Ruth - Commentaries by Samuel Ridout

Gleanings From the Book of Ruth, Ruth 2:18-23, Ruth 3

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

6. the Kinsman-Redeemer.

IN what has just preceded, we have been regarding Ruth as a type of the seeker in general, apart from the dispensational application. But we must not forget that the connection with the history of God's earthly people in the latter days is clear and continued. While every seeker is depicted in the patient gleaning and beating out, no doubt the faith on the part of the remnant is particularly suggested. There are touching and pathetic intimations throughout the first two books of the Psalms of this reaching out of a faith after a blessing which it but feebly apprehends, and with an evident ignorance of Him who is to be the kinsman-redeemer. There is integrity of heart, a separation from the mass of the ungodly nation, and yet an evident veil upon the eyes. In the sixth psalm, for instance, there is the deepest pressure upon the soul, not only from the persecutions without, but from the sense of wrath from God Himself. It is with apparent difficulty that a little comfort is gleaned at the close. Again, in the thirteenth, under the persecutions of the "man of sin," the soul makes its complaint to a God but dimly apprehended, although real faith is in exercise, and at the close the testimony is that the Lord has "dealt bountifully" with the needy one. Even after the wondrous unfolding of the work of Christ, and His person in the series of Psalms from the sixteenth to the twenty-fourth, we find in the twenty-fifth but a gleaner, gathering comfort and pleading for pardon in view of the remembrance of the sins that will rise up. These will suggest what would be an interesting and profitable line of study, the rise and development of faith in the remnant, as seen in the Psalms. We see, too, brighter days, and hear the "voice of the Bridegroom," if not of the bride, in such lovely psalms as the forty-fifth. But the time of that psalm has not yet been reached in Ruth, and we must follow her through some deep experiences before she reaches it.

After she had beaten out the barley—a grain itself suggestive of poverty and feebleness (Judg. 7:13) —she returns to her mother-in-law and shows her little store, sharing it with her. It will be noticed that she first satisfies her own hunger before giving to Naomi, and in this there seems to be suggested the thought that faith must receive before it can give. The nation of the Jews, typified by Naomi, can receive comfort and encouragement only at the hands of the believing remnant, which itself must feed on the store it has gleaned before it can impart it to others. The "Maskilim," the instructors who are to "turn many to righteousness" (Dan. 12:3), must themselves learn the lessons they are to teach. The very first of these lessons is found in the first of the "Maskil" Psalms, the thirty-second, on the blessedness of forgiveness. And so must it be with all other lessons; Ruth must first be sufficed before she can give to Naomi.

Passing to a more general application, the lesson is as self-evident. Faith must feed on its gathered store before it can impart to others. In John's gospel we see this strikingly illustrated in the "Come and see" of those who had themselves already come and seen the Christ. It is the poor Samaritan, who in her position resembles Ruth, who can take the message to the people of the town.

We are living in days not only of great activity, but when the doctrine of activity is put in the place of feeding upon the truth of God. We are told that the way to grow is to work; but how can we work without strength and guidance and all else suggested in that word, "communion"? We can only give the overflow to others, in any true sense, and that, as its name suggests, is spontaneous.

But how simple this makes all service. We eat and are sufficed, and out of a full heart we minister to the needs of others. Let the evangelist remember this. Does the deep full joy in a personal salvation fail, and does it seem in any way irksome for him to tell out the same old story? Let him turn in deep penitence to his Lord and Savior, confessing his emptiness and find again that "grace is the sweetest sound." The same applies to the teacher both in public and private, the pastor, and to all who would be witnesses for our Lord. Thus what might seem like ungraciousness on the part of Ruth conveys a lesson of deep importance to us all.

Naomi, with busy memory going back over familiar scenes long past, asks where her daughter-in-law had gleaned such abundance as it doubtless seemed to her widowed eyes, long familiar with poverty. Her heart already warms to one, whoever he might be, that would permit the lonely stranger to gather in his fields: "Blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee." It is interesting to gather from the blended picture of these two women the faith and exercises of the latter day. Ruth has the faith, we might say, and Naomi has the knowledge So it is the elder of the women who now is prominent, and who imparts to the younger the wondrous news that her benefactor is a kinsman. The knowledge that the Jews will have of the promises of God in regard to restoration and the blessings of the coming Kingdom through the Messiah, will no doubt serve to awaken and quicken the zeal of their newly born faith. Naomi recognizes in Boaz a kinsman, and sees in Ruth's experience the hand of God, "who has not left off His kindness to the living and the dead." The breach between the happy past and the present is spanned by the love and care of One who, whether with the individual or the nation, will prove that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

How it cheers the heart of the one whose eyes fail with longing to remember this. How Paul, as he developed the counsels and ways of God in the epistle to the Romans, from the ninth to the eleventh chapters, finds a love stronger than his own, though he had once wished himself accursed from Christ for his brethren according to the flesh. Ah, blessed forever be His name, He has not left off His kindness to His beloved people, and one day the sad heart of the widowed nation will warm into praise as it catches a glimpse of that love.

God will yet make good every one of the faithful promises made to Abraham His friend, and to David the man after His own heart. It will be found that "He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock" (Jer. 31:10). Those who fail to see this fact lose one of the most important illustrations of the faithfulness of God. If all the promises to Israel which fill the pages of the Prophets and the Psalms are to be spiritualized into blessings for the Church, what becomes of the gifts and calling of God for His earthly people? Well might we, without the hope of an answer ask, with the psalmist of old, "Lord, where are Thy former loving kindnesses, which Thou swarest unto David in Thy truth?" In the face of such a promise as the following, how could we think that God had forgotten the nation of Israel? "Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night ... , if those ordinances

depart from before Me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation from before Me forever " (Jer. 31:35, 36).

It is this that is suggested by Naomi in linking together God's past kindness to Elimelech and His present care for her, the poor widow. How good it is to remember that His love will yet find its rest in this now despised people. How it thrills the heart to dwell upon it. Little wonder that Paul breaks out in worship as he contemplates it: "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!”

With this unchanging purpose of God in our mind, we can understand how the Church is left out of view in all passages that concern Israel, both in the Old and New Testaments. We understand how our Lord, in sending out the twelve to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," leaves out of view entirely the present interval of the nation's rejection, and says, "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come" (Matt. 10:23).

So the glimmers of faith in the end will connect the little bits of blessing gleaned with the past mercies promised to the Nation. But like Naomi, the people will be slow to apprehend the wondrous meaning of this. She says to Ruth, "The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen." It will be noticed that for her Boaz is not yet the unique and only kinsman but simply one of whom there are others. So when our Lord asked His disciples, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man, am?" the answer was, "Some say that Thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets." They discerned that He was not an ordinary person, that He was a messenger from God, but how feebly did they see the reality, or rather how entirely they failed to apprehend it. For if Christ is but one of the prophets, He is not our redeemer. Thus Naomi is yet far from the truth.

But faith is on the right track, and in her words to Ruth we have an echo of what Boaz had already said, "It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field." In fact it was Ruth, "the Moabitess," as we are touchingly reminded, who repeats the words of Boaz to her mother-in-law. Thus there is a glimmer of encouragement, and happy Ruth goes all through the barley harvest and the wheat harvest, not in the widow's sackcloth like the mourning Rizpah (2 Sam. 21:10), but with the light of a great hope growing more and more definite in her soul. Such doubtless will be the attitude of the remnant, during that time of exercise in which God's purposes will be learned. Not all at once will they know the blessing that is theirs, but faith grows with exercise, and will soon take no refusal.

So too, in the history of the individual soul, faith grows, and the more it gleans the more does it want. That which satisfied it yesterday will not suffice today. The One who supplies the handfuls is Himself behind it all, and gives a craving which none but Himself can satisfy.

Ruth's diligence in gleaning has not only supplied the wants of herself and her mother-in-law, but has evidently awakened in Naomi the slumbering hopes which had apparently been dead. The knowledge of Scripture becomes her guide, and as faith has increased, so it will now make use of that which, though well known before, had seemed to be of no special value. How true this is in every case. How Scripture seems to lie dormant in the mind of the child of God away from Him, and yet when once faith and desire are quickened, the neglected Word is found to be bright indeed with its provisions exactly suited to the needs.

There was a merciful provision in the law (Duet. 25:5-10) that no man's family should be allowed to die out, while a brother survived to perpetuate the line. In Israel, to be childless was a reproach, and for a man's name to be blotted out-his family to become extinct-was regarded as a special mark of God's displeasure. The Sadducees, in our Lord's Day, might seek to ridicule the truth of resurrection by bringing in this merciful provision, but they only showed their ignorance of "the Scriptures and the power of God." It was provision for the earthly not the future life, that God had made. Most appropriate was it, therefore, that He should see that names should not be blotted out in Israel, save to mark, as in Achan, His solemn judgment of an awful sin. There seems, too, to be a recognition in His provision of that hope in the heart of every Hebrew woman, that through her in some way the promise of "the woman's seed" might be fulfilled. This was to be done literally in the line which was to be preserved through Ruth.

Naomi is the leader here. It is her knowledge both of the kinship of Boaz and the law of Deuteronomy which guides Ruth in the most trying of all her experiences. "Shall I not seek rest for thee?" Ruth had been gleaning food, but it had been through constant toil, and but for present needs. She was now to have rest, all her needs met, her labor over. What a change in the state of Naomi, from her unbelief at the beginning, when she would have turned Ruth back to find rest in the heathen home of some Moabitish husband. Would she not now be ashamed of such unbelief, and shudder at the thought of her own folly, which might have resulted so disastrously both for herself and her daughter-in-law? Yet unbelief in the nation checked any turning that it saw in the people to our Lord when He was here, and did not rest till there was no hope—as they thought—of a national acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah.

So too in the days of national return to the land, the spirit of unbelief will turn the newly formed hopes of the nation, to seeking rest in some union not of God. False prophets and false Christ’s will claim, and receive, recognition from many—the man of sin will draw off the most into alliance with "the beast." But faith and the word of God will seek rest for the widowed remnant only with One who is a Kinsman, with a divinely given right to redeem the inheritance and perpetuate the name of those whose hopes had long since died.

In the history, too, of every soul, there comes a yearning for something more than the merest satisfaction of pressing hunger. Every gift from the hand of such a Giver makes us long, not merely for more gifts, but for the rest which can only be found in Himself. It is a blessed fact that the Person of Christ is the necessary goal toward which the Spirit of God ever leads. Nothing short of the Lord Himself will do: "Our souls were made for Thyself, and can never rest save in Thee.”

It is this longing after the Person of our blessed Lord which gives the peculiar charm to the Song of Solomon. The affections are the same in all dispensations, and anything that describes the longing of the heart after Christ meets a response in every Spirit-taught heart. From the beginning of the Song throughout, there is a good measure of acquaintance with the Lord, and a conscious though not clearly defined sense of relationship with Him. In Ruth this is not so clear. She is rather seeking an acknowledgment of relationship, which she is not sure will be recognized. But the resemblance between the two books can be seen. We must, however, return to the narrative.

Harvest time is now over, and threshing and winnowing have succeeded. All work will soon be over, and Naomi recognizes that if anything is to be done, it must be immediately. The plan is a simple and bold one; Ruth is to prepare herself, and on that night, at the threshing-floor present herself to Boaz, claiming kinship and pleading the divine provision for cases such as hers.

It was a bold stroke, and would either succeed or ignominiously fail. She would either leave the threshing-floor recognized by Boaz as the proper and honored object of his affection, or, spurned from his feet, be forever after branded as a bold and shameless woman. All hung in the balance; how would it be decided?

Is it not significant, when we pass from the narrative to its spiritual application, that this trial was to be made at the threshing-time and at night? It is in connection with "the great tribulation,"—literally the great threshing-time,—when the remnant will put forth their claim to the Kinsman, whom yet they so dimly recognize. This is the testing time for the nation, when, through the trials of persecution, the wheat will be separated from the chaff of mere profession. When all goes well, it is easy to profess, but "when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word," the stony-ground hearers are manifested. Thus the time of threshing is the suited time for faith to be manifested as truly that, and for all else to fall away.

The figure of threshing is found quite frequently in the prophets, and nearly always as applied to the nations (See Isa. 21:10 with Jer. 51:33; Isa. 41:15; Mic. 4:13; Hab. 3:12). Israel herself will one day thresh the nations, but before that time she herself must pass through the purifying chastening, which will result in the chaff being driven away, and the pure grain alone remaining. It is during this separating time of suffering and trial that the remnant will in faith lay claim to Him who is Lord of the threshing.

Is it not also suggestive that the site of the temple was the threshing-floor of Ornan, and that it was at the time of God's chastening the people that He revealed Himself to David, and thus established the basis for His dwelling-place? David offered sacrifices, and the place where sacrifice and chastening had met was to be the lasting abode of a holy and faithful God. So at the last will the Lord reveal Himself to His people, and re-establish His sure house to all generations.

Ruth is now to lay aside the garments of her widowhood, washing and anointing herself, and thus to present herself as a bride to Boaz. So too the remnant will lay aside their hopelessness, and washed by the Spirit and the Word, will array themselves in a beauty not their own, claiming in faith Him whose mercy they have tasted. They will have learned of Him who gives "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." They will have heard the voice calling to them, " Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem the holy city... Shake thyself from the dust; arise and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.”

Carrying out the directions of Naomi, she is recognized by Boaz at midnight, the darkest hour, and makes her bold claim. Instead, however, of being repulsed, she is blessed by Boaz, who declares it is kindness on her part, greater even than she had shown to her mother-in-law at the beginning. She is reassured, he promises to do all, and affirms that which slander might have denied: "All the city of my people Both know that thou art a virtuous woman.”

So will the King, reassure the trembling remnant who draw near to Him in the dark midnight hour of trial and persecution. The joy of His own heart in their faith will be greater far than their own. "He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing." Who indeed can measure that joy, save He who wept over Jerusalem? Who can know the delight of seeing them turn to Him, save the One who was rejected by His people? "As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.”

All this part of the narrative is so entirely typical of Israel's relations to our Lord, that we can only in a secondary way apply it to the history of the individual in the present dispensation. Yet, as we have seen, the affections are the same in all dispensations, and faith nourished will develop in strength and intensity. It is most blessed to know that God has provided infinitely beyond our highest thoughts and strongest faith. So that we have not to obtain, as did Ruth, a place of the nearest and closest relationship, but to apprehend that which is already ours-the gift of grace.

But in the soul's experience, there is much that answers to this progress which we have been tracing. We come as poor outcasts, gleaning bits of blessing with faint heart,

Such is the language, not surely of intelligent faith, but of the soul as it dimly sees mercy even for it. But grace leads on, as we have seen, encouraging and strengthening, until at last the soul, entering into the marvel of divine love, lays hold upon the wondrous secret of Christ's heart—"we are members of His body".... "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.... that He might present it to Himself." We see Him not only as Savior, Lord, Shepherd, but find our rest upon His bosom the beloved of His heart, forming with all the redeemed of this age the Bride who shall be His companion throughout the endless day of God. "That in the ages to come, He might show the exceeding riches of His grace.”

Not at once does the soul grasp this wondrous relationship; alas at best how feebly do we respond to His love. But if the soul follow on under the leading of the Spirit of God, it will surely find its place at the feet of Him who is indeed "a near Kinsman," "not ashamed to call us brethren.”

Ruth returns to Naomi with the distinct promise of Boaz, to do all that her heart desired, should there be no obstacle. That possible obstacle is, as we shall presently see, a nearer kinsman. But, even during the suspense of waiting to know the outcome, she receives from Boaz ample provision for all needs.

What a contrast are the six measures poured into her veil, to the ephah of barley gathered by painful gleaning. He would not allow her to go empty to her mother-in-law, and this in itself was a pledge of more bounty to come, yea of himself lord of it all. Thus Joseph feasted his brethren and sent them back with full loads before the union with his family was consummated. And thus the Lord in grace provides for those who yet do not know the fullness of blessing that is theirs.

Naomi meets her returning daughter-in-law, not with her previous question "where hast thou gleaned to-day?" but "Who art thou my daughter?" It was not a question of benefit, but of relationship. It was not "What hast thou," but "Who art thou." For the bride is called by the name of the bridegroom. "One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." Fitting words are these to describe the changed relationships of one but lately called Ruth the Moabitess.

But, as we have seen, there must still be a brief delay. Brief indeed it is, for, as Naomi declares, "The man will not be in rest until he have finished the thing this day." Ruth can well afford to "sit still" and wait, for all is now in the hands of Boaz himself.

What a glimpse these words give of the tireless love of our Lord both for His Church and for Israel. He did not rest till He had accomplished redemption, and now His love will not rest till all is consummated. What force this gives to those words "the patience of Christ." How He longs to have His people with himself.

He waits now, He longs and looks for the time appointed. How is it with us? Can we say "Lord tarry not but come."?

clickbible.org