

Spurgeon Sermons on Ruth

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SERMONS & DEVOTIONALS ON RUTH

by C H Spurgeon

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Reward or Cheer for Converts

Ruth 2:12

by C. H. Spurgeon

"The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust" (Ruth 2:12).

THIS was the language of Boaz, a man of substance and of note in Bethlehem, to a poor stranger of whom he had heard that she had left her kindred, and the idols of her nation, that she might become a worshiper of the living and true God. He acted a noble part when he cheered her, and bade her be of good courage now that she was casting in her lot with Naomi and the chosen nation. Observe that he saluted her with words of tender encouragement; for this is precisely what I want all the elder Christians among you to do to those who are the counterparts of Ruth. You who have long been believers in the Lord Jesus, who have grown rich in experience, who know the love and faithfulness of our covenant God, and who are strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; I want you to make a point of looking out the young converts, and speaking to them goodly words, and comfortable words, whereby they may be cheered and strengthened.

There is a text, a very short one, which I would like often to preach from in reference to those who are newly saved, and I would invite you continually to be practicing it: that text is, "*Encourage him.*" So many will throw cold water upon the aspirant after holiness, that I would urge others of you heartily to cheer him.

I have no doubt that much sorrow might be prevented if words of encouragement were more frequently spoken fitly and in season; and therefore to withhold them is sin. I am afraid that many poor souls have remained in darkness, shut in within themselves, when two or three minutes' brotherly cheer might have taken down the shutters, and let in the light of day. Many matters are real difficulties to young believers, which are no difficulties to us who have been longer in the way. You and I could clear up in ten minutes' conversation questions and doubts which cause our uninstructed friends months of misery. Why are we so

reticent when a word would send our weaker brethren on their way rejoicing? Therefore, I do entreat all of you whom God has greatly blessed, to look after those that are of low estate in spiritual things, and try to cheer and encourage them. As you do this, God will bless you in return; but, if you neglect this tender duty, it may be that you yourselves will grow despondent, and be yourselves in need of friendly succor.

I think I can say for every Christian here, that the young converts among us have our very best wishes. We desire for them every good and spiritual gift. See how Boaz, wishing well as he did to the humble maiden from Moab, spoke with her, and then spoke with God in prayer for her. I take it that my text is a prayer as well as a benediction: "Jehovah recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of Jehovah, God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." Let us pray more than ever for the feeble-minded and the young.

We should, in all probability, see a much more rapid growth in grace among our young converts if they were better nursed and watched over. Some of us owed much to old-experienced Christians in our younger days. I know I did. I shall forever respect the memory of a humble servant in the school wherein I was usher, at Newmarket; an old woman, who talked with me concerning the things of the kingdom, and taught me the way of the Lord more perfectly. She knew the doctrines of grace better than many a doctor of divinity; and she held them with the tenacious grasp of one who found her life in them. It was my great privilege to help her in her old age; and but a little while ago she passed away to heaven. Many things did I learn of her, which today I delight to preach. Let it be said of us, when we, too, grow old, that those who were children when we were young were helped by us to become useful in their riper years.

First, then, WHAT HAS THE YOUNG CONVERT DONE? WE ILLUSTRATE THE SUBJECT BY THE INSTANCE OF RUTH.

Many young converts deserve encouragement because *they have left all their old associates*. Ruth, no doubt, had many friends in her native country, but she tore herself away to cling to Naomi and her God. Perhaps she parted from a mother and a father; if they were alive she certainly left them to go to the Israelites' country. Possibly she bade adieu to brothers and sisters, certainly she quitted old friends and neighbors; for she resolved to go with Naomi, and share her lot. She said, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go: and where thou lodgest, 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: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."

The young convert is an emigrant from the world; and has become, for Christ's sake, an alien. Possibly he had many companions, friends who made him merry after their fashion, men of fascinating manners, who could easily provoke his laughter, and make the hours dance by; but, because he found in them no savor of Christ, he has forsaken them, and for Christ's sake they have forsaken him. Among his old associates he has become as a speckled bird, and they are all against him. You may, perhaps, have seen a canary which has flown from its home, where it enjoyed the fondness of its mistress: you have seen it out among the sparrows. They pursue it as though they would tear it into pieces, and they give it no rest anywhere. Just so the young convert, being no longer of the same feather as his comrades, is the subject of their persecution. He endures trials of cruel mockings, and these are as hot irons to the soul. He is now to them a hypocrite, and a fanatic; they honor him with ridiculous names by which they express their scorn. In their hearts they crown him with a fool's cap, and write him down as both idiot and knave. He will need to exhibit years of holy living before they will be forced into respect for him; and all this because he is quitting their Moab to join with Israel. Why should he leave them? Has he grown better than they? Does he pretend to be a saint? Can he not drink with them as he once did? He is a protest against their excesses, and men don't care for such protests. Can he not sing a jolly song as they do? Forsooth, he has turned saint; and what is a saint but a hypocrite? He is a deal too precise and Puritanical, and is not to be endured in their free society. According to the grade in life, this opposition takes one form or another, but in no case does Moab admire the Ruth who deserts her idols to worship the God of Israel.

Is it not most meet that you older Christian people, who have long been separated from the world, and are hardened against its jeers, should step in and defend the newcomers? Should you not say, "Come you with us, and we will do you good: we will be better friends to you than those you have left. We will accompany you on a better road than that from which you have turned; and we will find you better joys than worldlings can ever know"? When our great King is represented as saying to his spouse, "Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house," he adds, "so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord"; thus he gives her new company to supply the place of that which she gives up. Let us gather a hint from this, and make society for those whom the world casts out. When Ruth had quitted her former connections, it was wise and kind for Boaz to address her in the words of comfort which I will again quote to you: "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust."

Next, Ruth, having left her old companions, had *come amongst strangers*. She was not yet at home in the land of Israel, but confessed herself "a stranger." She knew Naomi, but in the whole town of Bethlehem she knew no one else. When she came into the harvest field the neighbors were there gleaning, but they were no neighbors of hers; no glance of sympathy fell upon her from

them; perhaps they looked at her with cold curiosity. They may have thought, "What business has this Moabitess to come here to take away a part of the gleanings which belongs to the poor of Israel?" I know that such feelings do arise among country people when a stranger from another parish comes gleanings in the field. Ruth was a foreigner, and, of course, in their eyes an intruder. She felt herself to be alone, though under the wings of Israel's God. Boaz very properly felt that she should not think that courtesy and kindness had died out of Israel; and he made a point though he was by far her superior in station, to go to her and speak a word of encouragement to her. Should not certain of you follow the same practice? May I not call you to do so at once? There will come into our assemblies those that have been lately impressed with a sense of their guilt, or have newly sought and found the Savior; should they be suffered to remain strangers among us long? Should not recognition, companionship, and hospitality be extended to them to make them feel at home with us? Do let us try with all our hearts so to look every man upon the things of others that no single seeking soul shall feel itself deserted. Seekers should be spared the agony of crying, "No man careth for my soul." Are you a believer? Then you are my brother. We are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. We would lay ourselves out to bring our fellowmen to Jesus, and to aid new converts in finding perfect peace at his feet. Let us learn the art of personal address. Do not let us be so bashful and retiring that we leave others in sorrow because we cannot screw up our courage to say a kind and tender word in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The new convert is like Ruth in another respect: he is *very lowly in his own eyes*. Ruth said to Boaz, "Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" She said again, "Let me find favor in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens." She had little self-esteem, and therefore she won the esteem of others. She felt herself to be a very inconsiderable person, to whom any kindness was a great favor; and so do young converts, if they are real and true. I remember when I first went to the house of God as a Christian youth who had lately come to know the Lord, that I looked with veneration on every officer and member of the church. I thought them all, if not quite angels, yet very nearly as good; at any rate, I had no disposition to criticize *them*, for I felt myself to be so undeserving. I do not think that I have quite so high an idea of all professed Christians as I had then, for I am afraid that I could not truthfully entertain it; but for all that, I think far better of them than many are apt to do. I believe that young people, when first brought to Christ, have so deep a sense of their own imperfection, and know so little of the infirmities of others, that they look up to the members of the church with a very high esteem, and this fixes upon such members, officers, and pastors a great responsibility. Since these converts are lowly in their own eyes it is proper and safe to encourage them; moreover, it is kind and needful to do so. Never be critical and severe with them, but deal tenderly with their budding graces; a frosty sentence may nip them; a genial word will develop them. Our Lord bids you feed the lambs; act the shepherd towards them, and never overdrive them, lest they faint by the way.

Once more, the young convert is like Ruth because he has *come to trust under the wings of Jehovah, the God of Israel*. Herein is a beautiful metaphor. You know that the wing of a strong bird especially, and of any bird relatively, is strong. It makes a kind of arch, and from the outer side you have the architectural idea of strength. Under the wings, even of so feeble a creature as a hen, there is a complete and perfect refuge for her little chicks, judging from without. And then the inside of the wing is lined with soft feathers for the comfort of the young. The interior of the wing is arranged as though it would prevent any friction from the strength of the wing to the weakness of the little bird. I do not know of a more snug place than under the wing feathers of the hen. Have you never thought of this? Would not the Lord have us in time of trouble come and cower down under the great wing of His omnipotent love, just as the chicks do under the mother? Here is the Scripture—"He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler." What a warm defense! When I have seen the little birds put their heads out from under the feathers of their mother's breast it has looked like the perfection of happiness; and when they have chirped their little notes, they have seemed to tell how warm and safe they were, though there may have been a rough wind blowing around the bend. They could not be happier than they are. If they run a little way, they are soon back again to the wing, for it is house and home to them; it is their shield and succor, defense and delight. This is what our young converts have done: they have come, not to trust themselves, but to trust in Jesus. They have come to find a righteousness in Christ—ay, to find everything in him, and so they are trusting, trusting under the wings of God. Is not this what you are doing? You full-grown saints—is not this your condition? I know it is. Very well then; encourage the younger sort to do what you delight to do: say to them, "There is no place like this: let us joyously abide together under the wing of God." There is no rest, no peace, no calm, no perfect quiet, like that of giving up all care, because you cast your care on God; renouncing all fear, because your only fear is a fear of offending God.

But now I must come closer to the text. Having shown you what these converts have done to need encouragement, I want, in the second place, to answer the question, WHAT IS THE FULL REWARD OF THOSE WHO COME TO TRUST UNDER THE WINGS OF GOD?

I would answer that a full reward will come to us in that day when we lay down these bodies of flesh and blood, that they may sleep in Jesus, while our unclothed spirits are absent from the body but present with the Lord. In the disembodied state we shall enjoy perfect happiness of spirit; but a fuller reward will be ours when the Lord shall come a second time, and our bodies shall rise from the grave to share in the glorious reign of the descended King. Then in our perfect manhood we shall behold the face of him we love, and shall be like him. Then shall come the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body; and we, as body, soul, and spirit, a

trinity in unity, shall be forever with Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, our triune God. This unspeakable bliss is the full reward of trusting beneath the wings of Jehovah.

But there is a present reward, and to that Boaz referred. There is in this world a present recompense for the godly, notwithstanding the fact that many are the afflictions of the righteous. Years ago a brother minister printed a book, "How to Make the Best of Both Worlds," which contained much wisdom; but at the same time many of us objected to the title, as diving the pursuit of the believer, and putting the two worlds too much on a level. Assuredly, it would be wrong for any godly man to make it his object in life to make the best of both worlds in the way which the title is likely to suggest. This present world must be subordinate to the world to come, and is to be cheerfully sacrificed to it, if need be. Yet, be it never forgotten, if any man will live unto God he will make the best of both worlds, for godliness has the promise of the life that now is as well as of that which is to come. Even in losing the present life for Christ's sake we are saving it, and self-denial and taking up the cross are but forms of blessedness. If we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all other things shall be added to us.

Do you ask me, "How shall we be rewarded for trusting in the Lord?" I answer, first, by the *deep peace of conscience* which he will grant you. Can any reward be better than this? When a man can say, "I have sinned, but I am forgiven," is not that forgiveness an unspeakable boon? My sins were laid on Jesus, and he took them away as my scapegoat, so that they are gone forever, and I am consciously absolved. Is not this a glorious assurance? Is it not worth worlds? A calm settles down upon the heart which is under the power of the blood of sprinkling; a voice within proclaims the peace of God, and the Holy Spirit seals that peace by his own witness; and thus all is rest. If you were to offer all that you have to buy this peace, you could not purchase it; but were it purchasable it were worthwhile to forego the dowry of a myriad worlds to win it. If you had all riches and power and honor you could not reach the price of the pearl of peace. The revenues of kingdoms could not purchase so much as a glance at this jewel. A guilty conscience is the undying worm of hell; the torture of remorse is the fire that never can be quenched: he that hath that worm gnawing at his heart and that fire burning in his bosom is lost already. On the other hand, he that trusts in God through Christ Jesus is delivered from inward hell-pangs: the burning fever of unrest is cured. He may well sing for joy of soul, for heaven is born within him and lies in his heart like the Christ in the manger.

That, however, is only the beginning of the believer's reward. He that has come to trust in God shall be "*quiet from fear of evil.*" What a blessing that must be! "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." When a man is at his very highest as to this world's joy, he hears the whisper of a dark spirit saying, "Will it last?" He peers into the morrow with apprehension, for he knows not what may be lurking in his path. But, when a man is no longer afraid, but is prepared to welcome whatever comes, because he sees it in the appointment of a loving Father, why, then he is in a happy state.

More than this: the man who trusts in God *rests in him with respect to all the supplies he now needs, or shall ever need.* What happy music gladdens the green pastures of that twenty-third psalm! I am half inclined to ask you to rise and sing it, for my heart is leaping for joy while I rehearse the first stanza of it:

The Lord my Shepherd is

I shall be well supplied.

Since he is mine and I am his,

What can I want beside?

Usually man is made up of wants; and *he* must have reached the land of abounding wealth who boldly asks, "What can I want beside?" We are never quite content; it always needs a little more to fill the cup to the brim; but only think of singing, "What can I want beside?" Is not this sweet content a full reward from the Lord in whom we trust? Human nature has swallowed a horse-leech, and henceforth it crieth night and day, "Give, give, give": who but the Lord can stay this craving? The vortex of dissatisfaction threatens to suck in the main ocean and still to remain unfilled; but the Lord rewards faith by satisfying its mouth with good things.

Another part of the believer's great gain lies in *the consciousness that all things are working together for his good.* Nothing is, after all, able to injure us. Neither pains of body, nor sufferings of mind, nor losses in business, nor cruel blows of death, can work us real ill. The thefts of robbers, the mutterings of slanderers, the changes of trade, the rage of the elements, shall all be overruled for good. These many drugs and poisons, compounded in the mortar of the unerring Chemist, shall produce a healthy potion for our souls: "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." It is a great joy to know this to be an unquestionable fact, and to watch with expectation to see it repeated in our own case.

Then, let me tell you, they that trust in God and follow him have another full reward, and that is, *the bliss of doing good.* Can any happiness excel this? This joy is a diamond of the first water. Match me, if you can, the joy of helping the widow and the fatherless! Find me the equal of the delight of saving a soul from death and covering a multitude of sins! It were worth worlds to have faith in God even if we lived here forever, if our sojourn could be filled up with doing good to the poor and needy, and rescuing

the erring and fallen. If you desire to taste the purest joy that ever flowed from the fountains of Paradise, drink of the unselfish bliss of saving a lost soul. When faith in God teaches you to forego self, and live wholly to glorify God and benefit your fellowmen, it puts you on the track of the Lord of angels, and by following it you will come to reign with him.

Brothers and sisters, there remains the singular and refined joy which comes of a humble *perception of personal growth*. Children rejoice when they find that they are growing more like their parents and may soon hope to be strong and full-grown. Most of us recollect our childish mirth when we began to wear garments which we thought would make us look like men. When I first wore boots and walked through the stubble with my big uncle, I felt that I was somebody. That, of course, was childish pride; but it has its commendable analogy in the pleasure of gathering spiritual strength, and becoming equal to higher labors and deeper experiences. When you find that you do not lose your temper under provocation, as you did a year ago, you are humble thankful. When an evil lust is driven away, and no longer haunts you, you are quietly joyful, rejoicing with trembling. When you have sustained a trial which once would have crushed you, the victory is exceedingly sweet. Every advance in holiness is an advance in secret happiness. To be a little more meet for heaven is to have a little more of heaven in the heart. As we mellow for the celestial garner we are conscious of a more pervading sweetness, which in itself is no mean reward of virtue.

Let me tell you another splendid part of this full reward, and that is, to have *prevalence with God in prayer*. Somebody called me, in print, a hypocrite, because I said that God had heard my prayers. This was evidently malicious: a man might be called fanatical for such a statement, but I cannot see the justice of imputing hypocrisy on that account. If by hypocrisy he meant a sincere conviction that the great God answers prayer, I will be more and more hypocritical as long as I live. I will glory in the name of God—the God that heareth my prayer. If that writer had claimed that *he* prayed and had been heard, it is possible that he would have been guilty of hypocrisy: of that matter he is personally the best informed, and I leave the question with himself; but he had no right to measure my corn with his bushel. Certainly, I shall not use his bushel to measure my corn, but I shall speak what I know and am persuaded of. In deep sincerity I can bear testimony that the Lord hears prayer, and that it is his wont so to do. Many a saint of God has but to ask and have. When such men wrestle with God in prayer they always prevail, like Israel of old at Jabbok when he grasped the angel, and would not let him go without a blessing. If you have got this power to the full you will often say to yourself, “If I had nothing else but power at the throne of grace I have more than enough to recompense me for every self-denial.” What are the jests and jeers of an ungodly and ignorant world in comparison with the honor of being favored of the Lord to ask what we will, and receive the utmost of our desires?

Many other items make up the full of the reward; but perhaps the chief of all is *communion with God*—to be permitted to speak with him as a man speaketh with his friend—to be led by the divine Bridegroom to sit down in the banqueting house while his banner over us is love. Those who dwell outside the palace of love know nothing about our secret ecstasies and raptures. We cannot tell them much about our spiritual delights, for they would only turn again and rend us. The delights of heavenly fellowship are too sacred to be commonly displayed. There is a joy, the clearest foretaste of heaven below, when the soul becomes as the chariot of Amminadib by the energy of the Holy Spirit. I believe, brethren, that our lot, even when we are poor and sorrowful and cast down, is infinitely to be preferred to that of the loftiest emperor who does not know the Savior. Oh, poor kings, poor princes, poor peers, poor gentry, that do not know Christ! But happy paupers that know him! Happy slaves that love him! Happy dying men and women that rejoice in him! Those have solid joy and lasting pleasure who have God to be their all in all. Come, then, and put your trust under the wings of God, and you shall be blessed in your body and in your soul, blessed in your house and in your family, blessed in your basket and in your store, blessed in your sickness and in your health, blessed in time and in eternity; for the righteous are blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.

Finally, WHAT FIGURE SETS FORTH THIS FULL REWARD? WHAT WAS THE FULL REWARD THAT RUTH OBTAINED? I DO NOT THINK THAT BOAZ KNEW THE FULL MEANING OF WHAT HE SAID. HE COULD NOT FORESEE ALL THAT WAS APPOINTED OF THE LORD. IN THE LIGHT OF RUTH'S HISTORY WE WILL READ THE GOOD MAN'S BLESSING. THIS POOR STRANGER, RUTH, IN COMING TO PUT HER TRUST IN THE GOD OF ISRAEL WAS GIVING UP EVERYTHING: YES, BUT SHE WAS ALSO GAINING EVERYTHING. IF SHE COULD HAVE LOOKED BEHIND THE VEIL WHICH HIDES THE FUTURE, SHE COULD NOT HAVE CONDUCTED HERSELF MORE TO HER OWN ADVANTAGE THAN SHE DID. SHE HAD NO PROSPECT OF GAIN; SHE FOLLOWED NAOMI, EXPECTING POVERTY AND OBSCURITY; BUT IN DOING THAT WHICH WAS RIGHT, SHE FOUND THE BLESSING WHICH MAKETH RICH. SHE LOST HER MOABITISH KINDRED, BUT SHE FOUND A NOBLE KINSMAN IN ISRAEL. SHE QUITTED THE HOME OF HER FATHERS IN THE OTHER LAND TO FIND A HERITAGE AMONG THE CHOSEN TRIBES, A HERITAGE REDEEMED BY ONE WHO LOVED HER. AH! WHEN YOU COME TO TRUST IN CHRIST, YOU FIND IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST ONE WHO IS NEXT OF KIN TO YOU, WHO REDEEMS YOUR HERITAGE, AND UNITES YOU TO HIMSELF. YOU THOUGHT THAT HE WAS A STRANGER; YOU WERE AFRAID TO APPROACH HIM; BUT HE COMES NEAR TO YOU, AND YOU FIND YOURSELF NEAR TO HIS HEART, AND ONE WITH HIM FOREVER.

Yes, this is a fair picture of each convert's reward. Ruth found what she did not look for, she found a husband. It was exactly what was for her comfort and her joy, for she found rest in the house of her husband, and she became possessed of his large estate by virtue of her marriage union with him. When a poor sinner trusts in God he does not expect so great a boon, but, to his surprise, his heart finds a husband, and a home, and an inheritance priceless beyond all conception; and all this is found in Christ Jesus our Lord. Then is the soul brought into loving, living, lasting, indissoluble union with the Well-beloved, the unrivalled Lord of love. We are one with Jesus. What a glorious mystery is this!

Ruth obtained an inheritance among the chosen people of Jehovah. She could not have obtained it except through Boaz, who redeemed it for her; but thus she came into indisputable possession of it. When a poor soul comes to God, he thinks that he is flying to Him only for a refuge, but, indeed, he is coming for much more; he is coming for a heritage undefiled, and that fadeth not away. He becomes an heir of God, a joint-heir with Jesus Christ.

Mealtime in the Cornfields

Ruth 2:14

by C. H. Spurgeon

“And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left” (Ruth 2:14).

WE are going to the cornfields, as we did last year, not however, so much to glean, as to rest with the reapers and the gleaners, when under some wide-spreading oak they sit down to take refreshment. We hope there will be found some timid gleaner here, who will accept our invitation to come and eat with us.

Our first point is this— THAT GOD’S REAPERS HAVE THEIR MEALTIMES.

Those who work for God will find him a good Master. He cares for oxen, and has commanded his Israel, “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.” Much more doth he care of his servants who serve him. “He hath given meat unto them that fear him: he will ever be mindful of his covenant.” The reapers in Jesus’ fields shall not only receive a blessed reward at the last, but they shall have plenteous comforts by the way.

God has ordained certain mealtimes for his reapers; and he has appointed that one of these shall be *when they come together to listen to the Word preached*. If God be with our ministers, they act as the disciples did of old, for they received the barley loaves and fishes from Christ as He multiplied them, and handed them to the people. *We*, of ourselves, cannot feed one soul, much less thousands; but when the Lord is with us, we can keep as good a table as Solomon himself, with all his fine flour, and fat oxen, and roebucks, and fallow deer. When the Lord blesses the provisions of his House, no matter how many thousands there may be, all his poor shall be filled with bread. I hope, beloved, you know what it is to sit under the shadow of the Word with great delight, and find the fruit thereof sweet unto your taste. Where the doctrines of grace are boldly and plainly delivered to you in connection with the other truths of revelation; where Jesus Christ upon his cross is *ever* lifted up; where the work of the Spirit is not forgotten; where the glorious purpose of the Father is never despised, there is sure to be food for the children of God.

We have learned not to feed upon oratorical flourishes, or philosophical refining; we leave these fine things, these twelfth-cake ornaments, to be eaten by those little children who can find delight in such unhealthy dainties: we prefer to hear truth, even when roughly spoken, to the fine garnishings of eloquence without the truth. We care little about how the table is served, or of what ware the dishes are made, so long as the covenant bread and water, and the promised oil and wine, are given us.

Certain grumblers among the Lord’s reapers do not feed under the preached Word, because they do not intend to feed; they come to the House of Bread on purpose to find fault, and therefore they go away empty. My verdict is, “It serves them right.” Little care I to please such hearers. I would as soon feed bears and jackals, as attempt to supply the wants of grumbling professors. How much mischief is done by observations made upon the preacher! How often do we censure where our God approves! We have heard of a high doctrinal deacon, who said to a young minister who was supplying the pulpit on probation, “I should have enjoyed your sermon very much, sir, if it had not been for that last appeal to the sinner. I do not think that dead sinners should be exhorted to believe in Jesus.” When that deacon reached home, he found his own daughter in tears. She became converted to God, and united with the Church of which that young man ultimately became the minister. How was she converted, think you? By that address at the close of the sermon, which her father did not like. Take heed of railing at that by which the Holy Ghost saves souls. There may be much in the sermon which may not suit you or me, but then we are not the only persons to be considered. There is a wide variety of characters, and all our hearers must have “their portion of meat in due season.” Is it not a selfishness very unlike the spirit of a Christian, which would make me find fault with the provisions, because *I* cannot eat them all? There should be the unadulterated milk for the babe in grace, as well as the strong substantial meat for the full-grown believer. Beloved, I know that however murmurers may call our manna “light bread,” yet our gracious God does “in this mountain make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.”

Often, too, our gracious Lord appoints us mealtimes *in our private readings and meditations*. Here it is that his “paths drop fatness.” Nothing can be more fattening to the soul of the believer than feeding upon the Word, and digesting it by frequent meditations. No wonder that some grow so little, when they meditate so little. Cattle must chew the cud; it is not what they crop with their teeth, but that which is masticated, and afterwards digested by rumination, that nourishes them. We must take the truth, and roll it over and over again in the inward parts of our spirit, and so we shall extract divine nourishment therefrom. Have you not, my

brethren, frequently found a Benjamin's mess prepared for you in a choice promise of your God? Is not meditation the land of Goshen to you? If men once said, "There is corn in Egypt" may they not always say, that the finest of the wheat is to be found in secret prayer? Private devotion is a land which floweth with milk and honey; a paradise yielding all manner of fruits; a banqueting house of choice wines. Ahasuerus might make a great feast, but all his 120 provinces could not furnish such dainties as the closet offers to the spiritual mind. Where can we feed and lie down in green pastures in so sweet a sense as we do in our musings on the Word? Meditation distills the quintessence from the Scriptures, and gladdens our mouth with a sweetness which exceeds the virgin honey dropping from the honeycomb. Your retired seasons and occasions of prayer, should be to you regal entertainments, or at least refreshing seasons, in which, like the reapers at noonday, you sit with Boaz and eat of your Master's generous provisions.

Let us not forget, that there is one specially ordained mealtime which ought to occur oftener, but which, even monthly, is very refreshing to us, I mean *the Supper of the Lord*. There you have literally, as well as spiritually, a meal. The table is richly spread; it has upon it both meat and drink; there is the bread and the wine, and looking at what these symbolize, we have before us a table richer than that which kings could furnish. There we have the flesh and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereof if a man eat, he shall never hunger and never thirst, for that bread shall be unto him everlasting life. Oh! the sweet seasons we have known at the Lord's Supper. If some of you really did understand the enjoyment of feeding upon Christ in that ordinance, you would chide yourselves for not having united with the Church in fellowship. In keeping the Master's commandments there is a "great reward," and consequently in neglecting them there is a great loss of reward. Christ is not so tied to the Sacramental table as to be always found of those who partake thereat, but still it is in the way that we may expect the Lord to meet with us.

Besides these regular mealtimes, there are others which God gives us, *at seasons when perhaps we little expect them*. You have been walking the street, and suddenly you have felt a holy flowing-out of your soul toward God; or, in the middle of business your heart has been melted with love and made to leap for joy, even as the brooks which have been bound with winter's ice leap to fell the touch of spring. Seasons too you have had on your sickbeds, when you would have been content to be sick always, if you could have your bed so well made, and your head so softly pillowed.

Our blessed Redeemer comes to us in the morning, and wakes us up with such sweet thoughts upon our soul, we know not how they came; as if, when the dew was visiting the flowers, a few drops of heaven's dew had fallen upon us. In the cool eventide, too, as we have gone to our beds, our meditation of him has been sweet. Nay, in the night watches, when we tossed to and fro, and could not sleep, he has been pleased to become our song in the night.

God's reapers find it hard work to reap; but they find a blessed solace when they sit down and eat of their Master's rich provisions; then, with renewed strength, they go with sharpened sickle, to reap again in the noontide heat.

Let me observe, that while these mealtimes come, we know not exactly when, there are *certain seasons when we may expect them*. The Eastern reapers generally sit down under the shelter of a tree, or a booth, to take refreshment during the heat of the day. And certain I am, that when trouble, affliction, persecution, and bereavement, become the most painful to us, it is then that the Lord hands out to us the sweetest comforts. We must work till the hot sun forces the sweat from our face; we must bear the burden and heat of the day before we can expect to be invited to those choice meals which the Lord prepares for those who are diligent in his work. When thy day of trouble is the hottest, then the love of Jesus shall be sweetest; when thy night of trial is the darkest, then will his candle shine most brightly about thee; when thy head aches most heavily—when thy heart palpitates most terribly—when heart and flesh fail thee, then he will be the strength of thy life, and thy portion forever.

Again, these mealtimes frequently occur *before* a trial. Elijah must be entertained beneath a juniper tree, for he is to go a forty-day journey in the strength of that meat. You may suspect some danger nigh when your delights are overflowing. If you see a ship taking in great quantities of provision, it is bound for a distant port. And when God gives you extraordinary seasons of communion with Jesus, you may look for long leagues of tempestuous sea. Sweet cordials prepare for stern conflicts. Times of refreshing also occur *after* trouble or arduous service. Christ was tempted of the devil, and *afterwards* angels came and ministered unto him. Abraham wars with the kings, and returns from their slaughter; then is it that Melchisedec refreshes him with bread and wine. After conflict, content; after battle, banquet. When thou hast waited on thy Lord, then thou shalt sit down, and thy Master will gird himself and wait upon thee. Yes, let the worldling say what he will about the hardness of religion, we do not find it so. We do confess that reaping is no child's play; that toiling for Christ has its difficulties and its troubles; but still the bread which we eat is *very* sweet, and the wine which we drink is crushed from celestial clusters—

I would not change my bless'd estate

For all the world calls good or great;

And while my faith can keep her hold,

I envy not the sinner's gold.

Follow me while we turn to a second point. TO THESE MEALS THE GLEANER IS AFFECTIONATELY INVITED. THAT IS TO SAY, THE POOR, TREMBLING STRANGER WHO HAS NOT STRENGTH ENOUGH TO REAP; WHO HAS NO RIGHT TO BE IN THE FIELD, EXCEPT THE RIGHT OF CHARITY—THE POOR, TREMBLING SINNER, CONSCIOUS OF HIS OWN DEMERIT, AND FEELING BUT LITTLE HOPE AND LITTLE JOY. TO THE MEALS OF THE STRONG-HANDED, FULLY-ASSURED REAPER, THE *gleaner* is invited.

The gleaner is invited, in the text, to *come*. “At mealtime, come thou hither.” We have known some who felt ashamed to come to the House of God; but we trust you will none of you be kept away from the place of feasting by any shame on account of your dress, or your personal character, or your poverty; nay, nor even on account of your physical infirmities. “At mealtime come thou hither.” I have heard of a deaf woman who could never hear a sound, and yet she was always in the House of God, and when asked why, her reply was, “Because a friend found her the text, and then God was pleased to give her many a sweet thought upon the text while she sat in his House; beside,” she said, “she felt that as a believer, she ought to honor God by her *presence* in his courts, and recognizing her union with his people; and, better still, she always liked to be in the best of company, and as the presence of God was there, and the holy angels, and the saints of the Most High, whether she could hear or not, she would go.” There is a brother whose face I seldom miss from this house, who, I believe, has never in his life heard a sound, and cannot make an articulate utterance, yet he is a joyful believer, and loves the place where God’s honor dwelleth. Well, now, I think if *such* persons find pleasure in coming, we who *can hear*, though we feel our unworthiness, though we are conscious that we are not fit to come, should be desirous to be *laid* in the House of God, as the sick were at the pool of Bethesda, hoping that the waters may be stirred, and that we may step in and be healed. Trembling soul, never let the temptations of the devil keep thee from God’s House. “At mealtime come thou hither.”

Moreover, she was bidden not only to come, but to *eat*. Now, whatever there is sweet and comfortable in the Word of God, ye that are of a broken and contrite spirit, are invited to partake of it. “Jesus Christ came into the world to save *sinners*”—sinners such as you are. “In due time Christ died for the *ungodly*”—for such ungodly ones as you feel yourselves to be. You are desiring this morning to be Christ’s. Well, you *may* be Christ’s. You are saying in your heart, “Oh that I could eat the children’s bread!” You *may* eat it. You say, “I have no right.” But he gives you the invitation! Come without any other right than the right of his invitation. I know you will say how unworthy you are.

Let not conscience make you linger,

Nor of fitness fondly dream.

But since he bids you “come,” take him at his Word; and if there be a promise, believe it; if there be rich consolation, drink it; if there be an encouraging word, accept it, and let the sweetness of it be yours.

Note further, that she was not only invited to eat the bread, but to *dip her morsel in the vinegar*. We must not look upon this as being some sour stuff. No doubt there are crabbed souls in the Church, who always dip their morsel in the sourest imaginable vinegar, and with a grim liberality invite others to share a little comfortable misery with them; but the vinegar in my text is altogether another thing. This was either a compound of various sweets expressed from fruits, or else it was that weak kind of wine mingled with water which is still commonly used in the harvest fields of Italy, and the warmer parts of the world—a drink not exceedingly strong, but excellently cooling, and good enough to impart a relish to the reapers’ food. It was, to use the only word which will give the meaning, a sauce, which the Orientals used with their bread. As we use butter, or as they on other occasions used oil, so in the harvest field, believing it to have cooling properties, they used what is here called vinegar. Beloved, the Lord’s reapers have sauce with their bread; they have sweet consolations; they have not merely doctrines, but the holy unction which is the essence of doctrines; they have not merely truths, but a hallowed and ravishing delight accompanies the truths. Take, for instance, the doctrine of election, which is like the bread; there is a sauce to dip that in. When I can say, “He loved *me* before the foundations of the world,” the personal application, the personal enjoyment of my interest in the truth becomes a sauce into which I dip my morsel. And you, poor gleaner, are invited to dip your morsel in it too. I used to hear people sing that hymn of Toplady’s, which begins—

A debtor to mercy alone,

Of covenant mercy I sing;

Nor fear with thy righteousness on,

My person and offerings to bring.

And rises to its climax—

Yes, I to the end shall endure,

As sure as the earnest is given;

More happy, but not more secure,

The glorified spirits in heaven.

And I used to think I could never sing that hymn. It was the sauce, you know. I might manage to eat some of the plain bread, but I could not dip it in that sauce. It was too high doctrine, too sweet, too consoling. But I thank God I have since ventured to dip my morsel in it, and now I hardly like my bread without it.

Now I think I see her, and she is half prepared to come, for she is very hungry, and she has brought nothing with her this morning; but she begins to say, "I have no right to come, for I am not a reaper; I do nothing for Christ; I did not even come here this morning to honor him; I came here, as gleaners go into a cornfield, from a selfish motive, to pick up what I could for myself; and all the religion that I have lies in this—the hope that I may be saved; I do not glorify God; I do not good to other people; I am only a selfish gleaner; I am not a reaper." Ah! but thou art *invited* to come. Make no questions about it. Boaz bids thee. Take thou his invitation and enter at once. But, you say, "I am such a *poor* gleaner; though it is all for myself, yet it is little I get at it; I get a few thoughts while the sermon is being preached, but I lose them before I reach home." I know you do, poor weak-handed woman. But still, Jesus invites thee. Come! Take thou the sweet promise as He presents it to thee, and let no bashfulness of thine send thee home hungry. "But," you say, "I am a stranger; you do not know my sins, my sinfulness, and the waywardness of my heart." But Jesus does; and yet Jesus invites you! he knows you are but a Moabitess, a stranger from the commonwealth of Israel; but he bids you. Is not that enough? Will you refuse Boaz? Shall Jesus' lips give the invitation, and will you say me nay? Come, now, come. Remember that the little which Ruth could eat did not make Boaz any the poorer; and all that thou wantest will make Christ none the less glorious, or full of grace. What! are thy necessities large? Yes, but His supplies are larger. Dost thou require great mercy? He is a great Savior. I tell thee, that His mercy is no more to be exhausted than the sea is to be drained; or than the sun is to be rendered dim by the excess of the light which He pours forth today.

Moreover, let me tell thee a secret—Jesus *loves* thee; therefore it is that he would have thee feed at his table. If thou are not a longing, trembling sinner, willing to be saved, but conscious that thou deservest it not, Jesus loves thee, sinner, and he will take more delight in seeing thee eat than thou wilt take in the eating. Let the sweet love he feels in his soul toward thee draw thee to him. And what is more—but this is a great secret, and must only be whispered in your ear—he *intends to be married to you*; and when you are married to him, why, the fields will be yours; for, of course, if you are the spouse, you are joint-proprietor with him. Is it not so? Doth not the wife share with the husband? All those promises which are "yea and Amen in Christ" shall be yours; nay, they all *are* yours now, for "the man is next of kin unto you," and ere long he will spread his skirt over you and take you unto himself forever, espousing you in faithfulness, and truth, and righteousness.

Now, thirdly, and here is a very sweet point in the narrative: BOAZ REACHED HER THE PARCHED CORN. "SHE DID COME AND EAT." WHERE DID SHE EAT? YOU NOTICE SHE "SAT BESIDE THE REAPERS." SHE DID NOT FEEL THAT SHE WAS ONE OF THEM—SHE "SAT BESIDE" THEM. JUST AS SOME OF YOU DO, WHO DO NOT COME DOWN HERE THIS EVENING TO THE LORD'S SUPPER, BUT SIT IN THE GALLERY. YOU ARE SITTING "BESIDE THE REAPERS." YOU ARE SITTING AS IF YOU WERE NOT ONE OF US—HAD NO RIGHT TO BE AMONG THE PEOPLE OF GOD; STILL YOU WILL SIT BESIDE US. IF THERE IS A GOOD THING TO BE HAD, AND YOU CANNOT GET IT, YOU WILL GET AS NEAR AS YOU CAN TO THOSE WHO *do*; you think there is some comfort even in looking on at the gracious feast. "She sat beside the reapers." And while she was sitting there, what happened? Did she stretch forth her hand and get the food herself? No, it is written, "He reached her the parched corn." Ah! that is it. I give the invitation, brother, today; I give it earnestly, affectionately, sincerely; but I know very well, that while I give it, no trembling heart will accept it, unless the King himself comes near, and feasts his saints today. He must reach the parched corn; *he* must give you to drink of the "juice of the spiced wine of his pomegranate." How does he do this? By his gracious spirit, he first of all inspires your faith. You are afraid to think it can be true that such a sinner as you are accepted in the Beloved; he breathes upon you, and your faint hope becomes an expectancy, and that expectation buds and blossoms into an appropriating faith, which says, "Yes, my beloved is *mine*, and his desire is toward *me*." Having done this, the Savior does more; *he sheds abroad the love of God in your heart*. The love of Christ is like sweet perfume in a box. Now, he who put the perfume in the box is the only Person that knows how to take the lid off. He, with His own skillful hand, takes the lid from the box; then it is "shed abroad" like "ointment poured forth." You know it may be there, and yet not be shed abroad.

But Jesus does more than this; he reaches the parched corn with his own hand, when *he gives us close communion with him*. Do not think that this is a dream; I tell you there is such a thing as talking with Christ today. As certainly as I can talk with my dearest friend, or find solace in the company of my beloved wife, so surely may I speak with Jesus, and find intense delight in the company of Immanuel. It is not a fiction. We do not worship a far-off Savior; he is a God right at hand. We do not adore him as One who has gone away to heaven, and who never can be approached; but he is nigh us, in our mouth and in our heart, and we do today walk with him as the elect did of old, and commune with him as his apostles did on earth; not after the flesh, it is true, but spiritual men value spiritual communion better than any carnal fellowship.

Yet once more let me add, the Lord Jesus is pleased to reach the parched corn, in the best sense, when *the Spirit gives us the*

infallible witness within, that we are "born of God." A man may know that he is a Christian infallibly. Philip de Morny, who lived in the time of Prince Henry of Navarre, was wont to say that the Holy Spirit had made his own salvation to him as clear a point as ever a problem proved to a demonstration in Euclid could be. You know with what mathematical precision the scholar of Euclid solves a problem or proves a proposition, and just the same, with as absolute a precision, as certainly as twice two are four, we may "know that we have passed from death unto life." The sun in the heavens is not more clear to the eye than his own salvation to an assured believer; such a man would as soon doubt his own existence, and suspect his interest in eternal life.

After Boaz had reached the parched corn, we are told that "SHE DID EAT, AND WAS SUFFICED, AND LEFT." SO SHALL IT BE WITH EVERY RUTH. SOONER OR LATER EVERY PENITENT SHALL BECOME A BELIEVER. THERE MAY BE A SPACE OF DEEP CONVICTION, AND A PERIOD OF MUCH HESITATION; BUT THERE SHALL COME A SEASON, WHEN THE SOUL DECIDES FOR THE LORD. IF I PERISH, I PERISH. I WILL GO AS I AM TO JESUS. I WILL NOT PLAY THE FOOL ANY LONGER WITH MY *buts* and *ifs*, but since he bids me believe that he died for me, I *will* believe it, and will trust his cross for my salvation. And oh! whenever you shall be privileged to do this, you shall be "*satisfied*." She did eat, and was satisfied. Your *head* shall be satisfied with the precious truth which Christ reveals; your *heart* shall be content with Jesus, as the altogether lovely object of affection; your *hope* shall be satisfied, for whom have you in heaven but Christ? Your *desire* shall be satiated, for what can even the hunger of your desire wish for more than "to know Christ, and to be found in him." You shall find Jesus fill your *conscience*, till it is at perfect peace; he shall fill your *judgment*, till you know the certainty of his teachings; he shall fill your *memory* with recollections of what he did, and fill your *imagination* with the prospects of what he is yet to do. You shall be "satisfied." Still, still it shall be true, that you shall leave something. "She was satisfied, and she left." Some of us have had deep drafts; we have thought that we could take in all of Christ; but when we have done our best, we have had to leave a vast remainder. We have sat down with a ravenous appetite at the table of the Lord's love, and said, "Now, nothing but the Infinite can ever satisfy me; I am such a great sinner that I must have infinite merit to wash my sin away"; but we have had our sin removed, and found that there was merit to spare; we have had our hunger relieved, and found that there was a redundancy for others who were in a similar case. There are certain sweet things in the Word of God which you and I have not enjoyed yet, and which we cannot enjoy yet; we are obliged to leave them for a while. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." There is a knowledge to which we have not attained—a place of fellowship nearer yet to Christ. There are heights of communion which as yet our feet have not climbed—virgin snows upon the mountain untrodden by the foot of man. There is a yet beyond, and there will be forever.

But please to notice: it is not in the text, but it is recorded a verse or two further on, what she did with her leavings. It is a very bad habit, I believe, at feasts, to carry anything home with you; but *she* did, for that which was left she took home; and when she reached Naomi, and showed her the quantity of wheat in her apron, after she had asked, "Where hast thou gleaned today and had received the answer, she gave to Naomi a portion of that which she had reserved after she was sufficed. So it shall be even with you, poor tremblers, who think you have no right to any for yourselves; you shall be able to eat and be quite satisfied, and what is more, you shall have a morsel to carry to others in a like condition. I am always pleased to find the young believer beginning to pocket something for other people. When you hear a sermon, you think, "Well, poor mother cannot get out today, I will tell her something about it. There now, that point will just suit her: I will take that, if I forget anything else; I will tell her that by the bedside. There is my brother William, who will not come with me to chapel; I wish he would; but now, there was something which struck me in the sermon, and when I get close to him, I will tell him *that*, and I will say, 'Will you not come this evening?' I will tell him those portions which interested me; perhaps they will interest him." There are your children in the Sunday school class. You say, "That illustration will do for them." I think sometimes, when I see you putting down my metaphors on little scraps of paper, that you may recollect to tell somebody else; I would fain give more where they are so well used; I would let fall an extra handful, on purpose that there may be enough for you and for your friends.

Cultivate an unselfish spirit. Seek to love as you have been loved. Remember that "the law and the prophets" lie in this, to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself." How can you love him as yourself, if you do not love his soul? You *have* loved your own soul; through grace you have been led to lay hold on Jesus. Love your neighbor's soul, and never be satisfied till you see him in the enjoyment of those things which are the charm of your life and the joy of your spirit. I do not know how to give my invitation in a more comfortable way; but as we are sitting down to feed at his table in the evening of this day, I pray the Master to reach a large handful of parched corn to some trembling sinner, and enable him to eat and be satisfied.

A Sermon for Gleaners

Ruth 2:15,16

by C. H. Spurgeon

"Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even 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" (Ruth 2:15 , 16).

ALL the world dependeth upon the labor of the field, and the king himself is served of the plow and of the sickle. The dwellers in the country who watch the up-springing blade through all its perils, who mark the ear as it bursts from its sheath, and who anxiously observe it until it hangeth downward through ripeness, and becometh yellow in the sun—these, being brought constantly into

contact with clods and crops, are not able to forget their entire dependence upon "the staff of life." One can hardly live where the operations of husbandry are carried on, without often looking up to the God of Providence in anxious prayer, and anon, lifting up the heart in grateful praise. But the most of us are condemned to live in this huge wilderness of bricks, where scarcely a green thing salutes our eyes; where, if we try to rear a plant, it is but a sickly thing, neither tempting for beauty, nor fragrant with perfume. In the absence of the bright-eyed flowers, it is small wonder if we grow a little blind towards our mother earth. We are too apt to think that we are independent of the operations of the country; that our trade, our commerce, our manufacturers are sufficient to support us; forgetting all the while, that in vain is yonder forest of masts unless the earth shall yield her fruit; in vain the emporium, the exchange, and the places of merchandise, unless the land be plowed and harrowed, and at last yield to the husbandman his reward.

I would that I could recall to your memories, O ye dwellers in the city, how much ye depend upon the Lord God of the earth for your daily bread. Doth your food fall like manna from the skies? Do ye create it at the forge, or fashion it in the loom or on the wheel? Cometh it not of the earth, and is it not the Lord who giveth to the fertile womb of earth the power to yield its harvests? Cometh now the dew from heaven, and the sunshine from above, and do not these bring to *us* our bread as well as to those who abide in the midst of the fields? Let us not forget this time of the harvest, nor be unthankful for the bounty of the wheatsheaf; let us not forget to plead with God that he would be pleased to give us suitable weather for the ingathering of the precious grain, and when it shall be ingathered, let us not sullenly keep silence, but with the toiling swains who, well-pleased, behold the waving yellow crop, let us lift up the shout of harvest-home, and thank the God who covereth the valleys with corn, and crowneth the year with his goodness.

Tell me not that this is not a proper theme for the Sabbath day. I wot ye know not what ye say. Did not the disciples of Jesus walk through the cornfields on the Sabbath, and did not the Master make the fields themselves the subjects of his sermons? I fear not his disapprobation when I say, on this hallowed day, "Lift up now your eyes, and behold the fields are ripe already unto the harvest." Do you think that the outward creation is sinful, and that God would be worshiped on Sabbaths with closed eyes, and vacant faces, which must not look on flowers and fields? There is no impurity in green grass, or flowers, or sailing-clouds, or rippling waves, or ripening corn. To the believing ear, the footsteps of the Bountiful Father are everywhere audible, and the revolving seasons do but reveal the varied attributes of God. We may gather from every rustling ear a son, and listen in every harvest-field to a sermon which angels might stoop to hear. 'Tis no unhallowed theme. Come with me to the harvest-field—may the Master come with us—and let us talk awhile of other things than harvests, though the harvest shall be the metaphor on which we will fashion our speech.

I have now to invite you to other fields than these. I would bring you to the field of Gospel truth. My Master is the Boaz. See here, in this precious book is a field full of truthful promises, of blessings rich and ripe. The Master standeth at the gate, and affords us welcome. Strong men, full of faith, like reapers, reap their sheaves and gather in their armfuls. Would you were all reapers, for the harvest truly is plenteous. But if not reapers, may ye be as the maidens of Boaz. I see some servants who do not so much reap themselves as partake of that which others have reaped; I know we have many in this Church who are glad to eat the sweets and feed upon the fat things of the kingdom when they are brought forth each Sabbath-day, in the ministry of the Word. But I see trembling yonder, outside the gate, a little company to whom I am to address myself today; they are not reapers, they have not strength enough of faith to take the big sheaves; they are not as yet like household servants; they are not peaceful enough in their consciences to sit down and eat, and dip their morsel in the vinegar and be satisfied; but they are *gleaners*, and they are saying as they stand at the gate, "Would that I might find favor in the sight of my Lord, that I might even glean in this field, for I should then be content if I might gather here and there an ear of gospel grace." I am sent to you. My Master sendeth me as one of his young men, and thus he biddeth me say unto you, "Come into the field and glean wheresoever you will, and if in the gleaning you should grow strong and become reapers, reap and carry home the sheaves for yourselves."

First then, like Boaz, I shall ask the question, "WHO IS THIS DAMSEL?" IN ORDER THAT I MAY FIND OUT WHO THESE GLEANERS ARE WHO ARE INVITED INTO THE FIELD OF CHRIST, THAT THEY MAY GLEAN THE HANDFULS THAT ARE LET FALL ON PURPOSE FOR THEM.

"Who is this damsel?" The first answer is, *she is a Moabitess and a stranger*. Ah! I know thee, poor timid heart. Thou sayest, "I am sprang of an evil stock, an heir of wrath even as others; my nature is depraved and vile; how can I hope, such a one as I am, that I should ever be allowed to go into the Master's field, and glean of his good corn of grace? Oh! sir, did you know what I feel of my lost and helpless state, could you but perceive how base I am in my own eyes, because I have been so long a stranger to God, and an alien from the commonwealth of Israel. I think you would scarce invite me to glean in the field at all." Verily, my sister, thou art the very person to whom I am sent, for it was a Moabitish damsel upon whom Boaz set his heart, and it was to her that he sent his message. "Abide thou fast by my maidens; go not in any other field."

But I ask again who this damsel is, and she answers, "I am not only by nature a stranger, *but I must confess that I am now in my condition miserable and poor*; I cannot buy Christ's grace; I can do nothing to win his love. Once I thought I had some good works, but now I have none. Once I relied upon ceremonies, but I have given them up, for I find no comfort in them. I am utterly poor—so

poor, that I despair of ever in the future being richer than I am now. I am helpless; I am hopeless; I am nothing; yea, I am less than nothing. Alas! I am such a miserable beggar, that I am not worthy of the least of all his mercies." Dost thou say this? Right glad am I, then, to hear thee use such language, for unto thee, again, am I sent, and unto thee am I bidden to give the gracious invitation—"Come into the field and glean even among the sheaves."

Now the gleaner whom I describe is not only in her experience an alien and a stranger, and in her own present condition naked and poor, and miserable, *but she hath, despite all this, a decision for the Lord God of Israel.* I think I hear her say, "If I perish, I will perish looking to the cross of Christ; I have nothing of my own to bring, but I come just as I am. The Lord knoweth I have no other dependence but upon the blood and the finished righteousness of Jesus Christ. I forswear the gods of Moab in whom I once trusted; the world is now nothing to me; the pomps and vanities thereof have lost all their glory; as to myself, I abhor myself in dust and ashes. I would be Christ's and if he will not have me, if I may not glean in his fields, I will never go elsewhere.

It is marvelous the tenacity with which some of these timid souls will hold to Christ. Just as a man, the more fearful he is of sinking, clutches the plant with a more terrible earnestness; so have I seen some of these fearful souls lay hold on Jesus with a grip which neither death nor hell could unloose. Were the times of burning to come back again, many a wavering soul, that can scarce say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," would go singing to the stake; while many of those who are bold in words would prove cowardly in acts, and withdraw from Christ when it came to burning for him.

Our description, however, is far from being complete. *This gleaner is one who is exceedingly humble and self-emptied.* Just observe what she saith when Boaz takes notice of her—"Who am I, that I should find grace in thy sight, seeing that I am a stranger?" Ah! and the woman to whom I would speak this morning has such a low estimate of herself, that when she gets a grain of hope she thinks, "Ah! it is too good for me." When, sometimes, you half hope that Christ hath loved you and given himself for you, a sight of your unworthiness comes in, and you say, "No, this can hardly be, that such an one, so mean and so despicable as I, should ever be regarded by the lovely eyes of Christ, my Lord." I know you think not yourself to be pure, or fair, or lovely; and when you read such a passage as that, where Christ saith of His spouse, "Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee," tears come in your eyes, for you say, "Alas! He will never say that of me, for 'I am all defiled with sin, all unholy and unclean.' Should he search the world through, he would not find a more worthless one than I, and should he turn the heap over again and again, he could not find one that less deserved to be the object of his pity than I, poor unworthy I." Aye, but thou art just the person to whom I am sent! Thy Lord Jesus hath heard of thee, and he loveth such as thou art, for when thou art little in thine own eyes, then art thou great in his, and when thou talkest thus bashfully of thyself then he loves to hear thy words, for they are words of truth. In very deed, thou art what thou sayest thou art, nothing but loathsomeness, and corruption, and depravity; and yet he who hath loved thee, notwithstanding all this, will never leave thee till thy corruption has been removed, till thy loathsomeness has been washed away, till for deformity thou hast matchless beauty, and for unholiness his perfect righteousness.

Once again, *these gleaners have a very high opinion of those who are true Christians.* You notice, Ruth says, "I am not like unto one of thy handmaidens." No, and my poor gleaner yonder, she thinks the saints of God are such a blessed people, she is not like one of them. When she gets into her black experience she says, "If I were a child of God I would never be like this." Knowing her vileness and her imperfections she cries, "Ah! if I were one of Christ's chosen I should be much holier than I am; though I love his saints, I cannot dare to hope that I shall ever be numbered with them; my goodness can never reach so high as to be joined with them in visible fellowship." Ah! I know some of you feel that if you ever did get to heaven you would creep through some cranny in the door, and hide yourselves in some mousehole far away, where none could see you; and today, though in truth you are the best of the saints, you think yourselves the vilest of the vile; for many there be that are very rich in grace who think themselves miserably poor; while, on the other hand, many who say "I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing," are naked and poor, and miserable. Poor Moabitess, long an alien, having gone far into sin, and now decided for Christ, with a sort of despairing hope that maybe he will look upon thee, today—even today, he speaketh to thee. Open thine ear and hear him; forget thy kindred and thy father's house, for he greatly desireth thee, and he would have thee even now come to him and be espoused unto him forever.

Having beckoned to the gleaner, I shall now, like Boaz, ADDRESS THE REAPERS. THE MINISTERS ARE THE REAPERS, AND THUS SPEAKS BOAZ TO THEM—"LET HER GLEAN, EVEN AMONG THE SHEAVES, AND REPROACH HER NOT; LET FALL SOME OF THE HANDFULS OF PURPOSE FOR HER, AND LEAVE THEM THAT SHE MAY GLEAN THEM, AND REBUKE HER NOT."

The first command Christ gives to his ministers is—"Rebuke her not." Ah! I fear me, my brethren in the ministry, that we have often rebuked where we ought to have comforted, and perhaps our unwise speeches, when we did not mean to do it, have been very hard blows to the afflicted in Zion. I know some preachers who never went to Martin Luther's school; they may have prayer and meditation, but they have never been schooled by temptation; and if we are not much tempted ourselves, if we are not emptied from vessel to vessel ourselves, we are in very great danger when we are dealing with these Ruths, lest we be hard with them, and rebuke and reproach them, when instead thereof we should hear the Master say, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people; speak ye comfortably unto Jerusalem."

Now I take it that we do very much reproach these tender ones *when we set up standards in our ministry to which we tell them they must come or else perish*. Some do it in *experience*. I have heard old divines, and, like Elihu, I have been ready to rebuke my seniors when they have taught their experience, in all its length and breadth, as necessary for all the people of God. The experience of the advanced saint must never be set up as a standard for the young beginner. There are mountains for us to climb when our bones are firm, but these mountains are not for babes. There are depths into which we are to dive when we have learned the art of plunging into them, but these are not for little children, who must be dandled on the knee and nourished at the breast. When we describe some dark passage in our lives and say to the young convert—"You must have felt all this or you are not a child of God," we are reproaching where we ought to have comforted, and rebuking where we ought to have consoled. So have I seen a standard of *grace* set up. Some Christians are eminent in their graces; their faith is valorous; their courage defies all danger; their hope is bright and sparkling like a diamond; but if in our preaching we tell young converts that their graces must be equal in luster to the fathers in the Church, what do we but rebuke Ruth when we ought to have let fall handfuls of corn for her to gather?

And so, too, with regard to *doctrinal knowledge*. I have known some Christians well-schooled in these matters, and deeply read in theology who, when they meet with one who knows no more than this, that he is a sinner, and that Christ came to save sinners, will ask hard, wrinkled questions, which are more fit for an assembly of divines than for a babe in Christ; and because, truly, the little child cannot untie a Gordian knot, because the babe cannot crack the hard shells of these theological nuts, they send him away and say, "The root of the matter is not in thee; thou hast not passed from death unto life." Oh! let us not do this, dear brother-reapers; let us sooner cut ourselves with our own sickle than cut Ruths therewith; let us rather be patient and very tender, and receive the weak in the faith, as Christ hath received them. Let us, like our Master, not overdrive the lambs, but carry them in our bosom, and gently lead them when they need our tenderness and our care.

There is also another way in which some rebuke these gleaners, who should rather be invited and comforted—that is, by denying their faith when it is mixed with unbelief. It is marvelous, it is miraculous, that a spark of faith can live in the midst of an ocean of unbelief. You will find men who, at times, fear that they believe nothing; in their own apprehension they are so beclouded and bemisted that they have lost their way, and do not know where they are; and yet they are true believers for all that. Some of us have passed through crisis of our being in which, if we had been asked our very name, we could hardly have told it, for we were so utterly distressed, so lost and cast away by reason of overwhelming blasphemies, or incessant temptations, that we could scarce tell our right hand from our left. And were we therefore without faith? Nay, there was a little faith still; there was an undying principle still within us when death had made us wretched men. So we must not talk to these young beginners as though the uprising of their corruption disproved the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but we must succor them. We may tell them of the dragons we have fought, and the giants we have slain, but we must use discretion even in this; and when they are in the Slough of Despond, we must not leave them to sink there up to their very necks, but go like Help in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and lend them our hand to pull them out, for they may be in the right road even in the slough, and they may still have their faces to Zion though those faces may be besmeared with the mire and filth of that dreadful bog. Let us never rebuke or reproach these timid ones, but help and sustain them.

But further; Boaz gave another exhortation to the reapers—"Let fall handfuls of purpose for her." In our ministry there should always be a corner cupboard for the tired and timid saints. I think there should never be a sermon without a Benjamin's mess for the children. There should be strong meat for the men, but there should always be milk for the babes. Ready to adapt our ministry to all sorts of people, if we forget any we should never forget these. My brother, wouldest thou minister to these gleaners? Let me remind thee, first, that our ministry must be *plain*, for these timid souls cannot feed on hard words. Dr. Manton once preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, and a great crowd went to listen to him. A poor man who had walked fifty miles to hear the good doctor, afterwards plucked him by the sleeve and said—"There was nothing for me this morning." The doctor had preached a very learned sermon, full of Greek and Latin quotations which the poor countryman could not understand; but the doctor had not expected him, and there was nothing for him. I think there should always be in our ministry some things for poor Ruth; so plain and so simple that the wiseacres will turn up their noses and say, "What platitudes!" Never mind, if Ruth gets a handful of corn, our Master at the last shall know who did his errand best, and served him with a perfect heart.

And then, if plain, we must remember, too, that it must be very *elementary*. We must be often laying again the foundation-stone; teaching faith in Christ again and again; as Luther says, repeating justification by faith every Sunday, because men are so apt to forget it. Oh! ye fine preachers who elaborate your learned essays, who work all the week long to addle your own brains, and then spend the Sunday in muddling your hearers, would that ye would remember these poor gleaners, who want none of your fine stuff, none of our glorious fights, none of your rounded periods; but who will be better far content if you will tell them that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and will point their eyes to Calvary and bid them look and live. We must let fall handfuls on purpose for the weak and ignorant.

And then again, our preaching must be *evangelical*. Seeing eyes need Christ to dry them; tender hearts need Jesus' wounds to make them whole. A man who lives without temptation may enjoy a Sunday's sermon without Christ in it, but give me a man who is

tempted in the week and I know he wants Christ; give me a man who has lost money in the week, or that has been subjected to ridicule for Christ's sake, and I know that you might as well offer him the husks that swine do eat as offer him anything but Christ crucified visibly set forth before his eyes. Oh! we must get back to this, all of us who are preachers; we must forget what we learned at college; we must leave behind what we pick up from learned books, and come out to tell to Ruth just that which she most wants to hear, that Boaz welcomes her to the field, and bids her glean till her hands are full.

But then, brethren, you will notice that these reapers were to let handfuls fall *on purpose for her*. Well, then, ye reapers in God's field, let your preaching be very *personal*. Oh! I love when I draw the bow not to do it at a venture, but to single out some troubled heart and speak to you all as though there were but one here; not pouring the oil over the wound, but coming up to the edge of the gaping sore to pour *in* the oil and wine. These poor Ruths will not dare to take the corn unless we put it right in their way. They are so fearful, so timorous, that though it seem to be scattered for everybody, they think it cannot be for them; but if it be *there*, put *there*, so that they cannot mistake it, then they say—"Well, that is for me; ay, that is what I HAVE FELT; THAT IS WHAT I want"; and they cannot, unbelieving though they be, they cannot help stooping down and picking up the handful that is let fall *on purpose* for them. Then, if it be so, our preaching must always be very *affectionate*, for if we let fall a handful with a scowling face, our Ruth will go to the other end of the field rather than pick it up.

Oh! brethren in Christ, it is after all our sympathy with our fellowmen which is the great engine the Holy Ghost uses in converting them. It is not merely telling out the truth which is the power. God, if he had willed it, might have made statues which could preach, and they could have preached as well as we do, and infinitely better if the Lord had poured the words out of their cold lips; but he made *men* preachers that men might feel for men, and that our words might come out from our hearts, and so go glowing into the hearts of the afflicted. Oh! let *us*, then, who are reapers for Christ, be very tender with poor Ruth, and often when we forget the strong and leave the mighty man to take care of himself, let us go to the gate to pull in the fainting Mercy, and to invite Christiana and her little children to sit down and rest. So would I do this morning, and therefore I pass on to our third point.

As myself a reaper for Christ, I must try to follow the example of the reapers of Boaz, and let fall handfuls on purpose for the gleaner.

I am afraid I shall not be able to give you such handfuls as I would, but they shall come out of the right field. Oh! thou timid and troubled heart, let me drop before thee now *a handful of precious promises*. "He will not break the risen reed, or quench the smoking flax." Doth not that suit thy case? A reed, helpless, insignificant, and weak; a bruised reed, out of which no music can come; weaker than weakness itself; a reed, and that reed bruised! He will not break thee; he who broke Rahab by his right hand will not break thee. Thou art like the smoking flax; no light, no warmth, come from thee; thou art on the contrary, like flax that smokes, giving forth a foul, offensive smell. But he will not quench thee; he will blow with his sweet breath of mercy, till he fans thee to a flame. Dost thou need another? "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." What soft words! Thy heart is tender and the Master knows it, and therefore he speaketh so gently to thee. Wilt thou not listen, and obey him, and come to him, come to him even now? Hear him yet again—"Fear not, thou worn Jacob, I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." Or wouldest thou hear Jesus Christ speak to thee again?—"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." Or, again, "He is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by him."

Dost thou not remember ten thousand such passages as these? "When thou passest through the rivers I will be with thee, and the floods shall not overflow thee; when thou goest through the fires thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Or this, "Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget, yet will I not forget thee." Or this, "I have blotted out thy sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud thy transgressions." Or this, "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson they shall be whiter than snow." Or this, "The Spirit and the bride say Come, and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him come and take the water of life freely." Or this, again, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and ye that have no money, come and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price." Oh! my Master's field is very rich; behold the handfuls. See, there they lie before thee, poor timid soul! Gather them up, make them thine own, for Jesus bids thee take them. Be not thou too bashful; but take them, feed on them, and go on in the strength of this meat all thy days.

Well, I have dropped a handful of promises; now let me try to scatter *a handful of doctrines*. But Ruth starts back, for she is afraid to glean in the wheat fields of doctrine. Nay, but, Ruth, here is the doctrine of election; come and glean that. Fear thee not, poor timid soul, 'tis a sweet and blessed truth. Hear it—"God hath chosen the weak things of this world, and the things that are not hath God chosen to bring to naught the things that are." "I thank thee, O Father of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Doth not that suit thee, timid soul? Art not thou as a babe, as a weak thing, and as a foolish thing? Oh, there is a handful on purpose for thee, in the doctrine of electing love. Hear thou another, the doctrine of justification by faith; not by works of righteousness which we have done he saveth us, but through Christ Jesus; we are saved through what Jesus hath done on our behalf. "He that believeth on him is not condemned, but hath everlasting life." What

sayest thou? Doth not that suit thee? Thou hast no good works; canst thou not trust Christ and *his* good works on thy behalf? Is not this a handful on purpose for thee? "Yes, but I fear me," saith one, "that if I were saved I should yet fall away, for I am so weak." There is another handful for thee, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus." Is not this a handful on purpose for thee? "I have made and I will bear, even I will carry; even unto hoar hairs I am he, and unto old age will I carry thee." What more dost thou want. I tell thee, Ruth, there is not a single doctrine in Scripture which, if it be rightly understood, will not yield handfuls on purpose *for thee*. Indeed, my Master's gospel, though it be a chariot in which a king may ride, is like an ambulance used on the field of battle, in which a man with broken limbs may ride comfortably too.

Once more, we have some handfuls to drop that we have gathered in another field; we have been to promise-field and to doctrine-field, *now let us go to the field of experience*. Dost thou not know, Ruth, that thy experience is no exception to the rule? There are thousands such as thou art; and I, too, who speak to thee this morning, that thou mayest know the truth of this matter, I tell thee that once upon a time I stood like thyself shivering at the gate, and I said in my soul, "His mercy is clean gone forever; he will be mindful of his covenant no more." For years I cried for mercy but did not find it, and I wrote my name among the damned, and said I must perish, for God had shut up the bowels of his compassion. But he hath not despised the cry of his prisoner. I looked unto him and was lightened, and I am not ashamed to confess that there is light nowhere but in him. "Oh," say you, "then your experience is something like mine! Just so, it is; and so there is a handful on purpose *for you*. I know the devil tells you, you are lost in a byroad where Christ's mercy never travels; but it is a mistake; you are in the midst of the king's highway. I know he tells you, you have got to the ends of the earth; but my Lord puts it—"Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." Oh, but you think you are the last man! Ah! but Christ loveth to take the last and make them first, while the first he often leaveth to be last. Yes, but you have written bitter things against yourself! Never mind what you have written; what a mercy it is Christ did not write them, and that, on the contrary, he has written sweet things of you, and hath said, "Return unto me, saith the Lord, for I am reconciled unto thee." My Master woos thee this morning. Instead of offering thee a gleaner, he offers thee himself. Thou camest to be a gleaner; he would make thee his spouse. See, Boaz comes to thee. Wilt thou have him? The ring is in his hand; come, stretch out the finger of thy little faith, and let the deed be done. Say, "Unworthy though I be, I hope, my Lord, I am thine; no other would I have to serve, to love, to trust; Jesu, just as I am take thou me, and make me what thou wouldest have me to be." 'Tis done; the marriage is ratified, and by and by it shall be consummated before the eternal throne in thine everlasting bliss.

I close, then, by stirring up timid and troubled ones to do what I know grace will make them do ere long. I say, then to you who are thus troubled in your consciences, since the field is open to you, and we bid you glean; since Boaz himself commands us to let fall handfuls on purpose for you, do your duty, and be bold to believe today. You have been afraid to trust Christ hitherto; trust him now. Venture on him; 'tis a poor word to use, but do it.

Ruth, we are told, threshed her corn and left the straw behind, and took home the good wheat. Do thou the same. There is much straw in all our sermons, much that our Master would not have us say, for we are poor, poor creatures, and but fallible like yourselves, but do you leave the straw behind, and take home the good wheat; and do us this service—do not take home the straw and leave the wheat as some do. And, lastly, while on your knees in prayer you are beating out the sermon by meditation, turn your eye to my Master; go you to him and say to him, "Lord, I am content to glean though I get but one ear of mercy; but oh! that I had thyself! Oh! that thou wouldest give me thyself! I have no beauty, but oh! Thou dost not love us for *our* beauty, but for *thy* beauty which thou dost cast on us; Lord, look on me; all I can say is that if thou wilt save me I will praise thee on earth and I'll praise thee in heaven, and there shall not be one before the throne more grateful than I, because there shall be none who shall owe so much to thine unmerited, rich, free, sovereign grace."