

Ruth.

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Article 25 of 47 **Short Meditations**

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The ways of grace and of faith, and the warrant on which they each act, get very beautiful illustrations in this little book.

Faith has two special characteristics — and so has grace. Faith *overcomes the world*, and *returns fully and intimately to God*. Or, in language known in Scripture, it takes a place "outside the camp," and within the veil

Grace *encourages the soul*, (inspiring confidence,) and then *answers it*. These are two of its shining ways; and they get an expression here in the dealings of Boaz with Ruth; as faith illustrates its two properties, (of which I have spoken above,) in the actings of Ruth.

Ruth, at the beginning, casts in her lot with Naomi in the hour of her widowhood, her strangership, and her poverty. For Naomi's sake, she will, like a daughter of Abraham. leave country, kindred, and father's house; and all that may be said to daunt her avails nothing. Go she will across the unknown world, and Israel's people shall be her people, and their God shall be her God. And this was faith that takes its place outside the camp, or gains victories over the world.

But faith that leaves the world, returns to God. And so in Ruth. The great things of Boaz are not too great for her. As far as estate or condition in life went, she was as distant from him as she well could be, a gleaner in his field behind his reapers, not fit to be put among his handmaids. But she aims at himself. It is not a small measure that she seeks, but the very highest and richest. The gleaner would be the wife. And this is also the way of faith. It goes outside the camp, but it comes within the veil It leaves the world, but it returns to the full presence of God; thus taking the very opposite place to that in which the Fall has set man. By the Fall, man is estranged from God, and finds his place in the world. We see this in Cain. He went out from the presence of the Lord; but there he built a city, and filled it with all manner of profit and of pleasure, with pastime and with traffic. Faith returns by the same road, making the opposite journey. It takes leave of the world, and gets fully and intimately and for ever back to God. And this way and power of faith are shown in Ruth first joining herself with the poverty of Naomi, and then getting for herself the wealth and dignity of Boaz.

And grace has its greatness and excellency in its way and generation, as surely as faith. It first *encourages*, as I said, inspiring confidence; and then it *rewards the confidence it has awakened*.

What was the Lord doing with Gideon in Judges 6? What was He doing with Moses in Exodus 3? What was He doing with Jeremiah, when first calling him into his office? (See Jer. 1) He found slow, reluctant hearts there; but He got them ready for the blessing which His grace had prepared for them. And what in the days of His ministry was the way of the Lord Jesus, but this of the God of Moses, Gideon, and Jeremiah? How did He sit at the well of Sychar, inviting the confidence of a poor distant Samaritan. How did He again and again rebuke that "little faith" which did not know and could not tell, whether it might look to Him for good or not. And how did He at once knock off from the poor leper's heart the one doubt that hung there, oppressing it and clouding it.

And this is also the way of the Spirit in the Apostles. How much of the teaching of the epistles, how much of the energy of the Spirit there is occupied in strengthening the faith and encouraging the

hearts of the saints. Arguments of Divine persuasiveness, rebukes of fine earnest temper, and yearnings of love, are all employed to knit the feeble heart with the grace and Gospel of God.

And Boaz is made to express this. The delicacy and yet the sincerity with which he encourages Ruth in the second chapter, is beautiful to admiration. And then he is ready to answer all the demands which the confidence he had thus awakened makes upon him. He had not trained her heart for disappointment. As the Lord's hand is ready to fill the hand of the sinner which His Spirit has already opened to receive from Him.

And here I might say, it was a blessed moment in the soul of Naomi, when she awakened to the recollection, or to the knowledge of this simple fact, that Boaz was a kinsman. (Ruth 2: 20.) "Blessed," she says, "be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead." It was as when a soul is brought to the discovery not only of the grace that is in God, but of a sinner's title to that grace, because of Jesus the Kinsman.

And thus, on the discovery of this blessed fact, Naomi, at once, charges Ruth to abide fast by his maidens, and not to be found in any other field. For this is the way of faith on the full discovery of Christ. It takes a long farewell, a farewell for ever, of all other confidences.

Boaz was a kinsman — and a kinsman has his duties and obligations, according to the laws and ordinances of Israel. Naomi knew this, and she instructs Ruth, the stranger, in these choice and wondrous secrets. And she is bold, and emboldens Ruth. And faith is so still. It counts on the *greatest* things — pardon, acceptance, adoption, inheritance, glory. But though bold, it is warranted. The customs and ordinances of the place to which faith is introduced, the counsels of the God of Israel, the secrets of abounding grace, are faith's warrant. It aims high; but its aim is guided by the Spirit of God; for God has, of old, counselled these high things for faith.

And when Ruth has followed Naomi's word, and laid herself at the Kinsman's feet, and claimed him for a lord and a husband, on her returning to Naomi, Naomi, in beautiful language, says to her, "Who art thou, my daughter?" (Ruth 3: 16.) Perfectly beautiful that is. Naomi looked on Ruth as the elect Bride. She knew what the faithful Kinsman would make her. She shone in her full dignity and joy, in Naomi's eye, at that moment — just as we should survey ourselves in like power of faith, and say, "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."

What follows is the experience of a soul, when the Kinsman is discovered by faith.

The grace of the Kinsman is a great sight to see to likewise. There were hindrances in the way. A nearer kinsman had his claims, and Boaz has to own them and answer them. Just, as in the great original, sin withstands the purposes of love — the guilt of man stands in the way of his blessing from One who is holy, as He is gracious. But He has found a way to vindicate righteousness, and set aside sin, while He gratifies His own love, and answers all the claims which faith makes upon grace.

Boaz goes to "the gate," the place of judgment, and there meets "the elders," who were the guardians and vindicators of righteousness. And there, in their presence, and to their full satisfaction, he sets aside the nearer kinsman, and thus gets out of the way the hindrance that stood in the way to his taking Ruth and all her burdens upon himself. Faith had counted on this, that "the man would not be at rest till he had finished the thing," (Ruth 3: 18;) and so it came to pass. Boaz settles the whole affair, Ruth has but to "sit still," as Naomi had instructed her, and her Kinsman is faithful and her Redeemer is mighty.

A Kinsman in Israel was one that did not, as Naomi had told Ruth, forget his kindness to the dead

or to the living. (Ruth 2: 20) Nay, to the poor and to the oppressed, we may add. He was to ransom the inheritance, the sold inheritance, of his poor brother — he was to avenge the blood of his murdered brother — he was to raise up the name of his dead and childless brother. Beautiful services, showing forth grace in its riches, its depth and its variety. And Boaz is made to represent this.

He acted, in taking Ruth and blessing her with the richest blessing he could bestow, on the warrant of the laws of Israel. He was acting righteously while bountifully honouring the claims of the throne of judgment. when taking a gleaner from the field to seat her at his side. Beautiful shadow of One who is *Just* while a *Justifier*.

Faith may aim high, and count on great things, but the grace of God, and the counsels of God, and the law of the Kinsman, and the faithfulness of the Redeemer, warrant it all. Faith's boldness will not exceed faith's title. The heart that encourages itself in God shall be blest — blessed to say it!

And *grace* has as clear a warrant to gratify itself, as *faith* has to encourage itself. The Cross has been, so to speak, erected "at the gate," or in the place of judgment. God is never more holy than when forgiving sin upon the warrant of the Cross of Christ. There God's glory in the highest is again proclaimed, as is peace on earth. His righteousness is there set forth, as brightly as His love. It is *enthroned* mercy we lean upon — a Mercy-Seat upon the Ark of the Covenant, where the tables of testimony are found. If the blood of sprinkling be there, the kept and honoured and magnified law is there also. God's righteousness is declared there, that "He might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." (Rom. 3: 26) It is glory to God in the highest, while it is peace on earth, good will to men, which will still be sung by every soul that learns the mystery and the fruit of the mission of the Son from the bosom of the Father to a world of sinners.

And one further beautiful point in the instructions of Naomi to Ruth I would still notice.

She tells her, in the earlier stage, while she was still a suitor, to wash herself, to anoint her, to put her raiment upon her, and then to get her down to the floor, where Boaz was to be. But as soon as Boaz has accepted her, then Naomi changes her voice, and tells her to sit still. (Ruth 3: 3, 18)

So is it in the journey of the soul. We are occupied with ourselves at the first. We have many thoughts as of our uncleanness and nakedness, our condition as sinners convicted and in our shame — but when we get to know the great secret of grace, that our Redeemer is making our cause His own, then silence, stillness, abstraction from self and occupation only with Christ becomes us. We have then to stand by and see the salvation of God. We have then, like Joshua in Zechariah 3, to be silent, while the Lord is doing His business with us and for us. We have to let Him answer our accusers and not open our own lips, like the Woman in John 8. We may, beforehand or while on the road, like the Prodigal, be thinking of ourselves, but as soon as the house is entered, and we see that the Father has made our blessing His care, then like the Prodigal again, we have only to sit and eat.

And let me further say, Naomi standing between Boaz and Ruth, the witness of Boaz to Ruth, is as Scripture between God and us. It witnesses God to us. It even pledges Him — and the business of faith is, to listen, to receive, and to enjoy with confidence. So did Ruth. The modest gleaner becomes the assured, and if you please, bold suitor, under the word of Naomi. It was enough for Ruth, quite enough, that Naomi had instructed her. She asked no more, nor did she hesitate.

And very blessed to add, Naomi's word was enough for Boaz, as it had been for Ruth. Whatever Naomi had pledged for Boaz to the gleaner, Boaz made good to her. It was enough for Boaz that Naomi had pledged him. And so, blessed to tell it, it is enough that Scripture has spoken, and made promises in the name of the Lord to sinners. All shall be made good. Not a jot shall fail. Heaven and

earth shall pass away, ere that could be. Jesus was fulfilling Scripture all through His ministry here, and He will not rest till He have finished it all, in all its rich and wondrous pledges of grace and glory.