Ruth 4:14-17 (John Thomas Mawson) 161649

How To Overcome: Talks on Judges, Ruth 4:14-17: 7: Delivered and Devoted (4:14-17)

No King in Israel

THE closing chapters of Judges bring out in startling fashion the quick descent of Israel from their faithfulness to God. When once upon the down grade their progress was rapid, and the terrible terminus was marked by covetousness, apostasy, corruption, and mutual destruction. It is stated in connection with each of these things that “there was no king in Israel,” and “every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” The sad results depicted were the only possible outcome of the lawlessness and self-pleasing which characterized the people at that time.

God has ordained kings and governors for the good of men, because it is necessary that they should be ruled and controlled, and those who would live lives of peace and tranquility in this world must be subject to the powers that be. But these rulers are representative of that which is higher and greater, even of God Himself. He is the great Ruler—the King Immortal; and subjection to Him means peace and blessing for men. His yoke has been cast off, alas, for sin is rebellion against God, and lawlessness has taken the place of His just rule in the lives of men. This is true of all naturally, for the Scripture saith: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way” (Isa. 53:6). And again: “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

In the face of these facts how glorious is the news that God has found a righteous way of blessing sinners that He is graciously calling men back to Himself and that all who obey His call are pardoned and saved; and, instead of walking in the paths of destruction and death, are led by Him in the paths of righteousness and life.

They “Sought an Inheritance to Dwell in.”

Covetousness and discontent, as well as lawlessness, flourished in the midst of Israel; for we find a Levite who was prepared to sell his God and his people for silver; and a tribe which, not content with the inheritance of the Lord, sought out a place for themselves. In both instances apostasy from God was the consequence. It was His intention to be King in Israel: His rule would have been most beneficent, and every man in the land would have been satisfied with the fatness thereof. But the children of Jacob loved their own way instead of His, and these Danites thought they could seek out for themselves that which would be better than what God had for them. It is a remarkable fact that no mention is made of them amongst the 144,000 of Israel who will yet stand before God to sing of His salvation. (Rev. 7).

It is sad enough to see these things in men who do not know God: it is doubly sad to see them in those who have professed to belong to Him; but history repeats itself, and that which was true of Israel of old is, alas, only too true of many who have professed to know God today; and it is most certain that nothing can keep men from being carried with the downgrade stream of independence and self-pleasing, and of apostasy from the truth of God’s gospel which is running so strongly today, but the vital knowledge of Christ as Saviour and Lord.

There are those who boast of a godly ancestry; or association with religious bodies of repute and antiquity; or with Christians whose doctrines are Scriptural; but none of these things will put or keep us right; there must be living, saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and constant and personal devotion to Him. It is very significant that the apostate Danites came out of the city of Samson. They knew and had seen his mighty exploits as God’s devoted Nazarite, but this did not keep them from wholesale departure from God; and the leader of the apostasy was none other than the grandson of Moses.1

A Great Contrast.

In the ancient Jewish Scriptures the Book of Ruth formed part of the Book of Judges. The events therein recorded took place during the period in which the Judges lived, and Ruth’s life and devotion form a pleasing contrast to the sad apostasy that marked the end of those times.

She is a true type of undivided devotion to one well-beloved object; for, delivered from every entanglement in the land of Moab by the love of Naomi, she was altogether controlled by that love which had set her free. Now the result of deliverance is devotion to the Deliverer, and the Lord desires to set us free from the world, the flesh, and the devil, and everything that binds us, so that we may follow Him alone. He would bind us to Himself by the strong fetters of love, and reign supreme in our affections, as Naomi did in the heart of Ruth. This is the end of all overcoming; to this our talks should lead; and this will be of greater value in His sight than mighty exploits, and a greater victory over Satan than any work could be.

Naomi and Mara

Naomi exhibited certain traits which have come out in all their perfection in Jesus, and the path which she trod is in certain respects illustrative of His sorrow and travail and its resultant joy.

She went into a far away land and there tasted the bitterness of death, insomuch that she had to cry: “Call me not Naomi [which means ‘pleasant’] but Mara [which means ‘bitterness.’]” But, in the midst of the sorrow through which she passed, she must have displayed something of the sweetness of which her name spoke, for only in this way can we account for Ruth’s devotion to her.

Sweetness and bitterness met in Naomi, but if we could see these things in all their perfection and intensity we must turn to Jesus. His name is sweet, the sweetest our ears have ever heard, and He is altogether pleasant to those whose eyes have been opened by the grace of God. He was so when here on earth; He is just the same upon the throne today; but we could never have known the sweetness that abides in Him

if He had not trodden the path of bitterness and sorrow. He was the Man of tears, the Man of the broken heart (Psa. 69); but the grief of that wonderful life of sweetest devotion to God, and love to men, was but the preliminary to the awful sorrow that He endured on the cross, when He took the bitter cup of sin's judgment from the hand of God. It was then that the waterfloods rolled over Him, and every sorrow found its center in His blessed heart. Calvary spelled "Mara" for Jesus; but the intensity of that bitterness only disclosed the sweetness of that marvelous love which no power could check nor sorrow overwhelm. Yes, His is an unmeasured love; stronger than death, more lasting than the ages, unutterably sweet.

It was to Naomi in her sorrow that Ruth clung, and for the love of her who had passed through "Mara" she said: "Entreat 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" (Ruth 1:16, 17).

When she made this memorable decision she knew nothing of Boaz, type of Christ in His present position of power, nor of the place of favor and exaltation that awaited her. The love of Naomi controlled her and she was satisfied, be it noted, not to dwell and to live, but to "lodge" and to "die" with Naomi. She embraced the path of strangership for the compensation that she found in the pleasantness of Naomi's company.

How true are the words—

Nothing else will: the thought of coming glories will not, in itself, separate us from the world. The attractions of the "world to come," and its attractions are indeed great, will not of themselves draw our hearts out of "this present evil world." His love alone—the love displayed at Calvary—can do this: and so the path of discipleship is invariably connected with the cross. It was this that controlled the apostle, for he said: "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

God grant that just as the portion that Ruth found in Naomi delivered her from Moab forever, and bound her up with the interests of the one whose love controlled her, so may the preciousness of Jesus, who endured the cross and despised the shame, constrain us to wholehearted devotion to Himself.

The Result of Following the Lord

Ruth lost nothing by cleaving to Naomi, for, as a result of it, "Her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz" (Ruth 2:3); and he was a man of tender heart, for he spake kindly to Ruth and comforted her (verse 13). But not only so: he was a mighty man of wealth, and the field over which he had power was altogether sufficient to satisfy her need.

If we consider Naomi's sorrow as illustrating the deep and sore travail through which the Lord Himself passed, the wealth of Boaz will speak to us of His present greatness and power. He has been highly exalted; all things have been put into His hand; and now He finds great delight in dispensing the blessings of God to those who are poor and needy.

Boaz would not have said, "Go not to glean in another field," unless he had known that his field was sufficient for Ruth; nor would the Lord have said, "My grace is sufficient for thee," if its fullness could not meet our every need.

Are there steep places in the path of discipleship, and do trials beset the feet of the pilgrim? The grace of the Lord is greater than all, and those who tread the path prove the blessedness of it, for He has said that they "shall receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting" (Luke 18:30).

So Ruth gleaned in the fields of Boaz as long as gleaning was needful, and she found that he cared for her in every way, so that she was not only satisfied herself but had also something to spare.

The whole story is of deepest interest and full of instruction; but we must now pass on to the end of the book.

The Results of Naomi's Sorrow

It is remarkable that at the end of the story Naomi is again the prominent person; not now in bitterness and sorrow, but reaping the pleasant fruits of her travail.

(1) The Church

She had lost Elimelech and her sons in the land of Moab, but she had gained Ruth, who was better to her than seven sons (ch. 4: 15), and in this we have a figure of what the Lord has lost and gained by His death. He came to His own people Israel, but they rejected Him, and for the time being He lost the kingdom and the nation; He was cut off out of the land of the living. But if He lost Israel for a while, He gained the Church; and no tongue can tell how precious the Church is to Him. It is the "pearl of great price" for which He sold all that He had, and for which He went down into the deep sea of death, when the midnight darkness of God's judgment rested upon the face of it.

I do not here speak of the outward profession of the Name of Christ, which has become so corrupted, but of what is real in it, that which He calls "My Church."

The Church as the Lamb's wife will be His eternal companion, for the time is not far distant when there shall sound "as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of many thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. 19:6, 7). Then in that glorious consummation the Lord shall see of His soul's deep travail and be satisfied; but even now, whilst He is rejected from the earth, the Church is His consolation and joy.

Is it not strange that some who belong to His Church every blood-bought believer is a member of it should seek the smiles of the world that rejected Him, instead of seeking only to fill the high privilege of giving joy to His heart? No higher privilege will be ours forever; no greater loss could befall us, as Christians, than the loss of it. It is this which the devil seeks to mar and spoil, and for this he plies his wiles and spreads his snares, and the true overcomer is the one who, cleaving to the Lord alone, is glad to lose all for Himself.

(2) Worship for the Father

The women of Bethlehem gathered round Naomi to felicitate her upon the joy that was hers, and they say: “There is a son born unto Naomi” (ch. 4:17). They do not say born unto Boaz or to Ruth; but to Naomi, for the child would never have been but for that sore “Mara” in the distant land.

And the women gave this child, which they counted as Naomi’s son, a name, and “they called his name Obed,” the meaning of which is “worshipping God.” “And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it” (4:16). The child was greatly beloved by her, for it was the fruit of Ruth, who loved her. (4:15).

Here is set forth another result of the death of the Lord Jesus. He came forth from the Father because the Father sought worshippers. (John 4:23). And for this He suffered and died: and in this respect His death has not been in vain, for by that death He has brought a countless host to God, all ransomed by His precious blood. These can worship God in spirit and in truth, for they know His love as it has been declared in the death of Christ.

Who can tell the joy that fills the heart of the Lord as He presents the worship of those who love Him to God the Father? Such worship, rendered from hearts filled by the love of God, is very precious to Jesus, for it is the fruit of the hearts and lips of those who love Him and whom He loves.

(3) Kingly Glory for Christ

Ruth and Obed were followed by Jesse and David; and David as the king typified the coming glory of Christ.

The Lord is still rejected by this world, but the time of His return is at hand; the crown of universal dominion shall encircle His once thorn-pierced brow, and as great David’s greater Son He shall sway the scepter from the river unto the ends of the earth. Then shall Israel own Him as the Son of God and their King, and the groanings of a sin-blighted earth shall be hushed, and everything that hath breath will break forth into singing, and every note of every song shall be in praise of the King.

How deep will be the joy of His heart when He looks abroad upon a creation which has been made to smile by the light of His countenance, and when men, delivered from the thralldom of Satan’s power, shall rejoice in the knowledge of God! But the foundation of all the gladness which will mantle the earth in the day of His kingly glory is His sorrow and death.

All who love Him earnestly desire this day of glory, and rejoice in the blessed fact that He shall be exalted and adored in the very world in which He was despised and put to shame. But not because of the crowns of an endless glory that shall shine upon His sacred brow do we love and follow Him, but because of His love, love that disclosed its sweetness amid the shame and grief of Calvary’s “Mara.” It is this love, and this alone, that constrains us to serve Him untiringly, follow Him devotedly, and love Him now with fervent and undivided heart. This is the pathway of the overcomer.

Is it our desire to tread this path? Then let us hold it fast, for He hath said: “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God: which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from My God: and I will write upon him My new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev. 3:11-13).

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