Notes on Ruth

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Ruth

From: Lectures Introductory to the Earlier Historical Books of the Old Testament.

That the book of Ruth stands most fitly in the place where it is actually found must have been felt by the spiritual mind. Indeed it is apparent to every attentive reader of Scripture; for by outward marks it clearly belongs to the place where God has presented it to us. As to the time of what is brought before us, it belongs to the days of the Judges, as we are expressly told, and thus was clearly before the immense change which God was pleased to bring in and to have recorded for our instruction in 1 Samuel. Nevertheless, its character being singularly different from that which we find in Judges, none need wonder that it stands in a distinct book.

It is true that there is an old tradition that it formerly belonged to the book of Judges, but I doubt the fact extremely, being convinced on internal grounds that it forms a separate book, no matter what that will-o' the-wisp may say; for we can never trust the traditions of men, though of course they may occasionally fall in with truth. There is nothing more certain than that God has shown us the tendency, even of apostles themselves, to fail whenever tradition was leaned on; for we know of a tradition that went forth among the disciples, and this too not before the Lord's death, but after it; but even this, brief as it was, and heard by several witnesses, they failed to hold immaculate. For in consequence there went about a report that the disciple whom the Lord loved was not to die. Now the Lord had said nothing of

the kind. So strikingly does Scripture warn, not only as to the principle, but in fact. There may have been a certain difficulty on the surface of the words uttered, not only because of the immense depth of that which lay underneath the Lord's intimation, but because He saw fit to present it in a form to exercise their thought in pondering His words. But it seems evident that God teaches us by such an instance the valuelessness even of primitive tradition; how much more of subsequent writers, who almost always show the grossest incapacity to understand the plain written word of God! Show another tradition which has such a character as this; and yet Scripture has itself given us here in the most striking way the warning that we are in no case to trust tradition, but only what inspiration has written. If it be found then that it was thus even among the disciples, we certainly dare not trust the Jews. The Lord made use of them, and we have every reason to bless God for His own care of the written word, though committed to man's responsibility.

But while there can, to my mind, be no reasonable question that the book of Ruth fittingly follows the Judges, it is equally plain, I think, to such as give the matter a little reflection, that it appropriately forms a book to itself, and this as the natural and, one may say, necessary prelude to the book that follows. That is, we are here in presence of a wholly different line of truth; so much so that it could easily be proved utterly incongruous to piece on the story of Ruth to anything found in the book of Judges. Indeed, if there be a contrast, as it appears to me, complete and well-defined in this part of Scripture, it is between the real and proper appendix of the book of Judges (Judges 17-21)

and this book of Ruth, which man and tradition tell us once made another supplement. If they can be conceived as so put together, one certainly was the appendix of the most grievous disorders; the other, of the beautiful ways of divine grace. The one exhibits all lawlessness, when there was not even a magistrate in the land that might put them to shame in anything; the other is among the loveliest tales of genuine piety that God Himself has given us, and this not merely in the generous man who does the part of the Kinsman-Redeemer, but also in her who in unobtrusive faith served in love no less than faith where it could be the least expected. Thus does the grace of God meet us in the book of Ruth, clothing itself in its most attractive form, and so much the more giving,, evidence of its power, when we think of the material on which it wrought, in her at least whose name it bears.

Besides, the story itself is of very great importance, as preparing the way, not for David only, but for his greater Son. This, however, does not at all link itself with Judges, admirable as it is where God has given it to us. It is neither a part of Samuel on the one hand, nor of Judges on the other, though morally far more of a preface to the former than a supplement to the latter. It is just what God has made it, a most suitable transition scene between the two, but, in fact, a book to itself on the gracious words of which it is our happy privilege to dwell for a little together.

What is that which we find here? It is not yet the day for royalty on the throne of Jehovah, not even in any imperfect form. Nor is it what we have been seeing — the intervention of grace to deliver the people from time to time from oppression — often in uncomely forms, as

regards the men or measures employed; and I think that every one who has followed with attention the course of Judges must have recognised the truth, when pointed out, that one of the special lessons of that Book is that? although divine mercy wrought in power, the human instrument was marked with some striking drawback.

In the Book before us we see grace working so as to secure promises. There was ruin in Israel; yet a Moabite stranger engages our interest and respect singularly. For, above all, faith was there. It is not a drawback where one might have looked for much, but beauty morally where one could expect nothing. At the very time when even the deliverers that God gave His poor people partook of the utter weakness and of the painful failures then found universally prevalent in Israel, on the other hand He was pleased to magnify His own mercy in a Moabitess. Granted that she was one of those excluded according to law from the congregation of Jehovah. But if law is just and good, grace is better and the only means of rescuing the guilty and fallen from ruin. If the law is suited to break down and expose man in his sinful self-confidence, grace is God’s secret for the lost and wretched to bless and save them. Nevertheless, just because grace suits God’s love and glory, how admirably it suits us, when we are brought down, to renounce self, and to cast our souls on His Son!

In this shape very attractive to faith we shall find the principles of grace throughout the Book of Ruth, brought out as fully as could then be, conspicuously in Ruth, though not in herself exclusively. Even at that time, full of sorrows and of great humiliation for the people, Ruth was not alone. We greatly mistake when we so narrow the intimations of the word of God. We must

leave room for what meets the eye or ear; and surely the day will tell what hidden beauties there were even in the darkest times. What fulness of joy for our hearts when we know as we are known! But it is a joy to take in the hope, and assure ourselves of the largeness of grace now. Traces of this too we may find, unless I am greatly mistaken, in traversing the Book of Ruth.

What then is the great aim and object here? What does the Spirit of God appear to propose to Himself in this short but remarkably delightful book? The state of the people seems to have been one of great distress. There was a famine where least of all it ought to be felt, in the land where God's eyes rested; a famine which surely could not have been but for Israel's profound departure from God. But His mercy would employ it to exercise His people's hearts before Him in self-judgment, as well as in looking to Himself, whose grace is ever above all failure. Sorrowful to have it brought in for their sins; but turned to good, as God knows how to use everything in His grace. So it was then that "a certain man in Bethlehem-Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab." It was not only distresses and oppressions and enemies that afflicted men in the land, as we see was the occasion for deliverance in the Judges throughout, and without exception. Here is the first pointed contrast between it and the Book of Ruth. The pressure is of such a character, at least its effect such, that this Israelite and his wife and sons are found outside the land of the Lord. The name of the man too seems clearly significant, Elimelech — he to whom God is King. Yet was he an outcast for want! A strange and painful anomaly that so it should be; but so it was. Nor need we wonder that a false position in Elimelech is followed by the marriage of

his sons with the women of Moab. It is no longer God shown as specially taking His place, and dwelling in the midst of the people, but now a result deplorable in His people and land.

Thus Naomi brings before us the condition of Israel, to be verified on a larger scale another day, but plainly enough shown in a little summary then; that is, not merely the enemies let loose on the people in the land, but the Israelites themselves, through sheer distress, are seen out of the land. This cannot be denied to have been a novel character of humiliation for Israel — that any who were particularly and publicly identified with the government of God over His people and His land should be forced to quit it because there was no bread to eat there. Elimelech being now dead, all testimony that they had God to govern Israel, as far as he was concerned, is lost. She who ought to have been a pleasant one found bitterness, as she tells us in her desolation and widowhood in a strange land. Most vivid picture of the condition which was ere long to befall Israel! And such we know has been their portion for weary centuries. No doubt their kings contributed to the result; but here it is most strikingly prefigured before they had kings. For great, and in the end gracious, purposes did the principle of royalty come in afterwards; but here God prepares us for the result, if we only look at the unfaithful people. Where was the faith to avail themselves of God’s presence?

Naomi then was left with her two sons: “And they took them wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth.” And thus they continued to dwell for about ten years. After this the sons died also, when the woman Naomi, hearing that

Jehovah had been pleased to give His people bread in His own land, turns back in her heart, lays the case before her daughters, and sets forth for the land. It was then that a most interesting difference comes out; for one of the daughters, though not without natural affection and hence unwillingness to leave her mother-in-law, lets us see that she had no faith in the God of Israel, and accordingly drops behind. Ruth for an opposite reason shines, and so much the more because of lowly unconsciousness of anything as to herself. The liveliest affection to her mother-in-law, and the faithful remembrance of the dead, were there, but above all the mighty attraction of the God of Israel. All these wrought powerfully in the heart of Ruth; and so she in the happiest manner tells out the purpose of her soul to her mother-in-law. Her portion is taken for ever with Naomi. As she said herself — for there are no words capable of expressing the truth so well as those that her heart poured forth with God before her eyes — “Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodges”, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: Jehovah do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.” Out of the abundance of her heart did her mouth speak; and what so sweet as this devotion to the living God, not to speak of the dead, where it could be unlooked for? If Orpah shows us the failings of nature, Ruth certainly the power of grace.

This decided the mother; and they are next seen approaching Bethlehem. All the town was moved for Naomi; but, be sure of this, not less when they reflected on the strange sight of a Moabitess who turned her back

for ever upon her gods and her land and every natural tie, come to take her part with a desolate widow, under the shadow of Jehovah.

That Naomi typifies Israel under the first covenant can scarcely be questioned by any one who admits the prophetic character of scripture; Israel who had experienced a famine in the land, who had lost husband, sons, everything out of it. “Call me Mara; for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.”

And who then is pictured to us by Ruth? What can she be? There is a great difficulty to many minds in the fact that Ruth was a Gentile — a Moabitess. This perplexes them, and it has often led persons in times past to think she must be the church. No doubt if Naomi had been seen clearly by the same principles to represent Israel, they would have been rather confirmed at first sight in their thought; but it is not really so. Ruth does not represent the church. That there is a life flow of the grace of God in this case, that the same grace has gone out beyond measure towards us and brought us in as the body of Christ, is most true; and if people mean nothing more by the church than the objects of divine grace, we can understand why to them it should seem a settled question. There can be no doubt that Ruth does set forth the grace of God towards a stranger who had no claims on His promise or covenant, as being a Gentile, and under the ban of the law expressly.

But I am persuaded that there is profound wisdom in the fact that Ruth does represent, spite of all appearances to the contrary, a Jewish connection. How can this be? For the simple reason that the Jewish people have lost their distinctive title, and are merged amongst the Gentiles.

This is so true that even the prophet Jeremiah, who was called up at a time when God was about to bring in this great change, is distinctly ordained to be a prophet to the nations; and when the cup of trembling is put in his hand by Jehovah (as shown in Jeremiah 25), it is to give to the nations to drink. But who are these “nations”? The very first of them is Judah and Jerusalem. This proves, then, that the judgment of God did put down judicially even His chosen people in the place where their sins had brought them morally.

When Israel ceased to preserve their separateness to Jehovah — when the idols and false gods of the heathen came so to overshadow the true God as to attract their heart, so that, in point of fact, they abandoned the God of Israel, kings as well as people and priests — it is evident that nothing could be more righteous than that God should sentence to public exile from Himself, and from all their old position of favour and comparative possession of His name in their land, those who had already gone away from Him morally, after all discipline had failed to recover them, and there was no remedy. Such indeed is invariably the way of God. He never sentences to a distance from Himself one who has not gone away in heart already. It is only therefore His judicial hand sealing them in the place to which their own unbelief had consigned them. Hence accordingly if it were wanted to indicate the quasi-Gentile position of the Jewish remnant in the latter day — if this had been the object of the Spirit of God — I cannot conceive how it could have been done more effectually or with more graphic power than in the very manner in which the Holy Ghost has here brought the story before us.

Had Ruth been a strictly Jewish woman, or widow, if you please now — had she been of the chosen people rather than of Moab — she could not have set forth the peculiar circumstances out of which the Jewish remnant will be called; for when God begins to work with them in the latter day, in what condition will they be? Loammi — "not my people." Indeed it is the sentence of God on Israel ever since the day of the Babylonish captivity. They were His people before, but not His people from that time; and the evidence to all the world that they were not is given in this, that God handed over imperial power to the golden head of the great image, as we know; that is, to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. When the whole case is thus looked into, it confirms the accuracy of the type, instead of being a difficulty.

The same principle is in other parts of scripture. Take, for instance, a familiar chapter in the New Testament, where the apostle sets forth doctrinally our relation to the Jew. I purposely refer to Romans 11 now as the first example, because there are persons who own their difficulties about the prophecies, but who feel them much less in the epistles. The truth is, they have allowed a false principle to guide them in looking at the prophets. They there endeavour to turn aside Israel, and Judah, and Zion from their regular meaning to other objects quite distinct, the effort being to make all, at least what is bright, apply to the Christian or the church in some form or another. But Romans 11 resists such a diversion from its true channel. For the object of that chapter is to show that the Jewish branches were broken off their own olive-tree because of unbelief; that the Gentile who had been a wild-olive (ourselves, in fact, who had no claim and no privilege previously) became

the object of the divine favour expressly and distinctly, in consequence of Israel having rejected the Messiah and afterwards rejected the gospel. And to what end has God done this? A most merciful one as well as marvellous and wise. He means to bless Israel fully; but when the day is come for it, He will bless them strictly and solely on the ground of mercy. When they repent in truth of heart before God, when they take the place of being no better than the despised Gentiles — that is, when they are broken down to feel their need of mercy, and of nothing but mercy — then are they to become objects of God's restoring grace; "for the gifts and calling of God," as we know, "are without repentance:" God will hold them fast and apply them in his faithfulness. They are indefeasible.

Now, it is precisely this that Ruth, I believe, is intended to set forth. The peculiarity of her origin and of her national condition, the very fact that she was not of the Jews by birth but a Gentile, fitted her to represent the condition of the Jews in the latter day, because, although they had been really of Israel at the beginning, they had lost their place for the time, and He had designated them Lo-ammi; so that, on the very ground of being "Not-His-people," will the mercy of God take them up in the latter day, and bring them into the place of His people, never to forfeit His favour more.

There is a remarkable expression in the prophet Micah that falls in with the same thought, but often misunderstood, where he says, "Then shall the remnant of his brethren return to the children of Israel;" that is, instead of as now having a sort of Gentile place, mixed up with all the other nations (even at best the olive-tree having a Gentile character for the present), the remnant

of those whom the Judge of Israel is not ashamed to call brethren will return to the children of Israel. Thus the whole scene is brought briefly out in the most vivid way before us; and, remarkable to say also, in connection with Bethlehem, the very place that comes before us historically. For the Judge of Israel is seen struck on the cheek; He is put to shame; He is smitten in the house of His friends. And in full accord with other scriptures He is here shown to have a double character. He springs as man from a family in this little village, on the one hand; on the other hand, “His goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” He belongs to the seed of David, the lineage of the king, as we all know, from many prophecies; but, besides that, He has a divine character which none but Himself could possess among those who ruled Israel.

Thus the Judge of Israel here predicted — this singular ruler, who stands alone marked out from all others — is smitten by His brethren; a fact which, after the parenthesis of so momentous a nature just discussed, is followed up by the words, “Therefore will He give them up.” Therein we have their anomalous or Gentile phase since the cross — “therefore will He give them up,” because the distinctive privilege that makes Israel to be Israel is that God owns them as His people; but He who has been thus shamefully rejected by them gives them up, and God puts the seal upon that rejection. They are given up, not only on the ground of idolatry, but here on that of the rejection of Christ the Messiah (the two counts pressed in the later chapters of Isaiah); for after their past unfaithfulness and grievous idolatry He was willing to have taken them up, and made good all the promises, had they received Him. Instead of this they

rejected the Judge who would have been their deliverer. They refused the God of Israel by going after idols. They refused the Judge of Israel, who deigned, though Jehovah, to be man of their own flesh and blood, of the stock of David: “Therefore will He give them up till she which travaileth hath brought forth;” that is, till the accomplishment of the purpose of God which is constantly set forth by a travailing woman.

The abandonment of the Jews as a people by God must be till the man-child is born that will bring joy into the world. This clearly cannot here, and in a few other places, refer to the birth of Christ; for the scripture before us supposes that He had already come and been rejected. The attempt to apply it therefore to His birth, as has been done in a learned book which has recently appeared, and which I was reading only a day or two ago, is evidently fallacious; for Christ must have already come if He be already rejected, and smitten on the cheek. Consequently, according to the context itself, He must have been born before this travail, and the birth there referred, not to the literal nativity of the Messiah, but to the development of that purpose of blessing God will bring out of Israel’s last sorrow. It is clearly the joy that will follow the unparalleled and final tribulation of His people.

Hence when this long-looked-for purpose of God has come to the birth, then, as the prophet puts it, the remnant of the Judge’s brethren shall return unto the children of Israel, instead of being taken out of Jewish relations to form the church, as at Pentecost and since. Whenever a Jew now believes in Jesus he leaves his nationality, and merges his old earthly hopes in higher and heavenly things; but in the latter day it will not be

so. Then only will the type of Ruth be realized. Up to that time they will have long been, as it were, Gentiles, in point of forfeited privileges; but then, instead of being left in so dismal and desolate a condition, they will return to the children of Israel; they will take up the ancient national hopes for which God is waiting, and which depend on His chosen people being put in living relationship with their long-despised Messiah for the glory of the latter day.

This, I think, tends greatly to clear the Book of Ruth for any one who desires to have no system except God's, but would understand it as it is, without warping it to bear on our own circumstances or comfort. The truth is, brethren, that we Christians are so blessed of God, so met in all the fulness of His grace and glory in the Lord Jesus, that in the measure in which we believe it we are capable of understanding His word; but where there is the predisposition to divert scripture to ourselves, we are in the same proportion turned aside from the just interpretation of scripture. In short, the one constant, blessed, and blessing object of scripture is Christ; and where the single eye looks to Him and is filled with Him we shall certainly have the whole body full of light; where, on the contrary, anything of ours is the object that we are searching for in the word of God, so far we are in danger of being a prey to our own thoughts or those of other men.

It appears plain then, that Ruth most naturally was a Gentile, in order fitly to show the condition of the Jewish remnant in the latter day — perhaps, one might say, she must have been one, if the previous Lo-ammi state was to be marked. At the same time we may observe that she was not simply such, but nearly connected with the Jew,

where again we see an element of propriety for the purpose in view. For thus the two things that must have been thought quite heterogeneous and unlikely to be found in the same person seem exactly required to meet in order to give an adequate type of that which was before God in respect of Israel's future. She had been united to a Jew. This undoubtedly was not according to the law, but a manifest irregularity. Was not the history of Israel similarly anomalous? Were not the Jews guilty of no less irregularities? And scripture goes forward worthy of admiration in this as in other respects, that it does not stop, as the rule, to explain the irregularity, never to apologize for it. Scripture assumes that we have confidence in God, and that no saint will take licence from such facts as these. It just simply states them, and leaves us to form a spiritual judgment from the word of God in general upon them. There is nothing that more stamps the divine word than this; whereas, where the source is human, and evil cannot be denied or hidden, you will always find an excuse for this thing and a palliation of that, the result being altogether beneath the dignity of real inspiration. There, on the contrary, God is moving in His love, holiness, and righteous ways, and hence does not require to make apologies. To expect otherwise is an entire forgetfulness that scripture is not the work of the writer, but the word of God. This sort of unbelief is the root of ninety-nine out of a hundred of the difficulties commonly felt.

Ruth then lets us see what I have ventured to call the quasi-Gentile condition of those that will form the remnant: Jews undoubtedly, but Jews that have been out of their land, and dispersed among the nations, where they will have learned their ways, in whom God will

begin to work. He will attract their heart and face towards Himself; He will decide them to turn their back upon the Gentiles' pride and idolatry; He will use the frightful evils of the last days, the antichristian times, to produce true repentance and a cleaving in faith to the God of Israel, and the Branch He has made strong for Himself. This will be the work which grace will then carry forward in the godly Jewish remnant, of whom Ruth, it appears to me, is so clear a prefiguration.

As once by birth and in all her natural associations Ruth had been a Gentile, it was the more clear now that her heart was firmly devoted in love and honour for Jehovah; and this soon brings down the blessing of God upon it; for "Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter. And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech. And, behold, Boaz came from Beth-lehem, and said unto the reapers, Jehovah be with you. And they answered him, Jehovah bless thee." And Boaz, perceiving the stranger, enquires, "Whose damsel is this? And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab: and she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house. Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in

another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens: let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn. Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger? And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been showed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. Jehovah recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of Jehovah God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." (Ruth 2)

Thus we see that where the heart is simple and the eye towards the Lord, He knows how to make it a testimony for Himself. We are apt to mistake by making testimony our object; nor does it really succeed except in the eyes of those who are not competent judges. The real strength and spring and value of testimony is in the self-forgetfulness that is occupied with Christ; and this is beautifully exemplified in the conduct of Ruth. There was nothing more evident in all her conduct than that she gave herself up to the path of simple duty. Nevertheless that duty had an immense dignity stamped on it, because, whilst it was bound up with love to Naomi it was not in her mind separated from the glory of the true God; and when those two qualities unite, how blessed the result! In its own sphere of relations affection is admirable; but when it springs from, and is

guided by God Himself, what a reality it is in such a world as this! And this won the heart of Boaz, who had already heard her good report. Little thought she that a poor and stranger damsel could have had her history brought fully before what man would call the lord of the soil, Boaz — a man, it clearly appears, of admirable character, of good position, and of unsullied honour in the land of Israel. It was strange to the Moabitess to hear that such an one so knew and estimated all. How it must have filled her heart with thankfulness to God who had even thus, had it been all, looked upon Naomi and herself! He who had decided her heart was giving her to feel already that it was no vain thing to trust under the wings of the God of Israel. Why should we ever care for ourselves? Had Ruth sought her own things, she had never found them so well, nor even so fast. How deeply err those who make character their idol, lowering it just as they are self-occupied! Still farther off are they who seek things beneath, like the Gentiles who know not God. It was God before her eyes that gave Ruth such moral weight and grace.

The lowly woman had been seeking to do what she owed her mother-in-law before the Lord, and she was right. But was not He thinking of her, and taking care that others too should know what His grace had wrought for and in that Moabitess? Accordingly, “Boaz said to her, At mealtime come thou hither.” But we need not dwell on the details of this beautiful book. It is enough for my purpose to point out what is not so obvious.

Suffice it here to say that her return and its supplies astonish her mother-in-law. “Where hast thou gleaned today? and where wroughtest thou?” The blessing of Jehovah it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it.

Naomi looks for more — for all. “Blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she showed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man’s name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz. And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of Jehovah who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen. And Ruth the Moabitess said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest. And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter in law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field.” Nothing can be more genuinely charming than the artlessness of Ruth’s character; nothing more in keeping with the mother-in-law than the looking out for her daughter, and such a daughter. At the same time faith gives a sense of propriety which, in my opinion, we none of us can afford to neglect. By this I do not mean the human prudence which seeks its own objects and in its own way. Not so; but that strong sense of what is comely in the sight of God and man, which assuredly shines here in both mother and daughter. “So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother-in-law.”

Now gradually comes to view a purpose which faith seizes deeper than the apron full of corn from day to day. “Then Naomi her mother-in-law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee? And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshing floor.” (Ruth 3:1, 2) Thus she

gives directions, and Ruth acts on them. We need not pursue the minute history of all. No doubt it is familiar to almost every hearer in this room. Suffice it to say that God was with the course suggested by Naomi. It might have seemed bold to some, it was really a believing one with love to Ruth also; but when God is with us, if there be on the one hand the attractive grace of a chaste conversation, coupled with fear, there is also on the other the boldness of faith, which is just as remarkably blessed of God. Ruth 2 shows us the one as the third chapter does the other. It was possible that the course that Naomi directed her daughter-in-law to take might have turned away completely the heart of the great man from the Moabitess; but God ordered otherwise according to faith, and therefore difficulties disappeared one after another. God would have us confide in Him, dear brethren; for He is not more mighty than simple in His ways. It is we who are not, and how much blessing do we not lose from the lack of it? Let none doubt that the place of finding His blessing is in what some despise ignorantly, the path of duty. This is always right, though grace gives us occasions in that path which leave room for higher things, suffering not only for righteousness' but for Christ's sake. In such cases faith does not fail to see that which suits His name, and is not a mere question of duty. In short righteousness is in itself good, but grace is better; only it is not grace where righteousness is either sacrificed or not respected. Grace therefore will not fail to honour righteousness whilst rising above it. Thus, in Ruth 2, Ruth is in the path of what we may call righteousness; certainly of relative comeliness and propriety, which was not forgotten of God. In Ruth 3 we find her taking a bolder flight by faith, wherein God led and honoured it too.

Nor again was this faith unappreciated by Boaz, however desirous he may be that the Moabitess should not by the boldness of her faith jeopardize the smallest atom of that which had drawn out to her the confidence of all who loved Jehovah's name. Hence, in jealousy lest the breath of suspicion should blight or wound such a one, he gives her directions quite as carefully as the mother, if not more so, and hides not from her the difficulty which the law placed in the way. "Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as Jehovah liveth." Thus the woman rests with implicit confidence in the Lord who had wrought in His servant Boaz. When she rejoins her mother, there was more to praise Him for than the measure of barley. There was a tale to tell, delightful to her mother-in-law's heart. "Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day." (Ver. 18)

"Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down." There is not a finer picture in the Bible of the ordinary rural habits of an Israelite in the olden time; and here again we are let into the ways of their civil life in that day. The Book of Ruth may be little, but it furnishes us with a great deal. "And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down. And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land,

which was our brother Elimelech's: and I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee." (Ruth 4:1-4) The kinsman was ready enough for property and its purchase. "And he said, I will redeem it." Boaz next tells him the condition that goes along with the redemption of the piece of land. "Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance." (Ver. 5) This was quite another matter, though God's mind in the law could not be doubted. The kinsman at once draws back with the words of excuse, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar my own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it." (Ver. 6)

"What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." The law fails not because itself is bad, for it is good, but because man is bad — the first man, be his advantages what they may; and this is precisely what is set forth by the kinsman. It is the impossibility for him of raising up the name of the dead; the impossibility to Israel of having their blessing according to the purpose of God in connection with the law and the first man. No doubt this was the nearer kinsman; for first is that which is natural, afterwards that which is spiritual. What was natural must first be tried; and this is the near kinsman who simply furnishes room for the display not only of the goodness of God, but of His power; and indeed this is

involved in the very name of Boaz. There was strength in him.

No doubt therefore we have in Boaz the type of Christ, but I suppose not so much of Christ coming in order to atone for man, the first man, but — after the settlement of every moral question before God was over — of Christ when raised from the dead by the power of God and the glory of the Father, when the forlorn remnant is received back in grace and the inheritance made good in every way by the Kinsman-Redeemer. In short, Boaz represents Christ risen, as the vessel of power to come in and bear fruit for God where there had already been death, ruin, rejection, and completeness of desolation, as we have already seen in the history of him (Elimelech, God the King) who had a pleasant purpose in Naomi. He was dead, she changed to bitterness, as all had failed in both sons away from the land of Jehovah; till on the good news of divine mercy to Israel there is a return, and the widowed one is united to him who is strength (Boaz), and the royal line appears in due time. It is Christ risen who makes the mercies of David sure.

Thus then, as it appears to me, the whole case opens out as simply as possible; that is, we see here the Redeemer, but this by power rather than by blood, the Goel or Kinsman-Redeemer. Such Boaz was, and such Christ will be to Israel; but this is not the way in which we know Him; for, as the apostle says so forcibly, in 2 Cor. 5, “Henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.” To us it is all an entirely new creation and circle of associations; not sin only, but old things passed away, and all things become new. Israel will not be called on to see the change so

absolutely great as it will undoubtedly be. But He is and will be then known as their Kinsman in a way which does not so apply to us of the Gentiles, and less, if possible, as the church His body, another and far more intimate relationship. What we see in Ruth is most surely in connection with Israel.

In truth, God magnifies His grace towards us, inasmuch as we have no claim, nor link with Israel. We cannot in any way take the ground of kinsmanship with Jesus. Think not that we lose by this. No doubt in principle it is true that, because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He likewise partook of the same; but then you will remember that this truth is laid down for the seed of Abraham in the Epistle to the Hebrews. With striking propriety it is addressed to the Hebrew Christians, though no doubt the general truth pertains to all others.

Let none suppose that it is meant that we have not all the blessing revealed in that epistle, for I believe we have thoroughly, and that it is very precious. Indeed I should not like to give the right hand of fellowship to any one so enamoured of his crotchets as to allow of doubts that we have a living portion in that scripture as in the rest. Such theorising is highly to be deprecated and dangerous, my brethren; and the more we value the mercy which has given back to us the truth in all its definiteness, as honouring the Lord and confiding in the word and Spirit of God during this dark and evil day, the more are we bound to discountenance all such trifling with the scriptures as would blunt their edge in dealing with those souls, no matter who or what the theorists may be; for they are men that allow their minds to run riot with the precious word of God.

Nevertheless, affirming this distinctly, I think that there is special propriety in the epistle to the Hebrews referring to this, and hence it will be observed that we hear of the children here: “Behold, I and the children which God has given me.” There was a natural link between the Israelite and the Lord Jesus, though it all came to nothing in His cross. But then, grace having intervened, we find them taken up where we Gentiles can be met equally on the new ground of resurrection; and thus the force of this and other kindred scriptures is made manifest by the Spirit.

Does this then detract from us who were outside? Our real and proper relationship to Christ is founded on death and resurrection-life, not on flesh. Even those that had natural relationship are, after all, obliged to come into the same place. All that is connected with flesh has met its end; so that it would be an altogether inferior ground even for a believing Jew now to found his connection with Christ on anything short of that which is equally open to us as to them. In connection then with the term “Kinsman-Redeemer” I merely make this remark, that it has a beauty and a force in speaking about Israel in which, as far as I am aware, it is not applied in any part of the direct scriptures which speak of us Gentiles that are brought in now in the infinite grace of God.

The rest of the story is then brought before us. The man who failed had to bear a mark of his failure which was very significant. “Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel. Therefore the kinsman said unto

Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe. And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance." Thus two of the features of God's dealing with Israel rather than with us are brought before us here; for it is plain that the earthly people and the land go together. This has no application whatever to the church of God. You may, no doubt, use the figure; and I am not in the least saying that you should not employ the moral truth both individually and corporately if you will; only it requires a delicacy of touch which I think is apt most of all to fail where the practice is most common. I grant you that there are those that could handle the type of Ruth the Moabitess, and gather, so far as it goes, all the spiritual blessedness in the truths of the book which would apply to a Christian man or to the church of God; but employed, as it usually is, with a rough and vague indiscriminateness as being a distinct type of the one or the other, I am persuaded that it is an error, and must have mischievous consequences, as indeed is notorious. For the distinctive character of the Christian and the church is lost thereby, or rather was never known to those who thus teach.

Here then the land and the widow went together; and Boaz in the most solemn manner takes both, as the Lord will another day. "And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. Jehovah make the woman that is come into thine house like

Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel."

In the latter part of the chapter we are told that "Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife." A son was born; "and the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be Jehovah, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel." But how sweet that things should have come down to the last pass perhaps found in any house in Israel! If there was a woman whose condition seemed not only calamitous but hopeless, it was Naomi, as she confessed herself. Her appeal to Orpah and Ruth was founded upon the impossibility (humanly speaking) that deliverance should come, or the name of the dead be raised upon the inheritance. But impossibility is a word never to be named with God, save indeed that He should lie or act below Himself. It is a good thing that we should feel our utter weakness; it is intolerable that we should ever limit Him. No doubt it is just, and may be turned to profit by grace, that we have been brought utterly low; and so it was with Naomi. But now what joy filled the heart of the aged mother-in-law, once so forlorn, when she took the child of Ruth, Moabitess though she had been (for all this was now merged in her husband Boaz), and the women said for her, "He shall be a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter-in-law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it. And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed; he is the father of Jesse, the father of David." (Vers. 15-17)

And will it not be so, beloved brethren in that bright day when the Lord Jesus will come, and when He will take the long widowed Israel, and when every trace of shame and want, as well as of death and sorrow, will have passed away for ever? Then the mighty course of God's grace will flow, not only in old channels to the overflowing of their banks in goodness, but when the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah will fill all the earth as the waters the sea. And this is what we know will be the fruit of Christ's assumption of the inheritance, the true Heir of all things.

For as the women felt and said, so will it be yet in the goodness of God. The welcome Seed of promise, the Messiah, will be "a son born to Naomi," to Israel, but on a new ground of grace, as set forth by her who had no title to promise. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The Father of the age to come, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this." (Isaiah 9:6, 7)

Let us then rejoice that He has given us such a prospect, even as regards the earth and not merely Israel and their land. When we look at the world now, and at the madness and infatuation of men; when we hear how they glory in what is really their shame; when we see insubjection to God put forth in the proudest and most frantic forms, we may in some little degree realize what a deliverance it will be when Jesus will take the reins.

We know well now that the best men are those that most of all feel their powerlessness, and theirs is the truest judgment of that which is found upon the earth where it is followed with sadness and sorrow and sighs and groans. These are not fruitless, as some men count them, nor is it in anywise according to the will of the Lord, that we should shirk this confession of our weakness, or our sense of total ruin here below. I am persuaded that when all the efforts of those who value themselves on their energy have come to nothing, and the attempts to stem the tide of evil will have only increased it, even by the most well-meant endeavours, then the prayers, the tears, the groans that have gone up to the Lord of glory will be answered, and the Lord Himself will prove that He alone can fill the void of this earth, as He only fills the heavens to the praise and glory of God the Father.

May the Lord then; soon to be the exalted and confessed of all on earth, give us to delight in all that He has revealed to us in His precious word, having a heart for each and every part of it for His name’s sake. So blessed are we as members of His body, as of His flesh and of His bones, that it becomes us to share the outgoings of His love to Israel ungrudgingly. And if we are to be with Him on high, it is meet that He should have a special object of His affection on earth; and who is this to be but the people who had been called out from the nations, but alas! slipped back again like a deceitful bow; who in that day will return penitently and in faith, and find plenteous mercy and redemption. Thus will the grief and shame, bitter though it was, be forgotten in the joy and glory of her who will then lay aside for ever her Gentile proclivities and belongings only to be a true and

enduring channel of divine blessing to all the families of the earth as long as it endures.