Ruth - Commentaries by Hugh Henry Snell

Streams of Refreshing From the Fountain of Life, Faith and Unbelief (1:15-16)

And she said, Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law. And Ruth 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 (Ruth 1:15, 16).

To whatever part of the Bible we turn, we find, when under the Spirit's teaching, great gospel truths brought before us. It seems as if salvation by grace were stamped on every page, and the Lord Jesus Christ continually presented to us as the Savior of lost, undone sinners. In the New Testament these truths are plainly brought out; but in the Old Testament Scriptures they commonly come before us in the form of types and shadows.

The book of Ruth has been valued by many Christians as containing typical instruction of a dispensational character. The book of Genesis so abounds with this kind of teaching, that it may be called a table of contents of the whole Bible. In the little book of Ruth, however, we find God's dispensational ways glanced at, and though so briefly, all are preserved in strictest keeping with the divine order. It opens with an account of the people of Israel scattered among the Gentiles, because the Lord in judgment had brought famine on their land; after a while, we find that God so blesses His people again, that Naomi (a sample of the Jewish remnant) returns to her own country, and finds it again the scene of the goodness and mercy of Jehovah; and the book concludes by showing us Naomi, who had so keenly felt her past

bitterness (see Ruth 1:20),

both comforted and nourished. But it is important to notice, that between the scattering of these Israelites, and their subsequent restoration and blessing, a poor outcast sinner of the Gentiles hears of the goodness of the God of Israel, believes the report, confesses her attachment to the Lord God of Israel, and ultimately becomes the wife of the gracious and wealthy Boaz, who alone had the right to redeem; and then, and not till then, the heart of the returned Israelite is made to rejoice. All this is plain to those who have prayerfully meditated on the prophetic Scriptures.

And where, I would ask, are the Jews now? Are they not scattered among the Gentiles, their city lying in heaps, and their land in a state of poverty and darkness? as the apostle saith, they are

broken off because of unbelief (see Rom. 11:20).

They will, however, yet be restored to their own land; they will be grafted in again to their own olive tree; they will have the spirit of grace and supplication poured out upon them; and

they shall look upon Him whom they pierced (John 19:37),

be brought into the blessings of the new covenant, and filled with joy and gladness; but not till the fullness of the Gentiles is come in, not till the calling out of the Church by the gospel testimony is accomplished, and the Lord Himself descends from heaven to meet her, and take her to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Now, I say, Israel as a nation is for the time under God's judgment, because of their sin (save as one and another, according to the election of grace, now receives the Savior); and God is preaching the gospel of forgiveness of sins to every creature, and

calling out of the Gentiles a people for His name (see Acts 15:14).

The blessed proclamation, that there is bread enough and to spare in the Father's house for poor returning prodigals, is now being sent forth; the glorious testimony of

the living bread which came down from heaven (John 6:51)

is

preached unto the Gentiles (1 Tim. 3:16);

and in a little while the Lord will come again to receive His Church unto Himself. After this, the nation of Israel's joy will be realized; for the Scripture saith,

There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob (Rom. 11:26).

Then

Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the whole earth with fruit (Isa. 27:6).

Having thus briefly looked at the general features of the book of Ruth, let us now consider the instruction contained in the verses before us.

1st. Let us contemplate the moral condition of this woman, who was afterwards brought into such honor and blessing;

2nd. The report she heard;

3rd. The effect of the report; and,

4th. The warning presented to us in the case of Orpah her sister.

1. RUTH'S MORAL CONDITION. She was a sinner of the Gentiles, outside the privileges of the favoured nation of Israel, far off from God, an idolater; her origin and birth loathsome in the extreme, a Moabite, concerning whom the law of Moses declared, that one

shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation (Deut. 23:3).

She was, therefore, without God, and without hope in the world. We also are fallen in Adam, Gentiles, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, far off, not having the privileges of Jews, all by nature children of wrath; we have no claim whatever upon God; we deserve only His righteous condemnation, because we have rebelled against Him, and transgressed against His holy laws. Such is our condition. But the mercy is, that God — while His ancient people (the Jews) are scattered in unbelief — is now calling us Gentiles who believe to Himself, and giving us pardon and peace through the atoning blood of His beloved Son.

2. THE REPORT. While Ruth was in this sinful condition, in the far off country of the Moabites, she heard the good report,

that Jehovah had visited His people in giving them bread (Ruth 1:6).

This report she believed; and it was this testimony of the goodness and mercy of the God of Israel that won her heart, and animated her whole soul. And, beloved reader, what is the report now? Is it not that God has sent His Son to be the Savior of the lost? Is it not that He has provided

living bread (John 6:51)

for poor, dying, perishing sinners? Is it not that God, in pure, wondrous love, delivered up His own Son to the death of the cross, that sinners might be saved from the wrath to come? Is it not that by Christ crucified sin is for ever put away, and Christ Himself the righteousness of every sinner that believes in the Lord Jesus? Yes, every sinner, however vile and unclean — even Jerusalem sinners, and Moabitish sinners — whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Our Lord Jesus Himself said,

I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world (John 6:51).

What a glorious report to reach the ears of broken-hearted and heavy-laden sinners! What blessed news! How kind and full of love is God, who, instead of banishing us all from His presence because of our transgressions, has sent His only-begotten Son to die that we might live; and having raised Him from the dead, because He had accomplished the work of eternal redemption, now commands this blessed report to be proclaimed to every creature. But who believes? Ah! well might the prophet exclaim,

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? (Isa. 53:1).

3. THE EFFECTS OF THIS REPORT. When the gospel is received into the heart by faith, it always leads the soul to God, because it reveals God's love to us. It is indeed the gospel of the grace of God. It unfolds His glorious attributes; shows forth His gracious character; testifies of His love and mercy to lost sinners; and proclaims life and pardon to the dead in trespasses and sins. When the heart has been opened by the Holy Ghost to receive this good report, it at once attracts the soul to God, and produces confidence in Him. A thorough change of mind thus takes place, so that God is no longer judged to be a hard master, and an austere man; but He is seen to be most gracious and merciful, full of love and compassion, and abundant in goodness and truth. Thus it was with Ruth. The good report, that

Jehovah had visited His people in giving them bread (Ruth 1:6),

at once enabled her to turn from idols to serve the living and true God. So truly, so decidedly, was her heart attracted to the Lord God of Israel, that when her sister turned back, and she was earnestly besought to take the same course, her unhesitating and steadfast response was,

Intreat me not to leave thee . . . for thy God shall be my God (Ruth 1:16).

This is a very important point to contemplate, for the human mind may be in a certain way exercised about religion and religious things, short of a spiritual birth; but unless the glory of God be seen in the face of Jesus Christ, unless God's character be known as the sinner's Savior, there can be no sincere turning to God, no confidence in Him, no power to walk in the truth for His glory. But when the death of Christ is beheld by faith, as God's provision for dying, guilty, helpless sinners, and preached to every creature by the Savior's own command; when the sin-burdened conscience hears the Most High God saying,

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Isa. 1:18);

then the soul finds rest in the bosom of God Himself as a sin- hating and yet a sin-pardoning God. The love of God is now shed abroad in the heart; our faith and hope are in God;

we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1);

we love Him, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19);

and the happy soul exclaims

But this is not the only effect of believing the good report. Ruth also said,

Thy people shall be my people (Ruth 1:16).

So it is with souls now who are born of God. They love the Bible, because it is God's word; they love holiness, because it is God's way; and they love all Christians, because they are objects of God's love. Many believers have found, in times of sore temptation, the greatest comfort in that inspired declaration,

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren (1 John 3:14).

It is impossible to be a child of God without loving His people.

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? . . . and every one that loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him (1 John 4:20, 5:1).

This is very plain. In the subsequent history of Ruth, we always find her in association and companionship with the people of the Lord. The God of Israel was her God, and His people her people. Sometimes we see her gleaning in the kinsman-redeemer's field; at another time we find her eating and drinking with his servants; but we never find her going back to the gods and people of the Moabites.

Another point to be noticed in this narrative, as an effect of the good report, is that she proved in her experience the reality of it. She not only credited the statement that God had visited His people with bread, but she ate of it, and was sufficed. Dry doctrines, however true, can only feed the intellect; but the sinner that is compelled to cry out,

I perish with hunger (Luke 15:17),

feels that he must eat living bread, he must feed upon Christ for his own soul's necessities, he must come to the Savior for salvation, he can be satisfied with nothing else. This is what all true believers experience. The gospel, as we have seen, brings the sinner, through Christ, to God. He not only hears God's blessed testimony to the death of Jesus, but he looks there for salvation and lives; he eats, for his own eternal blessing, by faith, the flesh and blood of the Son of God, as that which fully meets his own soul's need, and has also fully met all God's just claims on the sinner's behalf. He eats and is sufficed. He realizes the flesh of the Son of man to be

living bread (John 6:51),

and views with eternal importance those words of Jesus —

Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed (John 6:53-55).

Yes, those who really receive the gospel which God hath sent feel that they do not embrace mere sentiments, or a formal set of religious views; but they renounce every other refuge, and trust in the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus from absolute necessity. As a man just aroused from sleep flees from a house enveloped in flames of fire, as a starving man eagerly devours a piece of bread, or as a sinking man cleaves to a life-boat, so every true believer gratefully welcomes the crucified and risen Savior as the only hope set before him in the gospel. The language of his heart is —

We might also notice other points in the experience of this faithful woman, which correspond with the experience of the household of faith in all ages, such as having all her needs supplied, being enabled to minister bread to others after she herself had been sufficed, finding increasing blessing as she went on her way, happy communion with her gracious, wealthy benefactor and his servants, the soul-humbling effects of grace, &c.; but I pass on to notice that her pilgrimage was terminated, and her hope consummated by her marriage with the mighty man of Israel, her redeemer. And what is the Church's hope now? Is it not to see Jesus, to be with Him and like Him for ever? Are we not expecting to be the bride of the Lamb? and has not that blessed Redeemer, who hath sustained, and comforted, and fed us so often upon His own flesh and blood, said,

I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I

am, there ye may be also (John 14:3)?

Yes, Christ Himself is the believer's hope. Nothing short of seeing Christ, and being with Him, and like Him, can satisfy the desires of truly regenerated souls. The apostle Paul says on this subject,

We look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His own glorious body (Phil. 3:20, 21);

and again,

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, &c. (Titus 2:13, 14).

Peter says,

Be diligent, that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless (2 Pet. 3:14);

and John also, by the same Spirit, writes,

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure (1 John 3:2, 3).

The next great event, then, that the Scripture points to, is the Lord's return from heaven; and the true hope of the Church is for the Bridegroom to come, and take those who are ready with Him to the marriage. Oh, dear children of God! What are we really looking for? What is our expectation? Are we looking for Christ, and loving His appearing? for

unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation (Heb. 9:28).

Christ is all to the believer. It is Christ who is his life, righteousness, and peace; and his true expectation is to reign with Christ, and share His honor and glory. And we may be sure that the heart of Jesus now looks forward to that time with inconceivable delight.

Father,

said He,

I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory (John 17:24).

If the question be asked, When will Jesus come? we reply, We know not. We are told to watch; for we know not when the time is. Now, it behoves us to love and serve Him, to walk in His ways,

not to glean in another field (Ruth 2:8).

Soon our pilgrimage will be over, our opportunities of confessing a rejected Savior in an evil world will have passed away, and then we shall be for ever with the Lord. What a glorious prospect! What fullness of unmingled joy! What perfect rest and satisfaction then! Oh, that we may all be so in love with our Savior, that our constant, hearty response to His

Behold, I come quickly (Rev. 22:12)!

may be,

Even so: come, Lord Jesus (Rev. 22:20)!

4. THE WARNING. Orpah, too, heard the good report, and for the moment seemed to be influenced by it; but her heart was not impressed by the truth, her conscience was not exercised about the goodness of God in giving bread again to sinful Israel. Moved, however, by the example of others, she walked for a little while with them; but carnal reasoning and temptation soon overcame her, and she returned to her Moabitish swine-trough again. She read not the lessons of love in the ways of Jehovah, she felt not the

goodness of God which leadeth to repentance (see Rom. 2:4),

she perceived not that the people of the Lord had any claim upon her esteem and confidence over the accursed Moabites; in fact, she did not consider matters as they really were in God's sight; and she therefore followed her own will and inclination, and returned

unto her people, and unto her gods (Ruth 1:15).

This is very solemn; yet, it is to be feared, that the gospel message of reconciliation to God by the death of His Son meets with the same rejection by many now. They hear, and seem interested in religious people and things for a little while; but, when temptation comes, they go back again to their people and their gods. They hear, but THEY BELIEVE NOT; they do not receive the Word preached into an honest heart; their feelings are moved for the time, but they are not brought into exercise of conscience before God about their own state; their hearts therefore, after all, really cling to their people and their gods. In every nation the ungodly have their gods — some darling objects of their hearts, and these vary too, according as circumstances change, and life advances; for that which engrosses the human heart at one period of life has little charm at another. There are household gods, and public gods, gods for youth, and gods for advanced age — not always visible, I grant, but not the less real. The poor man has his gods, and the rich have their gods; for fallen man is naturally an idolater; his heart is alienated from God, and his lust and pride thirst for gratification; hence he rejoices in the works of his own hands, he worships and serves the creature more than the Creator. Such is man. Unless, therefore, an object be presented to him, beyond what his natural eye beholds, capable of meeting every craving of his soul, man still clings to his gods. It is, then, most blessed to see how completely the death of the Son of God meets man in his sins, and is capable of filling his soul with everlasting consolation and hope, of practically delivering from the

gods many

and the

lords many (1 Cor. 8:5)

of this present evil world, and of elevating his affections to things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

And now, dear reader, let me affectionately ask, How have you treated the gospel? What effect has the good report had upon you? Has the goodness of God led you to repentance, and to receive God's salvation through Christ? Have you so beheld the mercy of God in saving you from wrath through the death of His Son, that you are constrained to love God and His children? Or, are you clinging still to the pleasures of

sin, and deceiving yourself with the vain hope that you will one day alter your course? Were you not once moved, when hearing of the love of God to sinful men in the cross of His beloved Son, to feel something of its solemn importance? Did you not resolve to walk with those who love the Savior in preference to your former companions? Then, why are you

gone back (Ruth 1:15)?

Why are you still living in sin with the enemies of Christ? My friend, beware of trifling with a matter which concerns your eternal welfare! It may, perhaps, be said of you,

This night thy soul shall be required of thee (Luke 12:20).

Let me faithfully warn you! I have lately heard of the death of a young woman which I must relate. On a Friday morning the wretched girl in great distress cried out, “I know that I am deathstruck, and damned to all eternity; the devil has told me so, and that he will drag me to endless torments at six o’clock, to the pit prepared for me!” Her agonies were inexpressible and truly heart-rending, so that even her companions, whom she earnestly exhorted to repent and leave their wicked ways, were alarmed and much affected, yet knew not how to meet her need; they knew not Jesus, who is the source of every true comfort, as meeting the sinner’s need; they knew not that His blood cleanseth from all sin. The poor, miserable girl, with screams of horror, exclaimed, “Can nothing save me? Is there no escape?" . . . . She several times jumped out of bed screaming, and in the most dreadful manner exclaimed, “You shall not have me yet; it is not six o’clock.” She continued raving thus till the hour she had so often named: the clock struck six, and she expired.

Reader! be assured that you are hastening on toward the fiery wrath of God, however pleasurable it may seem for the moment, unless you are brought, as a guilty sinner, to trust in His beloved Son.

The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ out Lord (Rom. 6:23).

Christian Truth: Volume 23, Field of Boaz, The (2:23)

Ruth did not forget the first lesson learned in the field of Boaz, "Go not to glean in another field," for we find in Ruth 2:23: "So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother-in-law."

She had taken her right place as an outcast, she had owned she was not like one of the handmaids of Boaz, and she found this to be the way of true blessing. In the field of Boaz, during the months between barley and wheat harvest, many happy and blessed lessons were learned.

She learned to keep her eyes on the field that was being reaped. She learned where to find refreshment for her thirst, and the mealtimes of the reapers, and found that Boaz was there to reach her a portion of parched corn more than enough to satisfy her own needs.

She learned to glean patiently after the reapers, and to beat out patiently what she had gleaned.

Last, she learned the name of Boaz, and the value of his word (vv. 19-21). These are simple but blessed lessons that flow from the work of grace when the soul has met with Jesus. Instead of the restless wandering and seeking for some object to satisfy, the heart finds a place where full satisfaction is known.

Instead of a thirst that cannot be quenched at the broken cisterns of the world, the heart finds abiding refreshment and joy in Christ enjoyed by the Holy Ghost, a well of water springing up into everlasting life. Then the joy is learned of gathering with the children of God in God's way, according to the Word, to find that the Lord is always in the midst of His own, to feed His sheep, and fill the heart with His preciousness.

The value of patient study of the Word, and the need of beating out with diligence and prayer the portions gathered are real things that the young Christian learns in the field of Boaz, nor does the older Christian ever cease to need them. But above and beyond all, and indeed through all, the great lesson is the knowledge of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and that His Word must be everything to the soul.

"The man's name... is Boaz." "He said unto me." These are the words that show what Ruth had learned, though the ephah beaten out bore witness to her labor, and the portion reserved bore witness to the gracious care of Boaz.

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