often have only the odd moments of our lives. Are we diligent in the study of the Word? Are we diligent in prayer? We may plead that the hurry and difficulties of life leave but little time, but the question is still, How do we spend the little time that we have? In Heb. 6: 11, the writer exhorts to diligence and then adds, "Be not slothful but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." If we desire to enter into the enjoyment of our inheritance we must be diligent. Small wonder if we make but little soul progress when we can find time to read the daily news, and light literature of this world, and yet find no time to glean in the rich pastures of God's holy Word.

Thirdly, Ruth was *persevering*. She was not diligent one day and slothful the next, but "she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of the barley harvest and of wheat harvest." Day after day she gleaned until the end of both the barley and the wheat harvest. The Bereans were specially commended not simply for searching the Scriptures, but because they did so daily (Acts 17: 11). It is easy to be diligent for one day, but to be diligent day after day calls for perseverance. Daily is a hard and testing word. Let the disciple "take up his cross daily," said the Lord. To put forth some great effort to make some heroic sacrifice, is comparatively easy but to go on quietly day after day following Christ is the test. It is not the man that starts well that wins the race but the man that perseveres.

Finally, we read that Ruth "*beat out* that she had gleaned" (verse 17). It is not enough to glean the barley and the wheat, it must be beaten out. The truth we gather whether through our private study, or from the ministry of others, must become the subject of prayer and meditation if it is to promote spiritual growth. The mere acquisition of truth will only puff up. It must be enjoyed in communion with the Lord if it is to lead into further knowledge of the Lord.

Thus in order to make spiritual progress a condition of soul is called for marked by subjection, diligence, perseverance and meditation .

Moreover, the condition of the individual soul, while of the first importance, is not all. There is the help which we derive from others that promotes spiritual progress. This is strikingly seen in the different characters that pass before us in this chapter. Naomi, the maidens, the reapers, the servant set over the reapers, and finally Boaz the mighty man of wealth, all pass before us, and all are viewed in connection with Ruth. In different ways all are helping her to glean, bringing before us the different means that are set in activity by Christ to promote the spiritual growth in grace of His beloved people.

3.

Naomi had long been in relationship with Boaz, and is able to advise and instruct Ruth. So now there are those who have been long on the way, in relationship with Christ; and though they may have failed much (like Naomi) yet they are fitted by experience to instruct and counsel the younger saints. Naomi hardly sets forth one gifted to teach or preach but rather those aged saints, of whom we read in the second chapter of Titus, who are to be examples to others, "teachers of good things," and able to give loving advice to the younger women. In the spirit of these verses, Naomi, raising no difficulties, placing no hindrances in her way, at once says, "Go, my daughter." She encourages Ruth in this happy work. Moreover, on Ruth's return from her labours she gladly recognises her progress, for we read "she saw what she had gleaned" (v. 18). Further she interests herself in Ruth's progress, for she enquires, "Where hast thou gleaned today? And where wroughtest thou?" (v. 19). Lastly she enlightens Ruth as to Boaz and gives her loving counsel as to her gleaning (vv. 20, 22). Would that there were a little more of the spirit of Naomi leading the elder saints to care for the younger, to encourage them, take note of their progress, enquire after their spiritual welfare, instruct them in the knowledge of Christ, and

counsel them as to their gleaning.

4.

The maidens also help in this happy work of gleaning. They come before us in verses 8, 22 and 23. They are the companions with whom Ruth gleaned. Do they not speak, in a picture, of that happy fellowship and communion between the Lord's people which so greatly helps in promoting spiritual progress?

Boaz warns Ruth "Not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens." There are other fields and other maidens, but they are strangers to Boaz. Whether young or old in the path of faith we do well to heed the warning of Boaz. For the world has many an attractive field and can offer very pleasant company at times, but the world's fair fields and the world's vain company are not of Christ. In the days of the Apostles the world gave them but a prison, and when set free they went to their *own company*. Of necessity we have to do with men of the world in relation to business and the affairs of this life, but it is not in that circle that we can enjoy sweet fellowship and make spiritual progress. This alone can be found in our "own company," the company of the Lord's people. In the early days of Christianity the unbroken fellowship of God's people resulted in "great power" and "great grace." In Hebrews 10 we are exhorted to "Consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching." The saints are not the source of love and good works but the company of the saints certainly promotes love and good works. The day of judgment for this world is approaching, hence we do well to part with this world's company, and find our happy portion with "the maidens of Boaz," those who are undefiled and have kept their garments white. The nearer the day, the nearer we should draw to one another.

5.

The reapers also have their service in connection with Ruth. They pass before us in verses 4, 5-7, 9 and 21. They were the servants of Boaz and vividly set before us the characteristics that should mark the servants of the Lord who addict themselves to ministry for the help of the Lord's people.

The first necessity for every servant of the Lord is the presence of the Lord. So we find Boaz greeting his reapers with the beautiful desire "The Lord be with you" (v.4). And in like spirit we read in the gospel day, "They went forth, and preached everywhere, *the Lord working with them*" (Mark 16: 20).

Second, for the service of Boaz to be effectually accomplished there must be subjection to the servant set over the reapers. We need not only the Lord with us but also the control of the Spirit, the Divine Person that is prefigured by the nameless servant (v. 5).

Third, the reapers go before, and Ruth follows after, as she can say, "Let me glean and gather after the reapers." Scripture recognises that there are those among the people of God who lead spiritually, who have spoken to us the Word of God and whose faith we are told to follow. Such we are to obey and to such submit, for they watch for our souls (Heb. 13: 7, 17).

Fourth, these young men — the servants of Boaz — draw water out of wells. It was the privilege of Ruth to drink the water, but it was the responsibility of the young men to draw the water. Not all are called, or fitted, to draw water out of the deep wells of God, but all can drink of the water when placed in vessels suited to their capacity. The water in the well is beyond the reach of many; the water in the vessel is available for all. And so the word to Ruth is, "*Go unto the vessels and drink.*" Timothy was to "meditate upon these things," to give himself "wholly to them." This surely was drawing water from

the well. But his "profiting" was to "appear to all." This was the water in the vessel available for all (1 Tim. 4: 15).

Fifth, in order that the reapers may be fitted for their service they receive special directions from their master. "Boaz *commanded* his young men saying, Let her glean among the sheaves, and reproach her not: and let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not" (vv. 15, 16). The special need of individuals will call for special directions from the Lord. How near the servant must be to the Master, if in the course of his service, he is to know how to let fall a special handful, for a special need, without "reproach" and without "rebuke." The Lord in this, as in all else, is our perfect example. When, on the resurrection day, He sends a message to Peter saying, "Go your way, tell His disciples, *and Peter*," was He not with infinite perfection letting fall a "handful of purpose" for a poor wandering sheep, without "reproach" and without "rebuke" (Mark 16: 7).

Lastly, the labours of the reapers will end the harvest, for Boaz instructs Ruth to keep fast by my young men, until "they have ended all my harvest" (v. 21). And as it was with the servants of Boaz so will it be with the servants of the Lord, for the Apostle used the glorious hope that is set before us to energise the servants in their service. "Therefore, my beloved brethren be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15: 58).

6.

The servant of Boaz, set over the reapers, also has his place in connection with the progress of Ruth in gleaning. He is nameless and little seen and yet is behind all, on behalf of Boaz, controlling every reaper in the fields of Boaz. Furthermore, he brings Ruth into touch with Boaz, conversing with Boaz about Ruth. The servant too is in perfect accord with the mind of Boaz. He acquaints Boaz with the truth, but utters no word to her disparagement, and anticipates the mind of Boaz in encouraging Ruth to glean in the fields of Boaz. Surely a striking type of that great Person the Holy Spirit who has come from the glorified Christ in the name of Christ to represent the interests of Christ. One who does not speak of Himself, who is unseen by the world, but who controls the servants of the Lord and, by His gracious work in souls, brings into contact with Christ. He is One who has come to earth in the interests of Christ, and who thinks and acts in perfect accord with the mind and heart of the Father and the Son.

7.

Lastly we have Boaz presenting Christ in a twofold way First in the glory of His Person and work, and second in His gracious dealings with us individually.

Personally Boaz is represented as "a kinsman" and a "mighty man of wealth." The word "kinsman" used so many times in the Book of Ruth, is elsewhere translated "redeemer" a word that gives the true import of the kinsman's service. The kinsman had the right, and the power, to redeem his brother and his brother's inheritance, if either had passed into the hands of a stranger.

By the fall man has lost all right to the earthly inheritance and he himself has come under the power of the enemy and, as a guilty sinner, is exposed to death and judgment. He has power neither to redeem himself, nor the earth, from the power of sin, death or Satan. He needs a redeemer, one who has the right as well as the power to redeem. Christ is the great Redeemer, the One of whom Boaz was but a type. He redeems His people by purchase and by power. The price He paid was His own life given for us, "We have been redeemed not with corruptible things as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot." Further He redeemed by power, for

not only was His blood shed, but, by resurrection, He annulled the power of death and the grave. Already redeemed by blood we wait to be redeemed by power, for that moment when He delivers these mortal bodies from all trace of mortality by changing our bodies of humiliation, and fashioning like unto His own body of glory according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself. Finally we shall have the inheritance — a rich possession which He has purchased — which He will redeem from the power of sin and death and Satan, and the enjoyment of which we shall share in association with Christ unto the praise of His glory (Eph. 1: 14).

8.

Moreover, in Boaz, we have not only the foreshadowing of the glories of our great Redeemer, but a beautiful unfolding of the gracious ways of the Lord in His dealings with us individually. It is our privilege not only to learn the truth as to His Person and work, but to experience His gracious dealings by which we are led into the knowledge of Himself. Would that all believers sought to have a more definite soul history with Christ in secret — a history that they could not say much about to others — known only to Christ and the soul with which no stranger intermeddles.

Of such personal dealings with the soul we have a foreshadowing in the gracious ways of Boaz the man of wealth with Ruth the stranger.

These ways are marked by grace and truth, bringing before us the One who came by grace and truth. In our weakness we may show grace at the expense of truth, or maintain truth at the expense of grace. With Christ there is the infinite expression of grace with the perfect maintenance of truth.

With touching grace Boaz places all his riches at the disposal of the stranger from Moab — one who, according to the letter of the law, was not to enter the congregation of the Lord until the tenth generation (Deut. 23: 3). His fields, his maidens, his young men, his wells, his corn, all are at the disposal of Ruth. She is to abide in his fields, to keep fast by his maidens, to glean after his young men, and to drink from his well. He utters no word concerning her origin, her strangership or her poverty. No word of reproach for the past, no threats as to the future, no claims upon her for present bounty, all is given in sovereign unbounded grace. Nor is it otherwise in the dealings of Christ with sinners such as ourselves. Grace puts heaven's best gifts at the disposal of a sinful woman at Sychar's well; grace commanded the fish of the sea for a man full of sin like Peter; and grace opens paradise of God to the dying thief. And so grace has blessed us with all the unsearchable riches of Christ without money and without price.

But as we well know the riches of grace do not dim the lustre of truth. Yea, it is the grace that calls forth the truth. There is no need for Boaz to remind this stranger of her lowly origin. She herself confesses the truth, but it is the grace of Boaz that draws forth the confession. She falls on her face before Boaz, thus effacing herself in the consciousness of the greatness of the person in whose presence she is, one to whom she owes every blessing. She owns by her question, "Why have I found grace in thine eyes?" that there is nothing in herself to merit such grace. And she owns by nature she has no claim upon Boaz, for she confesses "I am a stranger." Alone in the presence of the grace of Boaz, she gives him his true place and she takes her true place, reminding us of other shining examples of the ways of grace and truth in the days of our Lord.

If grace tells a poor sinner of the free gift of the living water springing up into everlasting life, it will also call forth the truth as to herself. That word of Jesus, "Go call thy husband," was truth telling her all things that ever she did, and that other word, "Come hither," was grace making her welcome to all the love of the heart of God. The truth revealed to her the vileness of her heart, but grace revealed to her a heart that, knowing all things that ever she did, could yet love her and make her welcome to come

to Him.

And thus on another occasion, with another woman — one, who, like Ruth, was a stranger, a woman of Canaan — we see the display of these same ways of grace and truth. The disciples would have maintained truth at the expense of grace. They said, "Send her away." Not so the Lord, and yet He will not dispense grace at the cost of truth. Hence He so deals with her that the truth is drawn out from her own lips, for she is brought to confess, "Truth Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." She owns the truth that she is but a dog, but she sees the grace in the Lord that would not deny a crumb to a dog. The grace in the Lord leads her to own the truth as to herself. And she has the reward of faith, for the Lord, delighting to respond to such a claim upon His grace, can say, "Woman great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt" (Matt. 15: 21-28).

Blessed indeed the moment in our history, when alone in the presence of the Lord we are made conscious of the vileness of our hearts in the presence of the grace of His heart. To learn in such moments that however vile we may be there is grace in His heart to meet it all.

Thus it was that Boaz comforted the heart of Ruth. She has owned the truth, "I am but a stranger," and Boaz seems to say you can tell me nothing about yourself that I do not know; "It hath been fully shewed me, all that thou hast done" (v. 11). There is no lingering fear left in her mind that some day something may be disclosed as to the past which will lead Boaz to recall the gifts of grace. Set free she can say, "Thou hast comforted me," "Thou hast spoken to the heart" (margin). Nothing so touches the heart, so wins the heart, or so comforts the heart, as to learn in the presence of the Lord He that knows all, and yet He loves me.

9.

This, however, does not close this portion of Ruth's story. Grace has been shown by Boaz, truth has been confessed by Ruth, and this indeed has brought peace to the conscience and joy to the heart, but this is not all. Boaz is not content with bringing relief to Ruth and then leaving her with a heart filled with gratitude. Even if this satisfied her heart it would not satisfy his heart. If she expected no further blessing, he had yet more to bestow. Boaz will not be content without the company of the one to whose heart he has spoken. Thus it is he can say, "Come thou hither." And in a deeper way is it not thus that the Lord deals with us? If He breaks down our fears, speaks to our hearts, and wins our affections, it is in order to have our company. Love is not content without the company of the one that is loved. To this end He died that whether we wake or sleep we might live together *with* Him. Happy then for us if we too hear and heed the gracious invitation, "Come thou hither."

So it came to pass Ruth sat down in the company of a people that heretofore she had not known. But if "she sat beside the reapers" she did so in the company of Boaz, for we read "*he* reached her parched corn." Happy for us if we sit down in the company of the Lord's people conscious of the presence of the Lord Himself. Then indeed we shall feed on the corn of the land. We shall, like Ruth, be "sufficed" and "reserve some" (v. 14, N. Tr.). In His presence our souls are fed, our hearts are satisfied, and the satisfied heart will have of its fulness to give to others.

RUTH THE BRIDE

Ruth 3 & Ruth 4

"The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with

joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing" (Zephaniah 3: 17).

Gleaning, as we have seen, is the great subject of the second chapter. Rest is the theme of the last two chapters. In the opening verse of chapter 3, the word is used in connection with Ruth, "My daughter shall I not seek rest for thee." In the closing verse it is used in connection with Boaz, "The man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day."

There is doubtless an orderly progress in the truths presented in the four chapters of the Book of Ruth.

In Ruth 1, Ruth sets forth the faith, love and devoted energy. of a newly converted soul.

In Ruth 2, Ruth presents a picture of the growth in grace by which the believer makes spiritual progress.

In Ruth 3, Ruth is seeking the rest of heart that will alone bring satisfaction to the believer.

In chapter 4, the story of Ruth closes with the rest secured, setting forth the way that God's rest is reached for Christ and the believer.

1.

Gleaning in the fields of Boaz, and receiving blessings from the hand of Boaz, however happy and right, will not give full rest and satisfaction to the heart either of Boaz or Ruth. Nothing will give rest to the heart but the possession of the one that is loved. Hence, in chapter 3, Ruth is seeking to gain Boaz, and Boaz is working to possess Ruth. Love can never be satisfied with gifts, however precious; it must have the giver.

In his former dealings Boaz had shewn marvellous grace to Ruth. He had put at her disposal his fields, his corn, his maidens, and his young men. He had given her water from his well, parched corn from his table, and handfuls let fall of purpose. All these blessings, however, had not satisfied her heart. They had indeed won her confidence, and drawn out her affections. But once the affections have been won nothing but the possession of the Person who has won them will satisfy the heart. This is equally true whether in Divine or human relationships. The grace and gifts by which Boaz kindled the affections of Ruth would not in themselves satisfy these affections. It is the possession of the Blesser not the blessings that gives satisfaction to the heart.

Thus it is in the Lord's ways with believers. He so deals with us that we are brought to see that He is greater than all the blessings He bestows. Happy for us when we learn that blessings in themselves cannot satisfy. Christ alone can satisfy the heart.

Was not this the great lesson that Peter had to learn in Luke 5? The Lord bestowed a great temporal blessing upon Peter. He gave him the biggest catch of fish he had ever had. It was a blessing beyond the capacity of nets and boats to contain, and yet in that very gift the Lord so revealed Himself to Peter that He became greater in Peter's estimation than the blessings He had given; for immediately afterwards we read, he "forsook all and followed Him." What! left the fish that the Lord had given? Yes, he left all — nets, boats, and fish — and followed Him. If ever there was a catch of fish that Peter had a right to keep, it was the catch of fish the Lord had given. But he forsook the blessings to follow the Blesser.

So with another humble believer, Mary Magdalene. She had been completely under the power of the devil, for the Lord had cast out of her seven demons. She had been greatly blessed but her heart had been won to the Blesser. Thus at the empty tomb, when the disciples went away to "their own home,"

Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping. Blessings were not enough for Mary; she could find no rest in this world without Christ. With Him she was happy, without Him she was desolate.

In like manner the Lord dealt with the man who was once a blasphemer of Christ and a persecutor of the saints. Grace reached and blessed him in such manner that Christ became greater to him than all the blessings that Christ could give. His desire is expressed in the words, "that I may know I Him," and again, "that I may win Christ." He is not content to know all the blessings to which Christ has given Him a title; he must know the Giver of the blessings. He is not content to win heaven at last, but he must win the One who has made his heaven secure.

Alas! how slow we are to learn that Christ, and only Christ, can satisfy our heart's desire. At times we seek rest in our spiritual blessings. Our efforts are directed to keeping bright in our souls the joy of conversion, and the sense of the blessings we have received. But right as it is to be in the joy of salvation, all such efforts are doomed to failure. We cannot (and God never intended that we should) enjoy the blessings apart from the Blessor. Every blessing that we have received is set forth in Christ, and can only be enjoyed in company with Christ.

Others seek satisfaction in a busy round of service. Would that we were all busy in the Lord's service; but if pursued with the object of finding rest, we shall only find, like Martha, that we get distracted rather than find rest. Service is good but it will not satisfy the heart.

Others again seek some passing satisfaction in the vain things of this passing world, only to find that the more we surround ourselves with the things of earth the more we increase our cares, rather than find rest of heart. The prophet truly says. "Arise ye and depart; for this is not your rest; because it is polluted" (Micah 2: 10). Again we say, Christ alone can Satisfy the heart.

Thus from one cause or another we are compelled to admit that as Christians we know little true satisfaction of heart. Saved indeed every true Christian is, but it is one thing to be saved and quite another to be satisfied. Saved by the work of Christ we can only find satisfaction in the Person of Christ. The measure in which we are enjoying the company of Christ is the measure of our rest and satisfaction. Full and complete satisfaction will only be known when that great day dawns of which it is said, "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready." In a mystery this great truth passes before us in the closing portion of the beautiful story of Ruth. The first two chapters have told us in picture how love for Christ is awakened. The last two chapters will tell us how love is satisfied.

2.

First let us note the instruction that Ruth receives from Naomi (vv. 1-5). Ruth learns the secret of rest in order that it may be well with her. First Naomi engages her thoughts with Boaz, telling her who he is, and what he is doing. She says, "he is of our *kindred*." She says as it were, "He is ours and we have a claim upon him." And we can say that Christ is ours, for has He not become flesh and dwelt among us, and died for us, and as risen He calls us His brethren? He can say to Mary, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and to your God."

Further, Naomi tells Ruth what he is doing: "Behold he winnoweth barley tonight in the threshing floor." And, if we may so say, all through the long dark night, our Kinsman, our Boaz, has been winnowing barley. The Lord Jesus is not occupied with the chaff today. He will deal in judgment with the chaff in a coming day? but at this moment He is occupied with His own, "He is winnowing barley." In other words He is sanctifying the Church, in view of presenting the Church to Himself not having

spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The Lord on high is engaged with His own in view of the coming day.

Having reminded Ruth of her claim upon Boaz, Naomi proceeds to instruct her as to the suited condition for the company of Boaz. Realising that we are of Christ's kindred that we belong to Him and He is for us we shall surely desire His company. The conscious sense of His presence, however, calls for a suited condition of soul set forth in picture by Naomi's instructions to Ruth, when she says, "Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee."

The first necessity to "wash thyself" — carries our thoughts to the feet washing of John 13. John must first have his feet washed before he can lean on Jesus' bosom. Feet washing must come before heart resting. The Lord had to say to Peter, "It I wash thee not thou hast *no part with Me.*" Part in Him we have through His work, but to have part with Him to enjoy communion with Him in the home to which He has gone we must have our feet washed, and in this alas, we are so often careless. We allow the defiling influences of the world to creep in and drag our affections down to the things of the earth. Neglecting feet washing the defilements increase until our minds are so clogged, and our affections so dulled that communion with Christ becomes a rare or unknown thing. Let us heed the Lord's warning words, "If ye know these things happy are ye if ye *do them.*" It would not have been enough for Ruth to accept the instruction to wash; she must carry it out. So too, the good of John 13 does not lie in the knowledge of the truth but in its practice.

But more is needed: having washed, Ruth is to anoint herself. It is not enough to cleanse the mind from defiling influences, but we need to remember the Apostle's exhortation, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are noble, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, *think on these things.*" Washing is negative; it removes defilement. Anointing is positive, it leaves a sweet odour. Not only do we need to have our minds and affections cleansed from defiling influences, but to have them occupied with the things of Christ that there may be about us an odour of Christ that is suited to the company of Christ.

Following the anointing, Naomi says, "Put thy raiment upon thee." Does not this speak of the fine linen which is the practical righteousness of the saints? If the eighth verse of Philippians 4 speaks of the anointing, does not the following verse give us the answer to the raiment - the practical righteousness? There the Apostle says, "Those things which ye have both learned and received, and heard and seen in me *do.*" The keyword in Philippians 4: 8 is "think"; the keyword of verse 9 is "do". Had we a deeper sense of the loveliness of Christ should we not covet with more earnest desire His company and the conscious sense of His presence? And such desires would lead to more exercise that our thoughts and affections, our words and ways, might be kept from all defiling influences, and engaged with that which is suited to Christ.

Having become suited to the presence of Boaz, Ruth's course is plain. She is to lie down at the feet of Boaz and listen to his words, as Naomi says, "He will tell thee what thou shalt do." Does this not carry us in thought to that lovely scene at Bethany described in Luke 10, where we read of Mary, that she "sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word." Is not this the great lack today! In the hurry and bustle of life there is little time for being alone with the Lord to hear His word. Nevertheless the Lord says it is the "one thing needful". May we hear the voice of the Lord through Naomi, and like Ruth answer, "All that thou sayest unto me I will do." Thus "washed", "anointed", and clothed may we sit in His presence and hear His word.

3.

Having reached the moment when Ruth is found at the feet of Boaz the story is naturally more concerned with what Boaz does. He works to satisfy the desires that his love and grace have raised, but he will also work for the satisfaction of his own heart. All this brings before us the far deeper mystery of Christ and His desires for His Church. Nothing will satisfy His heart but having His saints with Him and like Him. His love must have the company of His loved ones. We are going to heaven because love wants us there. It did not satisfy the heart of the father to remove the rags from the prodigal son and meet his needs: he must have him in his own company suited to his presence, with the best robe, the shoes on his feet, and the ring on his hand. Nor does it satisfy the heart of Christ to deliver us from judgment and clear us from our sins, but He must have us *with Him* and *like Him*.

It was with this end He gathered souls around Him as He passed through this world, for when He called the twelve it was first of all that they should be "*with Him*" (Mark 3: 14).

It was for this He prayed when He said, "Father I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be *with Me* where I am."

It was for this He died, that "whether we wake or sleep we should live together *with Him*" (1 Thess. 5: 10).

It is with this end that He serves His people today, washing our feet that we might have part *with Him*. It is this end that He has in view when He puts one of His saints to sleep, to depart and be "*with Christ*."

And when at last the Lord comes into the clouds to call us home, it is to receive us unto Himself that where He is we might be also, "*for ever with the Lord*."

This then is the blessed truth that we learn at His feet. Not only that we want Him, but that He wants us. Small wonder that we should want Him, but an everlasting wonder that He should want us. Mary learnt at His feet that He can dispense with all our service but He cannot do without ourselves. "I am my Beloved's and His desire is toward me," is the great and glorious truth that we learn at His feet. And so Ruth tells us of this same truth for at the feet of Boaz she learnt not only that she longed for Boaz but that Boaz longed for her. And having learnt this she can "sit still" and wait for Boaz to finish the thing (v. 18).

4.

Deeply significant is the way that Boaz takes to secure rest and satisfaction for his own heart and the heart of Ruth. There is what he does with Ruth, followed by the work He does for Ruth. In chapter 2 he wins her affection; in chapter 3 he gives her holy boldness to gratify the affection he has won.

First, having refused all others and followed Boaz, she is assured of blessing, "Blessed be thou" (v. 10). Second, he removes every trace of fear from her heart, saying, "Fear not" (v. 11). Then she is assured that every hindrance to the fulfilment of all his purpose will be overcome (vv. 12, 13). In the meantime he richly supplies all her need. He gives her six measures of barley. When she sought her own blessing she obtained one measure of barley (2: 17); when she sought Boaz himself she gets "six measures of barley." But still it is only "six," not seven, the complete number. No amount of barley can give complete satisfaction.

Thus it is that the Lord acts with His own today. Is there not a special blessing for those who have learnt the great secret that the Lord wants us for Himself? Does not this remove all fear, give us holy boldness, and assure our hearts that no hindrance can stand in the way of the fulfilment of His purpose for us? In the meantime He meets our every need and thus enables us, like Ruth to "sit still" in the

knowledge that He will not be in rest until He has finished that which He has begun. "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1: 6).

5.

In the last chapter we learn how Boaz wrought for Ruth. In this work Ruth had no part. Boaz is seen alone when he goes "up to the gate" (v. 1). The gate was the place where judgment was dispensed. For justice must be satisfied before Ruth can be blessed, or the purpose of Boaz fulfilled. At the gate Boaz meets and settles every question that can be raised. Ten witnesses are called. They are told to sit down, as they do nothing but witness to the inability of the first kinsman, but, at the same time witness that his claims have been recognised and met. Does this not pass before us in picture the mighty work of our great Redeemer who alone went "up to the gate," the place of judgment? There, on the Cross, He settled every question between the believer and God. There too fully demonstrated the inadequacy of the law to meet our case, while fully recognising and meeting its just claims.

Thus every hindrance removed, the day of the marriage is reached, when Boaz "took Ruth and she was his wife." "And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses." They witness the blessing of Ruth, but they ascribe power and fame to Boaz; for they say to Boaz, "Acquire power in Ephratah, and make thyself a name in Bethlehem" (v. 11, N. Tr.).

Very blessedly does this happy ending to the story of Ruth foreshadow that great day in view of which the Church has been espoused to Christ, and for which we yet wait — the day of which we read "the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready." As the prophet John looks at this great vision he hears again as it were the praise of "the people that were in the gate and the elders," though now the praise has swollen to a mighty song of infinite power, for John heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord our God the Almighty has taken to Himself kingly power. Let us be glad and rejoice and give honour to Him.

The day of the marriage of the Lamb will be the great answer to the work of redemption. The glory is the answer to the cross. In that day the Bride will be infinitely blessed, but the Lamb will acquire power and fame. All the glory will be His, but more, in that great day the Lord Jesus will see of the fruit of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied. We too shall behold His face in righteousness and we shall be satisfied when we awake in His likeness.

Oh day of wondrous promise,
The Bridegroom and the Bride,
Are seen in glory ever,
And love is satisfied.

Ruth is a book for all times, whether written in post-exilic days or based upon very old oral traditions. It is set in the time of the judges — not the best ones, if we assign it to the period of Gideon and Samson — and it attempts to define the rights of widows and aliens within a society fallen upon hard times. Read the full text of the Book of Ruth in Hebrew and English on Sefaria. The Book of Leviticus comes to life here, with its injunctions to leave part of the harvest for the needy, and with all of its concern and compassion for the underprivileged within the society.