

Ruth Devotional-Selwyn Hughes

DEVOTIONAL ON BOOK OF RUTH BY SELWYN HUGHES

RUTH 1

Ruth 1:1-2 The danger of expediency

"A man together with his wife and two sons, went to live in the country of Moab." (v. 1)

As the famine of which we spoke yesterday continues to ravage Israel, Elimelech and his little family make the decision to emigrate to the land of Moab. Was this a right decision - or a wrong one? Bible students have debated this question for centuries. The Moabites were the result of the incestuous union between Lot and his daughters (Genesis 19:29-38). They appeared to be a bad bunch who always opposed Israel. On one occasion they refused the Israelites bread and water, and hired Balaam to curse them. Because of this, God forbade the Moabites to come into the presence of the Lord, and told the Israelites not to seek their peace or their prosperity (Deuteronomy 23:3-7). Elimelech's decision to move his family into Moab may have appeared to be a good choice economically, but I believe it was a bad choice spiritually. He went directly against God's commands. Of course it can be argued that when one considers the positive things that came out of the move - the book of Ruth for example - then what they did was right. But when we see good coming out of something, we must never assume that God willed it that way; rather, He works through the bad to make all things contribute to His glory. Christians should never try to foresee the results of an action and thus justify going against God's commands. Instead, it should be the constant practice of every Christian to decide everything on the basis of God's will as displayed in His Word. We live dangerously when we allow expediency, and not the clear guidelines of Scripture, to determine our actions and our directions.

O Father, burn into my consciousness the things I have read today so that I will never be directed by expediency but by the clear directions that come out of Your Word. In Jesus' Name I ask it. Amen.

Ruth 1:3-5 Putting God first

"Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons." (v. 3)

Although Elimelech's decision to care and provide for his family must be applauded, there can be little doubt that in moving to the land of Moab he went against the will of God. Everything seemed to go well at first, and no doubt the improved economic conditions were to their liking. One day, however, tragedy strikes. Elimelech is taken ill and dies. Naomi, his wife, now faces the devastation of bereavement. Later, her two sons - both of whom had taken Moabite wives - also die, and she has to bear the pain of this further tragedy. These circumstances reinforce the point we made yesterday about the folly of making decisions based on expediency rather than on the will of God. How prone we are to allow materialistic or economic values to influence our judgment. A man and his family emigrated, lured by the appeal of financial security. He wrote: "Would to God I had thought of the spiritual implications before I made the move. My life and family are in ruins." This is why it is always wise to pray over a move to another town, city or country, as there may be unseen dangers that are revealed only through prayer. A change of circumstances will not necessarily solve our problems. We think if we had a new home, a new church, a new husband or wife, a new minister, or a new job, that all our difficulties would be over. As Christians, every major decision we make ought to be set against God's perfect will. We owe it to God to bring Him into our decision making. Otherwise we may find we have gained economically but lost out spiritually.

My Father and my God, help me never to allow economic or personal considerations to influence my judgment when making life's major decisions. Grant that I might subject all my decisions and movements to Your perfect will. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Ruth 1:6-13 Full Forgiveness Available

"Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home " (v. 6)

After Naomi has recovered from the shock of losing her husband and two sons in the land of Moab, she hears that Israel is once again a flourishing land and she makes up her mind to return to her people. When she announces her intentions to her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, they decide to accompany her on the journey home. As the three make their way out of Moab, Naomi feels it necessary to point out to the young women that their chances of finding someone to marry in Canaan would be very remote. What mother in Israel would allow her son to marry a woman from Moab? Naomi makes it clear that if she had other sons who were

eligible for marriage, she would gladly give them to her two bereaved daughters-in-law, but as this is not so she encourages them to return to their own homes. At this point Naomi seems saddened and overwhelmed by all that has happened and utters these solemn words: "It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has gone out against me" (v. 13). We must be careful not to read too much into this statement, but I feel that there were some feelings of self-recrimination reverberating beneath that remark. Naomi, being an Israelite, would have known how to approach God for forgiveness. Self-pity and self-contempt are always signals that say one has not really received the divine forgiveness. Whenever you are in need of forgiveness, open your soul to receive it.

Heavenly Father, I see how easy it is to allow sorrow for my sin to become self-reproach or self-pity. Help me, whenever I am in need of forgiveness, to receive it from You, and then to forgive myself. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

Ruth 1:14-18 The leap of faith

"Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay." (v. 16)

After Naomi's advice to her daughters-in-law that they should stay in Moab, Orpah, albeit reluctantly, prepares to return home. So deep however is Ruth's love for her mother-in-law that she begs to be allowed to accompany her to Israel, in one of the most moving passages in the Old Testament. Ruth is well aware that great problems will face her when she arrives in Israel - national, cultural and religious. But her determination to remain at the side of her mother-in-law is so great that she pours out her feelings in these words: "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay." Such is her love for Naomi that the possibility that they might have no permanent home makes no difference whatsoever. "Your people will be my people." Imagine giving up your friends and family to settle in a land where you know you could well be ostracized. "And your God my God." Ruth had evidently seen and heard enough from Naomi to realize that the God of the Israelites was Someone worth knowing. What a magnificent picture this is of a true conversion. Ruth and Orpah stand at the crossroads. Orpah draws back to end her days in the darkness of heathen idolatry, while Ruth moves on to a new land and a new future, and to have her name inscribed forever on the sacred record. How sad that so many can appear to be deeply religious, travel for a time with God's people, yet fail to make that "leap of faith" that entrusts all one has and all one is to the Savior. If you have not done so, make the leap of faith today.

Gracious and loving Father, help me understand that keeping company with Your people is not enough for salvation. I must make that determined leap of faith. I do so now. Receive me and make me Yours. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Ruth 1:19-22 The marks of disobedience

"The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me." (v. 21)

After the long journey from Moab, Naomi, in company with her daughter-in-law, Ruth, finally reaches Bethlehem. There she is welcomed by the whole community, who seemingly turn out in force to greet her. One can deduce from the question "Can this be Naomi?" (v. 19) something of the change that must have taken place in her appearance. Undoubtedly, the circumstances through which she had passed, and the sojourn in Moab, had left deep marks upon her. Naomi's response is swift, and still tinged with self-recrimination: "Don't call me Naomi [sweet or pleasant] Call me Mara [unpleasant], because the Almighty has made my life very bitter." Although there might have been some feelings of self-recrimination in Naomi's heart, the fact must not be overlooked that she was also a living testimony of what happens to those who choose some way other than God's way. "Those who take God's way," says Dr. E. Stanley Jones, "get results. Those who don't get consequences." I have met many who stepped out of the will of God, and although they returned to Him and were forgiven, they still carry in their bodies and personalities the consequences of their actions. I heard of a Christian who, finding he had homosexual tendencies, decided to engage in one homosexual encounter - just to see what it would be like. He contracted AIDS, and unless the Lord heals him or a cure is found, he will probably die. We ought to remember that if we move away from the will of God, the sin in which we engage can be forgiven, but the marks of sin may remain in us and upon us for a lifetime.

Father, I see that in this world I can either get results - or consequences. Help me not to go against the grain of the universe, for life is designed to move in one way - Your way. Teach me to walk in Your statutes. Amen.

RUTH 2

Ruth 2:1 Maximizing time

"Naomi had a relative on her husband's side a man of standing, whose name was Boaz." (v. 1)

This one verse is like a window through which light floods to illuminate Naomi's family background. It tells us that her deceased

husband, Elimelech, came from a wealthy family, and that now most of that wealth was in the hands of a young relative of Elimelech's - Boaz. We know from the preceding verse (Ruth 1:22) that Naomi and Ruth have arrived in Bethlehem just as the harvest is about to begin. Ruth sets about the task of finding something to do. People of character always have a mind to work. Continued laziness, unless physiologically based, is evidence that a person's character is flawed. He or she is non-contributive and thus will not discover, as one of the laws of life says, that "It is more blessed to give than to receive." If you want some interesting hours in the Bible, look up the passages where God appears to people and calls them to special service. You will find that in most cases, if not in every case, when He came to them they were already busily engaged in some task. Moses was tending the sheep. Amos received his call while walking behind a plow. Peter, James, John and Andrew were called to Christ's service when mending their nets. Some idly sit around waiting for God to call them to special service and wonder why they never hear His voice. God is looking to see how we are handling ordinary tasks of life before He entrusts us with the special things. Put your whole energy into every task that comes your way and will give you the opportunity to do bigger and greater things.

My Father and my God, help me see that the little tasks, when done well, qualify me for the bigger tasks that may be up ahead. May I turn to today's duties with enthusiasm and dedication. For today may be the day when I am called to bigger things. Amen.

Ruth 2:2-3 Unconscious guidance

"So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters." (v. 3)

Ruth has no difficulty in finding a task to gainfully occupy her for, as we read in Ruth 1:22, they arrived in Bethlehem "as the barley harvest was beginning." At harvest time there was always work to be found in the fields, even if it was only gathering up after the reapers. When the workers went through the fields reaping the harvest, often, because of the speed at which they worked, they would leave behind small unreaped sections. These unreaped areas were then covered by "gleaners," who would walk behind and reap the grain that was still standing. Jewish law stated that the gleanings must be left for the poor, and the grain collected by the gleaners became theirs (Leviticus 19:9-10; Deuteronomy 24:19). During the harvest, all the fields were open to be gleaned. No employment agency. No special selection system. No union cards. Those who had the need and desire to glean simply went and worked wherever the inclination took them. As Ruth takes up the role of gleaner, she happens to find herself reaping in one of the fields which belonged to Boaz. The term used in the second half of our text for today, "as it turned out," is filled with deep spiritual meaning. Divine guidance was at work here. Ruth might not have realized it or sensed it, for most divine guidance takes place when we are not conscious of it.

Father, forgive me for the times I have thought things have happened to me because of luck, when really it has been the Lord. How glad I am that I am being guided not by the stars but by the Savior. I am truly thankful. Amen.

Bible verses: Ruth 1:22 Leviticus 19:9-10 Deuteronomy 24:19

Ruth 2:3 Nothing too trivial

"As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz " (v. 3)

We spend another day considering how Ruth finds herself gleaned a field which belonged to Boaz, not by chance but by divine guidance. Eliezer, Abraham's servant, you remember, experienced similar leading when he went to search for a bride for Isaac: "I being in the way, the Lord led me" (Genesis 24:27, KJV). The fact that God should condescend to guide us in this life is wonderful, but nothing can be more wonderful than guidance of which we are not conscious. How reassuring it is to know that even when we are not seeking it, God is guiding us still. I am sure that almost every one of you can look back and recollect a time when, because of a "chance" occurrence, your life took a completely different turn. The world explains these things as coincidences, and sometimes they are no more than that, but there are special times when seeming coincidences are really God-instances. The Almighty is at work, bringing His wondrous purposes to pass. This is because, as the theologians tell us, God not only has a general providence - one in which all His creation benefits - but a special providence which involves only those who have a personal relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ (Romans 8:28). After a lifetime of knowing God's special providence, the great Samuel Chadwick, one-time principal of Cliff College in Derbyshire, England, said: "The divine attention to detail is amazing. Nothing is too trivial for Omnipotence." Though the universe revolves at His word, He means it when He says to you and me: "I will guide thee with mine eye" (Psalm 32:8, KJV).

O Father, how humbling yet how encouraging it is to know that You guide me even when I am not conscious of it. Forgive me that I do not thank You enough for this. But I do so now. Thank You dear Father. Thank You. Amen.

Bible verses: Genesis 24:27 Romans 8:28 Psalm 32:8

Ruth 2:4 Management-labor relations

"Boaz greeted the harvesters, 'The Lord be with you!' 'The Lord bless you!' they called back." (v. 4)

The reception which Boaz receives from his workers when he arrives in his field shows that his relationship with them was far removed, generally speaking, from today's management-labor relations. Boaz greets his workers with the words "The Lord be with you!," and the workers reply: "The Lord bless you!" Can you imagine that exchange of greeting taking place on shop floors or in offices today? Yet when godliness prevails in a nation, one of the first things to be affected is management-labor relations. During the 1904 revival in Wales, many officials in the coal mines met with the miners to pray together before the day's work began. An old Welsh miner told me: "Dead on the stroke of 6 am, the manager would appear followed by other officials of the mine, and greet us with the word 'Benedegedig' [Welsh for 'wonderful']." The assembled miners would then respond with "Hallelujah," or something similar. What a way to begin a day! The secret of good employer-employee relations is for management to be caring, fair minded and honest, and workers to put in a good day's work. And where there is a Christian commitment on both sides then it adds great weight to the qualities I have mentioned. A leading industrialist in Pusan, Korea, told me during my visit there that before he found Christ the relationships between himself and his workers were in turmoil. After he found Christ, he saw his employees in a new light. "I worked out ways of how I could bless them," he said, 'and they in turn worked out ways by which they could bless me.'" This kind of approach never fails.

Father, lay Your healing hand on the turmoil that is in so much of the relations between employers and employees. Show everyone concerned that exhibiting fairness, honesty, and concern for the welfare of others is in accordance with the way the world was designed to run. Amen.

Ruth 2:5-12 Under His wings

"May you be richly rewarded by the Lord under whose wings you have come to take refuge." (v. 12)

As Boaz makes his way through the field, talking to his workers, his eye falls upon the figure of Ruth. "Who is she?" he asks. His workers quickly inform him that she is the widowed daughter-in-law of Naomi, a Moabite by birth. We cannot be sure that it was love at first sight, but Boaz certainly shows all the signs of it. He walks over to Ruth and says: "Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled" (vv. 8-9). Isn't that the language of a man in love? This protective care and concern prompts Ruth to ask: "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me - a foreigner?" (v. 10). Clearly, Boaz already knows of the return of Naomi and how her daughter-in-law Ruth has stayed at her side. He sums up his feelings in the words: "May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge" (v. 12). Some of you have stood for God despite great criticism from your families and friends. He has seen all your tears, all your heartache and all your sacrifices. And He promises you a perfect reward one day. Draw close to Him now and nestle beneath the shelter of His great wings. Look up and see how easily they cover you. Under His wings there is no further need for tears - just trust!

O Father, how marvelous is Your timing. Just when I need it, You find a way of bringing me the greatest encouragement when all other doors are closed. You find a secret stair into my soul. Thank You, dear Father. I take this word from You. Amen.

Ruth 2:13-17 Handfuls - on purpose

"pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up" (v. 16)

Today we see how his protective concern leads Boaz to invite Ruth to join him during a meal break. "Come over here," he says: "Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar" (v. 14). A little later he offers her some roasted grain. Gets more interesting, doesn't it? Once Ruth has completed her meal, she returns to her gleaning. Yet again, Boaz intervenes on her behalf by instructing his servants to let fall whole handfuls of grain so that she has plenty to gather. I love the way the Amplified Bible describes this moment: "And let fall some handfuls for her on purpose." "Handfuls on purpose." What a beautiful expression. It is a picture of how God goes before each one of His toiling servants and lets fall "handfuls on purpose" - some tokens of His goodness, some special encouragement, some evidence of His care, that serves to keep us moving forward and keep our hearts bent on the divine task. Has there not been a time in your life when, overcome with the weight and burden of the day, you were about ready to give up the task God had given you, and suddenly He let fall some "handful on purpose"? Have you not experienced such a moment of divine encouragement? Perhaps it was a word in a sermon, a word from Scripture which was quickened by the Spirit to your heart, or perhaps a line in a devotional commentary. How gracious and loving is our Lord. Today He drops before you once again a "handful on purpose." Be glad for it.

O Father, how easy it is to remember the discouragements and forget the encouragements. Forgive me for my proneness to do this.

Thank You for every "handful on purpose" that comes my way. I bless You for them. In Jesus' Name.

Ruth 2:18-21 On looking back

"He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead." (v. 20)

It is not difficult to imagine the kind of thoughts that may have been going through Naomi's mind as she dwells on Ruth's first day in the harvest field. How will she fare? What will the men say about her - a foreigner? Will she be successful in bringing home enough grain to help keep body and soul together? If Naomi had such fears then they are quickly laid to rest when Ruth returns with a whole ephah of barley. An ephah is no small measure. In today's terms it is nearly ten kilograms. I can picture Ruth recounting the events of the day with great excitement - her whole being tingling with delight as she reflects on the way God has provided for her. Naomi's questions come fast and furious: "Tell me everything! Whose field were you in? Where did you glean?" As soon as Ruth mentions the name of Boaz, Naomi's heart leaps within her, and she begins to focus on the Lord in a way she has not quite done before. "The Lord bless him!" she says, referring of course to Boaz, "He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead" (v. 20). She senses that Ruth's meeting with Boaz has a providential feel about it. Boaz was a close relative who had the right to redeem Ruth and take her to be his wife. Together, Ruth and Naomi look back over the day and give thanks to God for the evidence of His guiding hand. They find, as you and I have found, that the evidences of the divine design are certainly there as we look back.

Father, I confess I am better at looking back and thanking You than I am at looking ahead and praising You. Forgive me for that. Help me learn from what I have experienced of Your guiding hand to trust You more in the future. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

Ruth 2:22-23 If only we believed

"Ruth stayed close to the servant girls until the barley and wheat harvests were finished." (v. 23)

Ruth continues to glean in the field of Boaz, secure in the knowledge that when the barley harvest is over she will be able to stay on and participate in the wheat harvest as well. Naomi is equally elated as she senses that Ruth's meeting with Boaz is no accident, but part of God's wonderful provision and care. One can imagine Naomi musing to herself: "How strange that Ruth should alight on the field owned by Boaz and that she should become the object of his personal interest and concern. And to discover, too, that Boaz has the right to redeem her and may well take her to be his wife." Deep down in her heart Naomi knows that God is at work. Each one of us must recognize that in the ebb and flow of life's circumstances, an eternal God is quietly pursuing His purposes. Little, if anything, happens by chance in the God-ordained life. The Almighty is seeking to work out His purposes in the life of each one of us, and He is there in every emergency or situation that arises. He is there in the ups and downs, the ins and outs, the comings and goings. When you become aware that in the life of every one of His children God is bent on bringing to pass His perfect purposes, then that thought most certainly reduces anxiety and fear. If only we could grasp the truth of Romans 8:28 (KJV): "All things work together for good." Hardly a fear would then arise in our hearts. Our trouble is not that we do not believe God's Word; our trouble is we do not believe it enough.

My Father and my God, grant that Your Word might move from my intellect right into my heart. I don't want just to hold Your Word; I want it to hold me. "I believe, help Thou mine unbelief." In Jesus' Name I ask it. Amen.

Bible verses: Romans 8:28

RUTH 3

Ruth 3:1 A budding romance

"My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you?" (v. 1)

As Naomi ponders the sovereignty of God in the meeting between Ruth and Boaz, she begins to realize there is a distinct possibility that Boaz will take on the responsibility of marrying Ruth and providing the security she needs in the future. She begins, therefore, to formulate a clear and daring plan to ensure the continuance of the budding romance. Note how she opens up the conversation: "My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for? Is not Boaz a kinsman of ours?" (vv. 1-2). This is not meddling or matchmaking, but simply bringing to bear on the issues the insight God has given to her. Most people who fall in love and contemplate marriage could do with a little advice and counsel. Personally, I have never conducted a marriage service for a couple without requiring them to go through some premarital counselling. After all, marriage is probably the most important change that anyone on this earth can experience apart from conversion, and if ever guidance and help is needed, it is in relation to negotiating the difficulties that can occur when two people establish a close relationship. I have come to the conclusion that one of

the greatest indictments that can be levelled at the contemporary Christian Church is its failure, generally speaking, to assist and guide those who are about to be married. The more thought and care that goes into planning and preparing for marriage, the more likelihood there is that the couple will spend all their wedding anniversaries - together.

Father, forgive us that we, Your Church, have thought more about how to conduct weddings than how to nurture marriages. Help us to transmit the wisdom that comes from the Scriptures and our own life experiences to those about to marry. Amen.

Ruth 3:2-5 Three pieces of advice

"Ruth — went down to the threshing-floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do." (v. 5)

During the time of the winnowing of the grain, it was customary for the workers to sleep on the threshing-floor. Naomi's carefully formulated plan was designed to work precisely at this point. Her first piece of advice to Ruth is: "Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes" (v. 3). I am not sure that I know how to interpret her second piece of advice: "Don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking" (v. 3). We are all familiar with the saying: "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach." But this advice seems more in line with another proverb: "Never come between a man and his table." Her third piece of advice is this: "When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do" (v. 4). Naomi knew that according to the laws of Israel, a widow was entitled to approach the nearest male relative and remind him of his obligation to take care of her. What a delightful picture this gives us of the relationship that exists between each one of us and our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as Ruth was within her legal rights in approaching Boaz, so we, as God's children, have a legal right to approach the throne of grace and avail ourselves of God's obligation to meet our every need. We must be careful, however, that we do not mistake a need for a want. God is not under an obligation to give us everything we want, but He is under an obligation to give us everything we need.

Father, the thought that I have a legal right to approach Your throne and claim Your provision for my needs is awesome and breathtaking. Yet it is so. Help me to appropriate the rich inheritance I have in Christ. Amen.

Ruth 3:8-9 A Binding Contract

"Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer." (v. 9)

At midnight Ruth moves in quietly to where Boaz is lying, gently uncovers his feet, and proceeds to lie across them. Boaz is somewhat startled by this act and inquires anxiously: "Who are you?" "I am your servant Ruth," she replies, "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer" (v. 9). By this simple custom of lying at Boaz's feet, Ruth was really saying: "I belong to you and I want you to take care of me." Boaz is seemingly thrilled to be approached in this way for his response is certain and positive: "The Lord bless you don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask" (vv. 10-11). We can safely assume from these words that at that moment he acceded to Ruth's request to cover her with his garment - the sign of his willingness to protect her and meet his obligations as a redeemer. The custom of covering a bride with a tallith, or fringed garment (Ezekiel 16:8), is still part of Jewish matrimonial ritual to this day. What spiritual lesson can be drawn from this beautiful and inspiring picture of Ruth lying at Boaz's feet? This - the Church, though surrounded at this present moment by a deep and dense darkness, is nevertheless resting safely and securely at the Savior's feet. But this is not all. His covering of us by the robe of righteousness is also the pledge that one day He is going to join us to Himself in a marriage that will last for all eternity. And that marriage is destined never to end in divorce.

O Father, just to live with You in eternity would have been enough to delight my soul forever, but to be joined to You, to be one with You, to be part of Your Bride, is more than I deserve. Yet that is Your promise. I am eternally grateful. Amen.

Bible verses: Ezekiel 16:8

Ruth 3:10-13 A "Moonlight Sonata"

"Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I." (v. 12)

The more we get into the story of Ruth and Boaz, the more it appears that his heart was set on her right from the very start. He seems greatly relieved that she has approached him in this way, and the passage that occupies our attention today is a kind of "moonlight sonata" in which Boaz bears testimony to Ruth's virtue, courage, and character. It would appear from his statement that there was a little age difference between them: "You have run after the younger men, whether rich or poor" (v. 10). We cannot be certain about this, but most commentators make that deduction from these words. One problem, however, faces the couple as they contemplate marriage. There is a closer relative than Boaz. Jewish law specifically required the next of kin, if he was single, to take on the responsibility of marrying a widow, but Boaz is second in line. He vows before the Lord that he will seek a settlement of the matter as quickly as possible, and then encourages Ruth to rest contentedly until the morning. Here we must ask: If there was a

kinsman nearer than Boaz then why did not Ruth present herself to him? And why did not Naomi, who must have known there was a nearer kinsman than Boaz, steer Ruth in his direction? The answer will become clear as we reach the end of the story. For the moment, let us recognize in this the guiding and planning of the Almighty. The fate of most things precious is to grow familiar and lose their first bewildering thrill. May it never be so with the guidance of God.

O Father, give me, I pray, an ever increasing consciousness of the wonder of divine guidance. Let the fact that "nothing is too trivial for Omnipotence" continually amaze and astonish me. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

Ruth 3:14-17 Wait!

"Bring me the shawl you are wearing he poured into it six measures of barley." (v. 15)

Boaz was well aware that Ruth's visit to him at midnight could be misinterpreted. Anxious to preserve her good name, he encourages her to return to her place before the rest of the workers awaken and the general activity of the day begins. Before she leaves, however, he invites her to hold out her shawl, which he fills with six measures of barley. This was not something for which she had labored, the result of her gleaning, but a special gift. A later comment by Ruth indicates that the gift was intended not only for her but for Naomi as well: "He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed' " (v. 17). When Ruth finally reports to Naomi all that has happened in the night, and particularly the fact that there is a kinsman nearer than Boaz, Naomi gives her this advice: "Wait For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today" (v. 18). It is not easy to wait, especially where matters of the heart are concerned. But no Christian is mature until he or she has learned to wait. Perhaps this is the word the Lord has for you today - wait. Are you feeling spiritually restless at the moment, straining at the leash and anxious to press ahead on some point that needs further thought and prayer? Well, here is His word again - wait. A purpose far wiser than you can ever conceive of is being worked out for you. A heart infinitely more loving than any other you will ever know is caring for you. A mind greater than yours is planning for you. So - wait!

Father, forgive me that so often I move ahead when I should wait, and rush around when I should be standing still. I have so much to learn in this matter. Help me, dear Father. Teach me the art of waiting. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

Ruth 3:18 Confident Trust

" the man will not rest until the matter is settled today." (v. 18)

We spend another day considering Naomi's advice to Ruth following the latter's midnight vigil with Boaz. Yesterday we focused on the fact that Naomi's advice to Ruth centered on the word "wait." Now we consider the basis on which that advice was given: " the man will not rest until the matter is settled today." Clearly, Naomi is convinced that Boaz will leave no stone unturned until the matter is brought to a satisfactory conclusion. Scripture does not tell us how much Naomi knew about Boaz, but we can safely assume that she would have known a good deal about him. It would be rare in Israel, where even today family life is still close and intimate, for near relatives not to know almost everything about one another. As we shall see, Naomi's reading of the situation was quite correct for Boaz truly was a man who would do everything in his power to keep his promise and act according to his word. Who can fail to see in these words a picture of Christ, our heavenly Boaz, who at the beginning of time set about the task of overcoming every obstacle that stood in the way of our salvation? Such was His commitment to us that He endured the most horrifying experiences to woo us, and win us to Himself. I am reminded of an old preacher who was expounding the difficulties which Christ overcame in order to bring us safely to heaven. He put it in this quaint but intriguing way: "God thought it, Christ bought it, the Holy Spirit wrought it - thank God I've got it!" With all my heart I say - Amen!

Gracious and loving Father, when I contemplate the tremendous obstacles and difficulties which my Lord Jesus Christ overcame to save me, there are just no words to express my gratitude and praise. Thank You, dear Father. Thank You. Amen.

RUTH 4

Ruth 4:1 Three Conditions

"When the kinsman-redeemer came along, Boaz said, 'Come over here, my friend, and sit down.' " (v. 1)

We have referred to the term "kinsman-redeemer" several times in our meditations and we pause now to make clear what it means. The word "redeem," as you will know, means "to buy back" or "set free." It is the act by which a person's property or liberty is purchased through the payment of a special price. A kinsman-redeemer was someone who became involved in buying the rights and privileges of another family member. As such, several things were required of him. First, he must be a near kinsman, related by

birth (Leviticus 25:47-49). Second, he must be able to pay the required price. Third, he must enter into any agreement without coercion. All three of these conditions Boaz was able to meet. He was related to Naomi by birth and was thus a near kinsman. Being related to Naomi meant he was also related to Ruth. It would appear he was well able to pay the price, being a moderately wealthy landowner. One condition remains - was he willing? Most certainly so. So great was his love for Ruth that he was willing to lay aside his reputation in Israel and marry one who was cursed by birth and frowned upon by Jewish law. My mind flies to another Kinsman-Redeemer, whose name is Jesus. How wonderfully did our Lord meet these three conditions. At the Incarnation He joined Himself to us so that He could identify with the human race and thus become a near Kinsman. Although divested of heaven's riches, He had the one thing needful to pay for our redemption - a perfect life. And was He a willing participator? Most certainly so.

Lord Jesus Christ, what a perfect Redeemer You are. You joined Yourself to the human race in the incarnation, paid for my redemption with Your own life on the Cross, and did all of this freely and out of a heart of love. I am deeply thankful. Amen.

Bible verses: Leviticus 25:47-49

Ruth 4:2-4 A temporary setback

" 'If you will redeem [the land], do so.' 'I will redeem it,' he said." (v. 4)

Ruth, the Gentile widow from Moab, is to become the bride of the wealthy Boaz of Bethlehem. Before the marriage can take place, however, a special meeting has to be arranged with Naomi's next of kin so that the matter of redemption can be satisfactorily settled. The meeting is held at the gate of the city, the usual place for the elders to meet when resolving civic matters. Whatever was decided there usually became law. Boaz waits until the kinsman arrives and then proceeds to go into the details of Naomi's situation. Elimelech, Naomi's husband, had owned a field which Boaz wants to purchase. The next of kin has first claim, but Boaz asks if he wants to buy it. For a moment it appears that Boaz's plan might be thwarted for the kinsman says: "I will buy it! If the nearest relative bought the dead man's land, Jewish law stated that he then had legal rights over the family. Should this happen now, Boaz would not be able to claim Ruth as his wife. Some might have turned away at this stage and said: "I have done all I can - there is nothing more I can do." But not Boaz. In his heart burned a love that would not be dampened by difficulties. This is the wonderful thing about true love - it leaps over all obstacles, opposes every argument, and moves on relentlessly until it possesses the object of its affection and makes it its own. Our Savior's love was of this kind also - but infinitely greater. He has argued the case on our behalf and won! Now we find ourselves owned by Him - forever.

O loving Savior, how can I sufficiently thank You for pleading my case in the courts of heaven and winning on the Cross my eternal freedom and redemption. What I feel is impossible to put into words. I love You Lord Jesus. Amen.

Ruth 4:5-6 Arguing the case

" the kinsman-redeemer said 'I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself.' " (v. 6)

Boaz's plans to redeem Ruth were temporarily thwarted when the nearest kinsman gave a definite "yes" to his proposal that he should buy the land. But now the love which burned in Boaz's heart gives energy to his thinking and he comes up with a powerful argument that wins the day. In the words of the Living Bible: "Then Boaz told him, 'Your purchase of the land from Naomi requires your marriage to Ruth so that she can have children to carry on her husband's name, and to inherit the land' " (v. 5). The kinsman's enthusiasm wanes. The thought of having a Moabitess in his family - one who was a despised alien - was not at all appealing, and so he says: "Then I can't do it for her son would become an heir to my property too; you buy it" (v. 6). How similar is all this to the process through which our Lord went in order to redeem us. As Scripture puts it, we were "sold under sin" (Romans 7:14, KJV). That means we were slaves to the kingdom of Satan; we belonged by right to him. However, Christ put into effect the divine plan that enabled us to pass from the kingdom of Satan into the Kingdom of God. Satan thought he had us in his clutches for all time but he was outmaneuvered at the Cross. Just as Boaz turned the tables on the kinsman at Bethlehem, so our Lord turned the tables on Satan at Calvary. What the devil thought would be a great victory turned out to be his most ignominious defeat. Hallelujah!

O Father, when I reflect on with what deftness and skill You overturned the strategies of Satan, I just want to open up my heart to You in endless praise. Blessed be Your Name forever and ever. Amen.

Bible verses: Romans 7:14

Ruth 4:7-8 The redemption ceremony

" for the redemption to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other." (v. 7)

The ceremony through which a man passed when he was unwilling or unable to redeem something, and thus lost his legal claim,

was both colorful and dramatic, and could be unpleasant. A widow, for example, who faced a hostile kinsman who did not want to fulfil his obligations under the law, would sometimes spit in his face and say: "This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line" (Deuteronomy 25:9). The law required that the man who was transferring his legal right should take off his shoe and hand it to the other person as an act of completion, and that such a transaction should take place in the full view of the public. Justice must not only be done but be seen to be done. How reminiscent this is of the work of Christ on the Cross. Paul says: "This thing was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26, KJV). He meant that our Lord was not put to death in one of the back streets of Jerusalem, away from the eyes of the multitudes, but was crucified on a hill for all to see. There was a divine purpose behind this. If Christ had died at the hand of a footpad in some quiet corner then His death would have exposed the evil of only one man - a criminal type of individual. The fact that Christ was officially put to death - the "best" people of the nation sought it - meant that their condemnation of Him was representative of the wishes of the whole human race. In the uplifted Cross we have a revelation of the real character of humanity.

Father, I see that the Cross exposes not just the sins of a few but the sins of all humanity. This means my sins are there also. But men did not take Your life away from You; You laid it down of Yourself. I am so grateful for this saving truth. Amen.

Ruth 4:9-10 Sealed and certified

"Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, 'Today you are witnesses ' " (v. 9)

We said yesterday that Jewish law required the participants in a redemption purchase to have the transaction validated in the presence of witnesses. We said also that in a way this pictures the salvation which our Lord secured for us on the Cross. He too transacted our redemption before the gaze of many. Could He have exposed sin in all its foul horror if He had died in His bed, or by accident? Of course not. His death had to take place in such a way that it would reveal the real character of the human race. And it was necessary for there to be many witnesses. Boaz places such emphasis on the fact that the transaction between him and the nearest kinsman was being made in the presence of witnesses. He begins and ends his statement with these words: "Today you are witnesses." Why this double emphasis? I suggest it was because Boaz wanted to be sure that the transaction would never be called into question in the future. After all, it wasn't every day that a Jew married a Gentile, especially someone from the land of Moab. People might be tempted to query the legality of this at some later stage if not now clearly sealed, settled and certified. For a similar reason, our Lord's death was enacted before many witnesses. As Christ was destined to rise from the dead a few days afterwards, it was necessary that He be known to have risen from the dead. People could easily have said: "He did not really die." But He did die. His death was certified by many witnesses. He had a certified death and therefore an undeniable resurrection.

O Father, the more I see the depth of thought and the attention to detail that went into the securing of my redemption, the more thankful and humbled I feel. What a salvation! What a Savior! All honor and praise be to Your wonderful Name. Amen.

Ruth 4:11-12 A new identity

"Then the elders said 'May the Lord make [Ruth] like Rachel and Leah ' " (v. 11)

After Boaz has called upon the assembled group to witness that he accepts the full responsibility of kinsman-redeemer to Naomi which, of course, involved taking Ruth to be his wife, the elders respond by reciting the traditional blessing: "May the Lord make this woman, who has now come into your home, as fertile as Rachel and Leah, from whom all the nation of Israel descended!" (v. 11, Living Bible). If the elders had had any doubts about Boaz marrying a woman from Moab, then clearly those doubts had all been swept away. Their wish for Ruth is that she will be as blessed as were Rachel and Leah. Rachel and Leah were the two wives of Jacob, whose names are used in the Bible as a byword for fruitfulness. Rachel was regarded by the Jewish nation as one of their most illustrious personages, and to this day she is held in the highest esteem. It seems most strange that the elders should wish for Ruth to become as honored and revered as Rachel, especially when we remember that Ruth was a Moabitess, born in a land that was under God's curse. What was it that produced this strange turn of events? Just one simple factor - Boaz. By linking himself to Ruth he brought about a change in her identity, recognized by all. This is precisely what Christ has done for us. Though we were classified as "children of wrath" and "excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise" (Ephesians 2:3, KJV, 2:12), Christ has joined Himself to us and given us His own identity. We are no longer aliens - we belong to Him.

O God, how can I ever praise You enough for plucking me out of the world and giving me a new heart, a new identity, and one day a new name? Eternal praise and glory be unto Your precious Name. Amen.

Bible verses: Ephesians 2:3

Ruth 4:11-12 A place in history

"May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem." (v. 11)

We continue meditating on the words of blessing given by the elders at the completion of the legal formalities entered into by Boaz: "May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah" (v. 11). To see the real significance of these words, we have to jump ahead a little and consider some of the events that took place subsequent to the marriage of Ruth and Boaz. In due course a son was born whose name was Obed. When Obed grew up and reached maturity, he then married and had a son named Jesse. From Jesse came David, one of the greatest of all Bible characters. When we come to Matthew 1, the name of Ruth is listed alongside the others who were part of our Lord's genealogy. Ruth's name, being included in our Lord's line of descent, is stamped with a dignity that even Rachel never had! Consider what else the elders said as they gave Boaz and Ruth their blessing: "May you have standing in Ephrathah [the area surrounding the city of David] and be famous in Bethlehem" (v. 11). Bethlehem has a cherished place in history for two main reasons. One, it is the city of David, and two, it is the birthplace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is almost impossible to think of Bethlehem without thinking of King David. And the great-grandmother of David was Ruth. The blessing given by the elders turned out to be more than a blessing; it was a prophecy. Ruth has become as well known in Israel as Rachel and Leah, and her standing is as solid and immovable as that of the city of Bethlehem.

Father, the more I follow the story of Ruth, the more convinced I am that Your sovereign purposes are at work even when nothing seems to go right. Deepen this conviction within me hour by hour and day by day. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Bible verses: Matthew 1

Ruth 4:13 Reflected glory

"So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife." (v. 13)

We come now to the moment we have all been waiting for - the hour when Boaz takes Ruth to be his wife. All the Bible says is: "So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife." How I wish the inspired writer of the book of Ruth had included a few more details about the wedding. I would like to know what she wore. What did Naomi say as she watched her beloved daughter-in-law being joined in matrimony to Boaz? We have to recognize, of course, that had God wished us to know these details they would have been recorded, and so we must be content with things the way they are. Immediately prior to the marriage, Ruth seems to be very much in the background. There is a reason for this, I believe, in keeping with the message of the book. It is, after all, the story of a Moabitess, a penniless widow, over whom hung a curse, finding favor and salvation through the intervention of another. The law of Israel barred Ruth's way to happiness and prosperity until grace made itself known in the form of Boaz. Law knows no mercy; it demands only justice. Grace, however, looks for a way to satisfy the law's demands and bring happiness and joy to the guilty. Like Ruth, we had no legal claim to God's blessings. However, because Christ, the heavenly Boaz, has entered our lives, cleared all our debt, and made himself responsible for our eternal future, we are content to seek no glory for ourselves but to ascribe it all to Him. Any glory we receive is a reflected glory; it comes to us from Him.

O Father, that I should receive any glory at all - even a reflected glory - is beyond my comprehension. Yet I know it is to be. All I can say is that the glory You give to me, I will give back to You. Thank You my Father. Amen.

Ruth 4:13-17 Wedding in the skies

"The women living there said, 'Naomi has a son.' And they named him Obed." (v. 17)

The last few verses of the book of Ruth inform us of the birth of Obed, and tell how Naomi cares for the child as Ruth and Boaz continue a normal family life in the agricultural setting of Bethlehem. Where was Ruth while the arrangements to redeem her were being made? She was waiting patiently in the house of her mother-in-law, Naomi. Remember Naomi's words: "Wait until you find out what happens" (3:18)? We have no reason to suppose that Ruth waited with anything other than absolute confidence in the ability of Boaz to accomplish what he promised. Where is our Savior at this present moment? Yes, of course - in heaven. And what is He doing there? Many things, but one thing in particular - He is attending to the arrangements for the wedding which is one day to take place between Himself and His Church. While this is being done, we, the bride of Christ here on earth, are expected to wait patiently for the day when He will come to receive us to Himself. Just as Ruth waited patiently to hear the voice of the maidens who, as was the custom, came to accompany the bride to her wedding, crying out "Behold the Bridegroom cometh," so we too wait for that same cry that will herald the return of our Lord. We are going to a wedding in the skies which, by the way, is not called the wedding of the Church, but the wedding of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7). And why? Because, as the old hymn so beautifully puts it: "The Lamb is all the glory, in Immanuel's land."

Lord Jesus Christ, help me wait for your coming down here on earth as You wait for it in heaven. Help me remember that the only reason You delay Your coming is that more might be gathered in. I wait with patience - but also with eager anticipation. Amen.

Ruth 4:18-22 From a mess - a message

"Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David." (v. 22)

What is the book of Ruth really saying to us? This - through all the mistakes, blunders, heartaches, problems and difficulties of life, God is continually at work, guiding, governing, and controlling all our days. We have seen this thrilling truth illustrated in the life of the little family who, after leaving Bethlehem during a time of famine, made their way to Moab where they met with tragedy and disappointment. When, at last, Naomi, the only survivor from that original family, returns to Bethlehem in company with her daughter-in-law, Ruth, it is to discover that God is able to bring joy out of sorrow, delight out of disappointment and good out of evil. "Many things," said Thomas Erskine, "appear irretrievable to us, but there is nothing irretrievable with God." So learn to drop your anchor into the depths of this reassuring and encouraging revelation - out of every mess God is able to make a message. Never forget that the God and Father of Ruth, Boaz and Naomi, is also the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and through our Kinsman-Redeemer has become our God as well. In heaven He is preparing for us a new home where we will abide with Him forever. Surely the four short chapters of the book of Ruth reveal so much to us of the goodness and sovereignty of God that our lives cannot help but be enriched. God's way is always best; take it and you will obtain its rewards. Take another way, your own way, and all you will get are consequences.

Father, thank You for showing me in such great detail the truth that You have the power and ability to turn a tragedy into a triumph. Help me keep the truths I have learned ever before me. In Jesus' Name I ask it. Amen.