

“THE TIME OF HARVEST”

THREE ADDRESSES ON THE BOOK OF RUTH

By C. KNAPP

“The Time of Harvest”

ADDRESS I.

Chapter i.

THE book of Ruth has ever been accounted a literary gem, and of purest water. In this it is only like many other portions of the grand old book we call the Bible. The great Benjamin Franklin, though not a professing Christian, recognized this literary excellence of the Holy Scriptures. It is related that when representing the new-born Republic at the French capital, he was indignant at hearing learned and polished men there ridiculing the Bible, and expressing surprise that any one of proper and cultivated taste should ever spend time reading it. He one day announced to them that he had in his possession a copy of a very ancient manuscript, and invited them to his apartments on a certain evening to hear this treasure read. At the time appointed his literary friends were all present, and he had an accomplished elocutionist read to them his copy of the manuscript. They were loud in their praise of it, and the most critical of them pronounced it to be superior to anything they had ever read or listened to, and asked if they might have copies of it. Imagine their astonishment when the ingenious Yankee informed them, with

a twinkle in his eye, that they had been listening to one of the sixty-six books of that collection called the Bible and for which they had affected such contempt. It was our book of Ruth, with the name of God omitted, and a few other very slight alterations so that the infidel Frenchmen might not suspect that it was the Bible that was being read to them.

This is the book I wish to spend a few evenings over with you. There is a vast deal more than its literary merit that gives it value in our estimation. Being inspired of God, like all Scripture, it is "profitable for doctrine (or teaching), for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," (2 Tim. iii. 16) and very much more. I suppose, to view the book in its typical character, we should see in it the checkered history of God's people Israel, past, present, and future—for prophecy is only history in advance. This would be its primary interpretation as a type (for I do not think you have the Church typified at all in Ruth). But one great beauty of Scripture is what may be called its extreme flexibility of *application*; so, without attempting to interpret it, I wish to apply this lovely Judean tale to the individual soul throughout these addresses.

Names are very often in themselves illustrative. They are remarkably so here. Elimelech means, "My God is King." This is a name of lofty dignity. Naomi signifies "pleasantness."

The combination reminds us of what is true of every saint of God when in a right or normal state of soul. Their Saviour-God is the mighty "King of the nations" of the earth, and supreme Lord and Ruler of the universe. What dignity this gives to the Christian, and how it elevates him above the strivings of the potsherds of the earth in their ambitious aims of whatever nature. Then there is "the joy of the Lord" and His known salvation—the "pleasantness." They enjoy "the blessing of the Lord that maketh rich and addeth no sorrow thereto." The happy believer has every reason to rejoice, and he is the only person in the world who has any real or good reason for being happy. He "joys in God," the God of his salvation, and is even *commanded* to "rejoice in the Lord always." He proves by blessed experience that wisdom's ways are "ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

This couple dwelt in Bethlehem - Judah. Bethlehem means "house of bread," and Judah is "praise." A Christian in communion with God enjoys a continual feast. Christ, as revealed in the Scriptures, is made the food of their souls. There is no sighing, "My leanness! my leanness!" The husks, sought after and fed upon by so many, will be eschewed by him, for "the full soul loatheth a honey-comb" (Prov. xxvii. 7). Nature's sweetest things will lose

their charm. "As the living Father," Christ says, "hath sent Me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me" (John vi. 57). Then there is "praise." The soul feeding on Christ is a praiseful soul. They "in everything give thanks" and their praises are mingled with those of their brethren in the assembly of the saints. Peter speaks of the dual character of the Christian priesthood. It is both "holy" and "royal." We offer up the "spiritual sacrifice" of praise *to God* continually. This is as "holy" priests—it is Godward. Then there is service and testimony towards those around us. We "show forth the praises" of our God and Saviour. This we do as "royal" priests—it is manward. See I Pet. ii.

And then, they were "Ephrathites." Ephratah means "fruitful." A Christian with his soul well fed and full of joyful praise is sure to be fruitful in his life. His testimony will be blessed, and his work for God owned. He will not be a vain talker, or a useless cumberer, like the potatoes of the fable, all tops and no fruit at the bottom. He will not live unto himself but unto Christ who died for him and rose again. There will be seen in his life the fruit of the ungrieved Spirit—"love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control." So Elimelech (*my God is King*) and Naomi (*pleasantness*), Ephrathites (*fruitful*), dwell in Bethlehem (*house of bread*)-

Judah (praise). Happy combination! "What's in a name?" men ask. Everything often, we reply, when it is in Scripture. They are worth more as evidences of the inspiration of Scripture than all of Egypt's or Babylon's monuments, bricks, and tablets put together, though we do not by any means despise the value of these latter.

Well, there they dwelt till the famine came; and then they went down to the country of Moab. They begin to picture the course of the backslider now. It is the self-starved soul, always, that backslides. A neglected Bible means a withered soul. It is the famine of hearing or reading the word of God that leads souls to Moab. And what condition of soul does Moab signify. This family did not go either to Egypt or Babylon, mark. Egypt typifies the world, out-and-out; and Israel, once delivered, could never again be captives there. They went to Egypt in the days of Jeremiah, but it was of their own accord. They were voluntary sojourners there. "I will carry you away beyond Babylon," was God's sentence upon the nation for their idolatry. They were captives in Babylon, but never again in Egypt after their wonderful deliverance and passage through the Red Sea.

Now Christ died that He might deliver the Christian from "this present evil world" (Gal. i), and the word of God assures him that he

can never "be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. xi.). He is not of it, but given to Jesus *out of* the world. He may, and alas! sometimes does, go back to the world for a time, but he never can be of it again, after his conversion. He has been redeemed by Christ and is "free indeed," and can never again be Satan's slave. Babylon is the religious world-profession, where so many of the Lord's own are in captivity to-day, like Israel of old. Egypt's final end is blessing, as Isaiah tells us (chap. xix. 22-24. Babylon's end is utter destruction as we know from the same prophecy (chap. xiv. 22, 23). This poor world will, one day, when Jesus reigns, be blessed and its curse removed; but spiritual Babylon, earth's great corruptress, is beyond all healing. "And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, 'Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all'" (Rev. xviii. 21). God's call to all His own in Babylon is, "Come out of her, My people."

But Moab is neither Babylon nor Egypt. We have what Moab suggests in Jeremiah xlviii. 11; "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed." This is Moab. It is not the Christian turning back to

this world's husks, or joining affinity to a pleasure-loving and lifeless mass of profession, but "at ease" and "settled on his lees." He is not profiting by the disciplinary dealings of God, so is not "emptied from vessel to vessel." There is no purging of the branch, for it has, for the time being, become fruitless (John xv.). His conscience has ceased to be exercised—"his taste remained in him and his scent is not changed." The old fleshly appetites are still strong within him from being indulged, and his scent, or discernment, has become dulled. It is just a Christian leading perhaps an outwardly respectable life, but out of communion with God. He may even maintain a position of separation, but it is that separation of a Pharisee who says, "Stand by thyself, for I am holier than thou." Growth in grace has ceased, and for all the use he is, either in the Church or in the world, he might just as well die and go to heaven and be out of the way. I have met them, settled on their lees, like a water-logged vessel stranded on a mud bank. If they go to meeting at all, it is only on rare occasions when the whim takes them, or their favorite preacher or teacher comes along. They are at ease, alas! in a world where Jesus, God's untiring Servant said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." They will sometimes tell you how once they did work for God, visiting the sick on Sunday afternoons, distributing tracts or teaching in

the Sunday-school, but they never saw any fruit, or somebody criticized their methods, or they had got to see things differently, and now suspected the efforts put forth by others as being "fleshly zeal." They conceitedly compare themselves to Mary, sitting at Jesus' feet, and coldly look upon those who seek to really work for God and souls, as being Marthas who need reproving rather than encouragement. They are very fond of a text (which they little understand) reading, "Their strength is to sit still."

Their scent, too, is defective. Scent, in Scripture, is discernment; and a soul away from God has none. He no longer has any capacity to "try the things which differ," or power to "try the spirits," and so falls an easy prey to any new form of false doctrine that may be brought into his neighborhood, or spring up in the Church of God. His judgment is worthless, so he is useless when questions of discipline arise in the assembly (if he has not already taken himself away). Under the Levitical law no priest could officiate who had a "flat nose." There would be the impaired scent, defective discernment. In contrast with the flat-nosed disqualified priest, the bride of the Canticles is described by her Beloved as having a nose "as the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus" (Cant. vii. 4). It was prominent, denoting keen spiritual discernment. The "tower" (watch-tower) would speak of vigi-

lance. It "looked toward Damascus." Damascus was the city where dwelt Israel's enemy, the Syrians; and the Christian should ever be on the alert for those spiritual enemies who invade the land of our possession, and spoil, or bring in bondage, the soul, and destroy our testimony for Christ. But the soul pictured by the dual type of Elimelech and Naomi in Moab, has no discernment, and very naturally falls a prey to "imagination and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of Christ."

But "the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways," and these wanderers from the land of promise are made to feel the rod of chastisement. Elimelech dies and Naomi is left a widow—the standing Scripture type of desolation. The two sons, dragged down to Moab with their parents, marry Moabitish women and Jehovah slays them according to His word (Deut. vii. 3, 4). If Christian parents depart from God in heart, the effect upon their children is disastrous. We never fall but we drag down others with us. Mahlon means "sick," and Chilion is "pining," like the weak, sickly Christianity of children (when converted at all) whose parents have lost the vigor of their spiritual youth, or left their "first love."

So Naomi is left childless and a widow in a stranger's land, with two other widows, not to share, but to add to, her sorrows. It is a sol-

enn thing, I tell you, to drift away from God; and some day the rod of discipline most surely must descend. Unequal yokes, too, bring their just reward, as poor Mahlon and Chilion found to their destruction. Worldly fathers and mothers, take warning! You may make good matches, so called, for your converted children, but God will speak in judgment to both you and them if you link them up with unbelievers. I will relate an incident. At N—— I was told of a young Christian girl there to whom an ungodly young man paid attention. The mother, instead of discouraging it, helped it on. The girl was willing, and engaged herself to this unbelieving Christ-rejector, who dragged her out to all kinds of parties and worldly amusements. Both mother and daughter should have known better, for they were both in the fellowship of Christians walking in separation from the world, and where the truth was clearly taught. This poor young Christian girl soon sickened and died. On her death-bed she confessed to all that her departure from God was the cause of her being taken away. "And you, Mother," she said, "are to blame for this, for you should have stopped me, and shown me my sin." So she died for her transgression.

I could add testimony to testimony, and the half was never told. God says, "Them that honor Me, I will honor, and them that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." And He will

make all His saints to know that He is as good as His word.

Sometimes a whole assembly will allow itself to drift into a state of spiritual famine, and then the weaker ones drop out. This would be like this quartet of Ephrathites going to Moab. For I have sometimes thought that while Elimelech and Naomi represented what Christians should be, their sons might illustrate the state of soul to which the famine had brought them—sick and pining. Faith declines and the soul seeks relief in Moab, throws up its responsibilities, and begins a course of spiritual loafing, as we might say. But the family of Elimelech found a hundredfold more trouble in Moab than they would have found in Bethlehem-judah, even with its bitter hunger. It is as the prophet says, "As if a man should flee from a lion and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall and a serpent bit him" (Amos v. 19). I know of some brethren who, when things got low and trouble came into the assembly, removed to a distant city to save themselves exercise and conflict, as they thought. But there they only found worse troubles, and were glad to get back and face the difficulties. And then God commenced to revive them, and, in two weeks' meetings with them, I had the joy of seeing nearly thirty converted, and baptised twenty-one in one night in the sea. And the assembly was increased to

double its former size. It was God visiting His people in giving them bread, just as in our story.

There is at last, after more than ten years, a plentiful harvest in Bethlehem, and Naomi hears of it. "Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, that she might return from the country of Moab." "Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was." She was like the starving prodigal, who, when he thought of the "bread enough and to spare" in his father's house, said, "I will arise and go to my father."

Naomi came out of "the place where she was." She, with the others, came to *sojourn* in the land of Moab, but the end of ver. 2, (margin) says they "*were* there"—settled, stuck fast, so to speak. But Naomi rises up out of the place of her backslidings and sorrow to return to the land of Judah. It is the beginning of barley harvest when she reaches Bethlehem, and they say, as they behold the long-lost wanderer, "Is this Naomi?" And she, poor woman, says, "Call me not Naomi; call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me . . . why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?" Ah yes, she had reaped the bitter fruit of her unbelief and departure from God and His people. It is ever thus with the backslider. Poor sightless Samson grinds in the prison-house, and

makes sport for the Philistines, bound in fetters of brass. David tells us what he suffered for his sin, in the thirty-second psalm. He says, "My bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drouth of summer." He says, too, in Psa. li., "My sin is ever before me." And again he speaks of the bones which God had broken. "Restore unto me," he cries, "the joy of Thy salvation." Fallen Peter goes out and "weeps bitterly." The author of that hymn,

"Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy praise."

(whose name was Robinson, I think) became a backslider from his God after the composition of those verses. One day in a stage-coach he met a lady who, without knowing his identity, told him how much she loved the hymn, and what a source of comfort it had been to her. "Ah, madam," he sighed, "I wrote those verses, and I would give worlds now, if I possessed them, if I could have the joy I experienced at that time."

Many a child of God has lost the joy of his salvation through worldliness and sin, though, thank God, the salvation itself can never be lost, if once possessed. But just because I am His child, God will visit me here on earth with chastisement, if I depart from Him. Old

Bishop Fuller tells of seeing two boys fighting. A man came out of a house near by and seizing one of the boys, who was least to blame, gave him a sound trouncing. The Bishop asked him why he did not beat the boy who was most in fault. "Oh," he said, "this is my son, and I chastise him. I have nothing to do with the other." "You only have I known of all the families of the earth," God says to Israel, "therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities." And in the New Testament, though grace is the prominent and leading thing, there is also government as in the Old. "If we would judge ourselves," the apostle says, "we should not be judged. But when we are judged we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 COR. xi. 31, 32). It pays to walk straight, you may depend upon it, children of God. Naomi found this out. "The hand of the Lord is gone out against me," she says. "The face of the Lord is against them which do evil," Scripture says, whether they be His own or not.

"I went out full," Naomi says to her fellow-townsmen, "and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." Yes, *she went out*, but it was the Lord who *brought her home*. His watchful eye had never been off her during the long years of her wandering, and His care and love for her had never ceased, even if in chastisement He had been compelled to deal "very

bitterly " with her. He will never cast off or disown His child, blessed be His name! and of Jesus, John says, "Having loved His own which were in the world He loved them unto the end " —yes, right to the very end. And if you are His own, His sheep, His word declares you shall never perish. Some people think that preaching the final perseverance of the Saviour with His own will make them careless as to their walk; but I know from blessed experience that it will *not*. I never hated sin more, or longed more to please my Lord, than after I knew He had saved me with an eternal salvation and would never let me go. It is the *fixed* stars that tremble most, and it is those who know that they are fixed forever in the family of God, who fear and tremble most lest they should sin against such love and grace.

"The Lord hath brought me home," Naomi says. Yes, it was still home—sweet home. She had wandered far and long, but her heart was never at home in the land of the uncircumcised. Many a time, no doubt, she thought of the "pleasant land" she had left for the country of Moab. The yearly feasts would come often to her mind as the months rolled on in the land of her sorrow. Bethlehem was home to her still. And no matter how far a child of God may wander, or how long a sheep of Christ may stray, the Father's house and the fold of the Shepherd are sweet home to that wanderer.

The first explorers to Greenland took with them ravens, (being without the magnetic needle) and when they wished to know in what direction the nearest land lay, they loosed one of the birds and it flew straight for the nearest shore, regardless of distance. The saved soul is like the carrier pigeon. Release it never so far from its cot, it will, as soon as it gets its bearings, fly straight as an arrow for home. O wanderer, if you are here to-night, get your bearings *now*. Own your sin, judge yourself unsparingly for your folly, and seek the face of God. You have not to be re-converted but *re-stored*. This, God has made possible for you. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John i. 9). He is *faithful*, mark, because He has pledged Himself to do this very thing. And He is *just*, for His own Son has borne our sins in His own body on the tree, and the Father can now righteously forgive His wandering child.

Naomi was brought home *empty*. Some there are who will be "saved so as by fire," and all their worldly works burnt up—a lifetime lost, but the soul saved, thanks be to God and His grace! (See 1 Cor. iii.). Oh, for an "abundant entrance" into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! God grant it to us all.

If you are not God's child, and wish to be,

hear the way: "As many as received Him, (Christ) to them gave He power (or right) to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name. " Believe on His name tonight, poor child of wrath, and you will become one of the holy, happy children of God. Amen.

ADDRESS II.

Chap. ii.

WE come to Ruth to-night. Naomi the wanderer has been restored, and Ruth the sinner goes to Bethlehem with her. Orpah, too, pictures a sinner; only she never reaches Bethlehem, or Bethlehem's Boaz. She seems to start well, just like Ruth, but she turns back to her people and to her gods. She had said to Naomi, "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people" (chap. i. 10). She only thinks of Naomi's *people*, mark. Ruth has Naomi's *God* before her. She says, "Thy God shall be my God" (chap. i. 16). Orpah is like many a so-called "convert" of the present day. They make a start, apparently, but soon go back to their former idols and associates. They never, in their thoughts, get beyond joining some religious body of "people," like poor Orpah. The real convert, like Ruth, has had to do with God Himself, and such abide.

Both were now tested, as everyone must be. Naomi urges them to go back. Our Lord said to His disciples, "Will ye also go away?" when great crowds of nominal followers "went back and walked no more with Him." "What seek ye?" He asks of the two disciples of John who started to follow Him, as if to turn them back. So here Naomi seeks to dissuade them from

coming further. "And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her." There was no turning back of Ruth. She clings to Naomi and says, "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." Her mind is wholly made up, fully persuaded. Unlike her, Orpah is "almost persuaded," and returns to her people and her gods. Ruth has deliberately made her happy choice, and will not allow herself to be moved by her sister's declension, or turned aside by Naomi. So "when she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her."

So they go on together to Bethlehem. And when they arrive "all the city was moved about them." There was a great stir in the place, just as when a sinner repents, all heaven is moved over the event. "There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth." It delights God's heart to see a sinner turn to Him, and heaven rings with music over every case of real conversion. O, unsaved one! make Christ your choice to-night and let all heaven rejoice over your repentance.

In the chapter read to-night we have Ruth,

the young convert, as we might call her. She desires almost the first thing to become a gleaner. "And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter." The new convert instinctively turns to the word of God. I remember when God first saved me how I read the whole twenty-eight chapters of the book of Acts at one sitting. I had never read the Bible before. It had had no interest for me and I had looked upon it as the dullest of all dull books. I became like the new-born babe which, it is said, instinctively turns to its mother's breast. So Peter says, "As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby."

Ruth says, "In whose sight I shall find grace." These pictures are all more or less imperfect and fall far short of the reality. The believer now has *already* found grace or favor with God. He is "graced in the Beloved One" (Eph. i. 6, literal). "By grace ye are saved," Paul writes.

So she goes out to glean and she happens into the field of Boaz. This "mighty man of wealth," whose name means "strength," is a striking and beautiful type of Christ. What wealth of honor and majesty and glory and love and grace are His. And oh, His "strength"! He is "the Almighty" (Rev. i. 8). "All power

is given unto Me in heaven and on earth," He says. Isaiah calls Him, "The mighty God, the Father of eternity." We, His own, may be poor and weak, but we rejoice to know that riches and power are His. And we have *Him*, just as Ruth, at last, got Boaz.

As Ruth is gleaning, Boaz comes from Bethlehem to see how his harvest is progressing. As he enters the field he says to his reapers, "The Lord be with you." "The Lord bless thee," they reply. What beautiful greetings between master and servants. Boaz was a good master. There were no strikes among his workmen; no getting of heads together and grumbling about long hours, hard work, or low wages. He greets his servants kindly and they answer him with blessing. There is nothing but good feeling and accord between them. Oh, Christ is a blessed Master! "My yoke is easy," He says, "and My burden is light." Would that He were *your* Master, sinner. You will find the devil's service bitter enough in the end and the yoke of sin will some day prove to be intolerable. Let the Lord Jesus Himself break that yoke from off your neck to-night and give you His own "easy" one instead.

"Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this?" Who is this servant set over the reapers? He is mentioned twice (vers. 5, 6), but his name is not once given. He is like the servant of Abra-

ham sent after a bride for Isaac in Gen. xxiv. We should never know his name from that chapter. He is doubtless a type of the Holy Spirit as this servant here appears to be. He was "set over the reapers," directing them in their work, saying to one, Go there; and to another, Come here; and to still another, Do this—all under his orders and obedient to him. Now the Lord Jesus is having His great harvest of grace reaped, and the person set over the reapers is the Holy Ghost. Take, for example, the sixteenth of Acts. There in ver. 6, Paul and his fellow-reapers "were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia." In the next verse we read, "They assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not." It was not some archbishop, or missionary board, or self-styled "general" directing their movements, but THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST. In the same book of Acts, thirteenth chapter, when Paul and his companions start out on a tour of evangelization, we read, "So they, being sent forth BY THE HOLY GHOST, departed," etc. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers are the Lord's servants and only *He* has any right to direct or command them. True "holy orders" come from Him, through His Spirit. The Holy Spirit Himself is called "Lord" in 2 Cor. iii. 18, *R. V.* ("The Spirit of the Lord," there should read, "The Lord, the Spirit.")

Well, this servant set over the reapers tells

Boaz who this Moabitish damsel is. And Boaz, though "a mighty man of wealth," deigns to speak to the poor Gentile widow. "Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens." He graciously encourages her to continue gleaning in his field. And has not *our* Boaz encouraged us all to glean in His fields? "Search the Scriptures," He says, "for they are they which testify of Me." How different this from the Romish priest who says, "You must not search or read the Scriptures, but listen to us and implicitly believe all that we tell you." "Go not to glean in another field," Boaz says. And the word of God is sufficient for the Christian. There are the fields of philosophy, Higher Criticism, and evolutionary science, and what not. Let us cleave to our Bible as God has given it to us. Never mind the taunt of not being abreast of the times. The Bible was, is, and always will be strictly "up-to-date." David says, "I have more understanding than all my teachers: for Thy testimonies are my meditation" (Psa. cxix. 99). He says, "I understand more than the ancients." That is the way to be truly wise, to stick to God's testimonies and "search the Scriptures daily" like God's nobility at Berea. All this world's boasted wisdom is foolishness with God and to faith.

And there is separation, too, or fellowship, rather. Boaz says, "Abide here fast by my maidens." Young Christian, seek the fellowship of the Lord's disciples, and eschew all others. Beware of ungodly associations. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord." You will find the friendship of this world a snare to your soul. Be like David. Do you know that he tells us what sort of company he kept? He says, "I am a companion of all them that fear Thee, and of them that keep Thy precepts" (Psa. cxix. 63). You may put up the old plea of hoping to do the ungodly good by mixing with them, but it will end like the lady and her canary bird. Her bird was a very fine singer, and one day she hung his cage in one of the trees of the garden. This she repeated for a number of days until she noticed that he hardly sang at all any more but simply chirped, something like a sparrow. He had been in the company of the sparrows in the garden—in their society, if you will—and by listening to and imitating their unmusical chirp he had lost his lovely song. And when the lady went into the garden did she see sparrows sitting about on the branches, singing like canary birds? You may be sure not. They had not gained anything by the canary's company, but the canary had lost, for the time being, its melodious song. Be not deceived! "Evil communications corrupt good manners."

It is not good manners correcting corrupt communications. It always works the very reverse. You can never bring the ungodly up to your level; you will only lose that new song of salvation that the Lord has put into your mouth. Go after souls, anywhere, like your Lord and Master who ate with publicans and sinners, but make sure *that* is your object, and not companionship.

But Boaz says more. "When thou art athirst," he says, "go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn." The young men here, or reapers of Boaz, may well represent the "gifts" or specially called servants of Christ, as the maidens with whom Ruth was to abide closely, picture the saints in general. The maidens were gleaning or gathering for their own eating, while the young men were reaping the harvest for Boaz. These young men drew water out of the depth of the well, and of this Ruth was to avail herself when thirsty. This is like the ministry of God's servants. With joy they draw water out of "the wells of salvation," and a sweet, refreshing ministry of the Word is the result. And any Christian who refuses or neglects to profit by this ministry is sure to suffer for it in his soul. We cannot, of course, always have this ministry as orally spoken; but there is abundance of it in printed form, and thus accessible to all. I remember how when first converted I

used to revel in this ministry. My pastor (as I called him then,) a Presbyterian, loaned me the C. H. M. "Notes," and I may say that I fairly devoured them. I would read tracts and pamphlets on the way from the post-office where I had received them, and sometimes stumbled over the curbings, so intently was I occupied with the precious things I was getting for my soul. My heart was full of joy, and my spirit like a watered garden then—whatever it may or may not be now. It is an excellent plan to have some good book or pamphlet always on hand and, if you have any time to spare after reading the Word itself, take it up and "drink of that which the young men have drawn." So shall your "profiting," like Timothy's, "appear unto all." Spiritual progress will be the result; for the Lord who gave these gifts intended them "for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." The "vessels" are the publications which contain this ministry. The servants of the greater than Boaz have "drawn" it, sometimes with no little labor to themselves, and you, young gleaner, have but to "drink."

"Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" Grace always humbles us. Mephibosheth in

the presence of the grace of David, says, "What is thy servant that thou shouldst look upon such a dead dog as I am?" Ruth confesses she was but "a stranger." But there was a vast deal more than this, though she herself may not have known it. The law of Moses said, "An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord, even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord forever." It said further, "Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days forever" (Deut. xxiii. 3, 6). What then could she have expected from Boaz but to be rebuked and driven from his field? And that same stern law, that cursed and shut out the Moabites from blessing, curses and shuts up heaven against us all. "*Cursed*," it thunders, "is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." But, thank God, if the law "given by Moses" condemns the sinner, "grace and truth" which "came by Jesus Christ" saves him when he trusts that gracious Saviour. The same saving faith which wrought in Rahab the harlot, was found in Ruth. Boaz says, "The Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." Though by nature a cursed Moabite, her faith had saved her; though condemned by the law, she was justified by faith. And you, my unconverted hearer, though by nature a child of wrath and

cursed by the law you have broken, may put your trust in Christ to-night, and thus be saved. "By grace are ye saved through faith," is the testimony of Scripture (Eph. ii. 8).

"And Boaz said unto her, At meal-time come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed and left." He mentions "meal-time." Have you spiritual meal-times, Christian? Do you make it a rule to read the Word at least once a day? Do not say you have no time. You find, make, or take the time to eat three meals a day of bodily food. But Job says, "I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." He esteemed them *more*, mark. And it does not take so much time after all. If we have our Bibles handy, at odd moments, it is surprising how much one can gather up in a short time. Then there are the regular assembly meetings. These are often precious meal-times for the soul. If you willingly absent yourself from them, you will miss many a bit of choice ministry, such as you could not get at home,—important as private reading of the Word may be. Then there are the general meetings, or conferences, too, which none should miss, who can attend them. They are like Ruth's meal-times. It was at such times Boaz reached her parched corn. At such times she received from his

hand direct, as she sat besides the reapers. Being near the reapers she was close to Boaz. "Lo, I am with you always," our Boaz said to His reapers, as He sent them forth. They are not the sole custodians of the treasures of truth, but they are channels, and the Christian who haughtily affects independence of the gifts of Christ to the Church, is invariably found to be cold, hard, and heady. Ruth sits beside the reapers, but it is not *they* who reach her those rich portions of parched corn; it is *Boaz himself*. Oh, to receive from Himself *direct*, whatever or whoever may be the vessel He may use to convey it to us. If we get it otherwise, our intellect only will be ministered to; and it will be mere knowledge which "puffeth up."

"And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not. And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not."

"Let her glean even among the sheaves," says Boaz. She has the right of range to all his field. There are no limits or restrictions to be placed upon her. And the Christian has the range of all the word of God given him, from Genesis to Revelation. "Search the Scriptures." "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning." Some

read only the New Testament and look upon the equally inspired Old Testament as they do a last year's almanac. They even speak of it as the "old Bible." *All* Scripture testifies of Christ, and therefore must be profitable. "In *all* the Scriptures the things concerning Himself," Luke says. "Moses wrote of *Me*," Christ said. Philip says to Nathanael, "We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth." I have by me here a fifty centimes coin of Spain. On the reverse side are two columns, or pillars, representing the Pillars of Hercules, or the promontories on either side of the Strait of Gibraltar. Beyond these points the ancients believed there was nothing more to be discovered, and previous to the discovery of America all Spanish coins had the legend "*Ne plus ultra*" (no more beyond) inscribed across these pillars. But since the voyage of Columbus and his discovery of the American continent, they have omitted the "*Ne*," and the inscription on my coin reads "*Plus ultra*"—more beyond. The old Spaniards were like those who turn backwards in their Bibles to the "family record" between the Testaments and there they stop. "No more beyond," they say. No, brother, change your motto—there *is* more beyond. Go back from Malachi to Genesis, and you will find "profitable" Scripture all along the way. Some professing Christians seem to have about as

much use for the Old Testament as a Jew has for the New.

Then there are others who have their favorite chapters which they read and re-read over and over again to the utter neglect of other equally important chapters. Others again read so much of it as they find in the Prayer Book. But "all the word of God for all the people of God" is a first-rate motto. "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not," was Boaz' charge to his reapers. "Forbid the children not their lawful heritage and bread," we say to Rome. Child of God, it is *all* yours, its sixty-six books; and the Spirit who inspired it can make every portion of it profitable to your soul.

And let me tell you something about the reading of the Bible. You may not feel at the time of reading that you are getting very much out of that particular portion of the Word. You may not understand it, and nothing in it may seem to strike you particularly. But never mind, read on. It is bound to leave its impress on your soul. Being the word of God it is sure to affect you for good, and you will be unconsciously molded and your thoughts formed by it. It has this effect even on unconverted children. How much more, then, will it affect and form those who have been born again and have the indwelling Spirit. We are sure to be affected by the company we keep, and when we read the Bible we are in the company of those

holy men of God who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost—patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, “the excellent of the earth.” And when we read the Gospels we are in the company of the blessed Lord Himself. And men, beholding our transformed lives, will “take knowledge” of us that we “have been with Jesus.”

Boaz further instructs his young men, saying, “Let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her.” This is something different from Boaz reaching her parched corn. Did you ever feel when somebody was preaching that they could read your thoughts, or that somebody had told them all about you? The word seemed to suit you so perfectly. That was a handful “let fall of purpose” for you. God’s servants are not “mind readers,” but the Spirit in them is, and it is He who directs them, at such times, in their speaking. Sometimes it is a word of warning, or exhortation, or instruction, or comfort, as the case may be.

I remember once in Minnesota speaking of the believer’s eternal security. I was trying to show how the exhortation of Barnabas to the young converts to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart (Acts xi.) was perfectly compatible with our security depending entirely on Christ’s hold on us (John x.). I related how, when visiting at my brother’s a short time before, I had amused his little boy of two years,

one stormy day, by taking him on my back at the top of the stairs and carrying him to the bottom. Before starting I would say, "Now, Clayton, hold on tight," and I could feel his little arms tighten round my neck and his little legs twist themselves around my body. And, I said, I suppose that when I told him to hold on tight he really thought his safety depended on *his* grip of me. But it was another grip that kept him safe. *I* was holding on, and it was my strong arm that kept him from falling. I was responsible for that boy's safety. But it was nice, I tell you, to feel his warm little arms and legs clinging so confidently to me; and our blessed Lord Jesus, too, loves to have His own cling to Him in faith, but it is His own almighty grip that keeps us safe upon His shoulders. He says, "Neither shall any (man or demon) pluck them out of My hand." I cannot even pluck myself out, any more than my little nephew could cast himself from my shoulders and break his back or neck upon the stairs—which, of course, he was careful not to do: nor would a child of God ever turn wilfully from Christ.

A few days later a lady who was present said to me, "Mr. Knapp, your illustration and remarks on our holding on, and Christ's holding on, cleared the matter up perfectly for me. It was just the thing that was bothering me, and you seemed to read my doubts and difficulties. I understand now how it is Christ's holding on

that keeps us safe, though we too are exhorted to cleave or cling to Him." It was just a handful let fall of purpose for her. She is a writer, and I sometimes now see her name in some of the semi-religious papers for children. I hope she may keep Christ before her, and sometimes tell the little ones of Him who once held children in His arms and laid His blessed hands upon their heads.

I could relate many such incidents showing how the reapers of the Greater than Boaz have, instructed by their Master, let fall some handfuls of purpose for the favored Ruths.

"So she gleaned in the field until even." She does not cease her toil until the day has ended. She had continued from the morning (see ver. 7). She made a good beginning, as many do. but, like few, she made an equally good ending. It is comparatively easy to start, but most difficult to continue on. "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off." That was a very good proverb, though spoken by a very bad king (1 Ki. xx. 11).

And Ruth "beats out that she had gleaned." "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting," another proverb says (Prov. xii. 27). Many read the Bible, buy expository books and run to meetings, and really "hunt" for something. But it does them little good because what is learned is lodged merely in the region of the intellect and is not meditated on

and prayed over in the spirit of self-judgment. This, I apprehend, would be like "beating out" what was gleaned, or "roasting" what was taken in hunting.

I hope that we have all been gleaners here to-night. I trust, too, that there has been something in the vessel for thirsty souls to drink. And perhaps, too, some "handfuls of purpose" have been let fall for any who may have needed a special word of exhortation or comfort. May the Lord Himself add His own rich blessing to it all. Amen.

ADDRESS III.

Chaps. iii., iv.

WE left Ruth, in our last address, in the field of Boaz. She gleaned all day and in the evening beat out, or threshed, what she had gleaned. The result was "about an ephah of barley." We see from the sixteenth of Exodus, last verse, that an omer was the tenth part of an ephah. We see, too, from the same chapter, that an omer of manna per day was each person's allowance; so that, if barley was as nutritious as manna, Ruth by her diligence had gleaned enough in one day to feed ten persons.

In the eighteenth verse we read, "And she took it up, and went into the city." The city may be called the place of need. And how good and fitting for Christians when they have gleaned, and had parched corn reached them, and handfuls of purpose let fall for them, to go to the places of need and carry the precious truth of Christ to souls. So shall our profiting appear to all (1 Tim. iv. 15). "And her mother-in-law *saw* what she had gleaned." Our spiritual progress and growth in grace should be manifest to our brethren, and to all. "And Ruth *brought forth* and gave to her." Our Lord says, "Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which *bring-*

eth forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Matt. xiii. 52). We will have something to impart to others if we are like Ruth, and our ministry will neither be barren nor unfruitful. Many a brother sits dumb in the meetings from one year's end to another just because he has not been gleaning and threshing out like Ruth. Some try to preach but never have anything to impart because they have not been diligently digging into the Word for themselves; their speaking is just so much noise and they would do better to be silent. The mass of Christians never speak of Christ to others because they neglect their Bibles and feed on the newspaper and the secular magazines. They have nothing to "bring forth" to help souls with and, like Ephraim, they "feed on wind," or worse. Peter has a word on this line. He says, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet. iv. 10). As "*faithful* stewards" we hold fast the Word committed to us; as "*good* stewards" we minister it to others; and as "*wise* stewards" we give it out discriminately, ministering it in due season, not taking the children's bread and casting it to dogs, or putting pearls before swine.

In the chapters read to-night, we have Ruth's marriage to Boaz and what led up to it. Ruth and Naomi, her mother-in-law, were in serious

difficulty. Naomi had, as she says, been brought back from the country of Moab "empty," *i. e.*, a childless widow and in the depths of poverty. Pressed by need, it would seem, she was about to sell the family inheritance, "a parcel of land" which had belonged to Elimelech (chap. iv. 3).

Now there was a law in Israel to this effect: if an estate was sold or taken for debt it was to revert back to the original owner or to his heirs every fiftieth year, which was called "the year of jubilee." "The land shall not be sold forever," or to perpetuity, God had said. It was a most wise and gracious provision to put a check to land grabbing, and prevent just that lamentable condition of things which obtains in many of the European states to-day, notably, poor, down-trodden Ireland, where a few "gentlemen" possess the land and the tenants are reduced almost to the condition of serfs. The average workingman looks upon the Bible as a book in which the rich stand in especial favor, and he has become either antagonistic or indifferent to it. He does not know that in God's model government of Israel there was every provision that could be justly made in favor of the poor; and it was utterly impossible for the rich to monopolize the land which is after all, the important thing in any country given to agriculture. Ignorant infidels have tried to make out that the Bible is the work of a cunning priest-

craft, and Moses was just looking out for soft berths for himself and relatives when he gave the people the law. If this is so why did he prohibit any of the priestly family from becoming freeholders? They were not allowed to possess as their own an acre of the soil, which does not look very much as if they had all got their heads together and agreed to hoodwink a semi-barbarous nation of emancipated slaves, and give themselves positions of monetary influence and power over them. See Num. xviii. 20-24.

But this is a digression. Though all land was to revert every fiftieth year to the family to which it had belonged, it could be bought back, or redeemed by any of the family or their relatives, before that time. See Lev. xxv. 23-28. Naomi, therefore, as it would seem, being compelled to sell, hoped that one of her kinsmen would buy or redeem it. Boaz, the mighty man of wealth, was one of her nearest kinsmen, and she evidently looked upon him as one likely to redeem it for her.

And there was another question involved: the law laid it down that if a man died childless his nearest relative or "brother" was expected to marry his widow, and the first-born of the union was to be called after the deceased, so that his name should not perish, or be cut off, in Isreal. See Deut. xxv. 5-10. So the near kinsman would have a double duty to perform;

he would not only be expected, if able, to redeem the land, but also to marry Mahlon's widow. So, instructed by her mother-in-law, Ruth, anointed and adorned, goes to the threshing-floor of Boaz where he was winnowing barley. If he continued his work well on into the night it was to take advantage of the wind, probably. And when he lays himself down to rest at the end of the heap of grain, Ruth draws trustfully near and lays herself meekly and modestly at his feet. "And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself; and, behold, a woman lay at his feet. And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thy handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thy handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman." It is an Oriental courtship, and strange and unbecoming as Ruth's conduct might appear in the eyes of Westerns, it was considered perfectly proper in the "days when the judges ruled," and would be considered so still in the East, we suppose. Her asking Boaz to spread his skirt over her indicated to him that she was willing to become his wife (see Ezek. xvi. 8). And though she is but a poor widow of Gentile origin, Boaz expresses himself as quite agreeable to the proposal. He says, "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter: for thou hast showed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor

or rich. And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman." He means by this last ("all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman") that he understood her motives perfectly. He had not the slightest question as to the purity of her design in coming to the floor thus at night, and he graciously promises to perform for her all that she desires.

He says, "Thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich." How is it with you, believer in Christ? What are you following, or with whom do you have fellowship? Ruth, (as it became a widow) lived a life of retiring modesty and separation. And Christians are called to walk in separation from this world's principles and pleasures. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," writes the beloved John. "For all that is in the world," he says, "is not of the Father but is of the world." The young men, poor and rich, from whom Ruth kept herself, are like the things of the world of which John speaks. The *poor* young men would be like those coarser and gross pleasures from which it is comparatively easy to keep oneself, if saved. "The lust of the flesh," John calls them. But he speaks, too, of "the pride of life" which would answer more to the *rich* young men. These would be of special temptation to a poor young woman

like Ruth, and it is of the more refined and subtle forms of worldliness that Christians have most to beware. Almost any Christian would shrink from attending a public ball, or witnessing a sensational play or reading a French novel, but Satan is cunning and he has ready for our enticement that which awakens the "desires of the mind," if he cannot allure through "the lusts of the flesh." Both forms of depravity are mentioned in Eph. ii. 3. They are equally destructive of holiness, and the devil does not care one whit which he uses to hinder our communion with God or mar our testimony for Christ. O saint of God, shun, avoid, eschew whatever is not of Christ or the Father! Follow not these "young men whether poor or rich." Boaz says to Ruth, "Thou shalt keep fast by *my* young men, until they have ended all my harvest" (chap. ii. 21). And the apostle exhorts by the Spirit, "Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace *with them* that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. ii. 22).

"And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter-in-law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field. So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest" (chap. ii. 22, 23). Oh, for grace to persevere in the path of separation *to the end*. Some, once in it, are giving it up. Oh, they say, we made mistakes

in the past, and were too severe and rigid. Possibly; it is easy to become severe and to get rigid, saying to others, like the icy Pharisee, "Stand by thyself; come not near, for I am holier than thou." And it is possible, too, to occupy a position of outward separation from the world and all the while have the world in our hearts, like the monks and nuns, or the grasping, hard, and unspiritual brother, who sits with us around the table of the Lord and flatters himself that he is no Jonathan, like some other men he knows. He has "come out," he says. Yes; but do not forget, separated brother, that the passage that teaches separation most, distinctly ends with the exhortation to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh *and spirit*." And what is pride of ecclesiastical position, or covetousness, but hateful "filthiness of spirit?"

But in spite of mistakes made as to the spirit in which the truth of separation has been held, it is the truth taught in Scripture, if Scripture teaches anything. And what was the character of the men whom some now accuse of having been too rigid in this separation? They were devoted men of God who gave up all for Christ, and whose lives might well put to shame the soft, ease-loving conduct of those who now so freely criticise them. And there was power and blessing in the churches then, but where is the power and blessing now? Departed, alas!

and "Ichabod" written upon the testimony. Yet we have learned better how not to go too far in separation now, and we are pushing our children out more in the world, and going ourselves to places where we once would have felt self-condemned in being. No, brethren, our guides and separated fathers of the past generations were right, and God was with them. It is we, and not they, who have "gone too far." We have got in too close touch with the world. We have become so like it they can tolerate us now. The hope of the coming of Christ is in large measure given up (I mean as a living reality in our souls, not the doctrine), and to excuse ourselves for our compromise and unfaithfulness, we pretend that those that went before us were too narrow, and we are in measure correcting their mistakes.

Dear young Christian, do not, I beseech you, give ear to these suggestions that the path we are called upon to tread is one whit broader than our Lord says it is—a "*narrow way*." So let us never mind if sinners or unspiritual Christians call us narrow. See what Moses said to God in Exodus xxxiii. 16. He says, "Wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not in that Thou goest with us? *So shall we be separated, I and Thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth.*" Their separation was to mark them off from other nations, as a peo-

ple who had been blessed and saved by God. He says to them in Lev. xx. 24, "I am Jehovah your God, which have *separated* you from other people." They were first saved and then separated from the godless nations about them, just as the saved soul now is called to walk in separation from the ungodly, whether they be the "lewd fellows of the baser sort," or "the ungodly who prosper in the world." Let us seek the approval of Christ as Ruth had that of Boaz. Let us keep fast by the people of God as we glean, as Ruth kept fast by the maidens of Boaz. Let us, by God's grace, keep it up also, like Ruth until the end of the harvest of Him who is greater than Boaz. His "well done" at the end will be better than to have all our acquaintance as one man pat us on the back now, and tell us we do well not to be so narrow and exclusive. Let us be kind and courteous to all. Let us be gentle, though firm, in our refusal to compromise our position of separation to Christ. Let us, as we have opportunity, do good to all men, but let us never, *never* allow ourselves to be pressed, coaxed, or laughed into a position which our conscience does not tell us is one of distinctive and unqualified separation from the world. It is the happiest and only safe path, you may rest assured. "It is *good*," Naomi says to Ruth, "that they meet thee not in any other field." And it is good, disciple of Christ, that He find you, when He comes, in just that

place into which His grace and truth have called you.

But to return to Ruth and Boaz. Boaz says, "And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I." Boaz is perfectly willing to do the kinsman-redeemer's part, but the nearer kinsman has a prior claim, and Boaz, in righteousness, respects it. Now this is like the law given by Moses and the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ.

Boaz is the undoubted type of Christ, and the nearest kinsman, with his prior claim, impersonates the law. Jesus came to save and bless the sinner, but the law with its righteous claims was standing in the way. His blessed heart of love went out to publicans and sinners, and the outcasts of society. Ruth sought after Boaz; but Christ, the Son of God, came seeking the lost. But how could He in righteousness bless those concerning whom the law thundered, CURSED! "Cursed is every one," it says, "that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. iii. 10). Given by God, it is declared to be "holy, and just, and good." But men are unholy, unjust, and not good, but utterly bad. How then can they be spared and blessed of God? or how can the holy Christ of God befriend them? The sabbath-breaker was stoned under law. He only gathered a few sticks, to

cook his sabbath dinner perhaps, and yet the law condemned him to a violent death (Num. xv.). Shelomith's son was condemned to death for blasphemy and cursing, under law (Lev. xxiv.). The law condemned the disobedient and dissipated son to death. His own parents were to testify against him, and the men of his city were to stone him with stones until he died (Deut. xxi.). This was law, just and righteous, however severe it may seem to us now under grace. It was graven on tables of stone, showing that though it might be broken, it could not *bend*. It was hard, inflexible, and cold.

How was it possible then, we repeat, for Christ to befriend and bless transgressors? Could He ignore the law's demands, or hush its thunders with a word as He silenced the roar of the storm on the sea of Galilee? Could He sweep it aside as an obsolete code and having no present claim on man's conscience? "Think not," He says, "that I am come to destroy the law." But, though He came not to destroy or nullify or set aside the law, neither came He "to destroy men's lives," He says, "but to save them." How was it possible for Him to neither destroy men's lives nor the law, since that law demands the transgressor's destruction? The Pharisees had some such question in their minds when they brought the adulteress to Him. She was guilty. There

was no question as to that, for she had been taken in the very act. "Now," they said, "Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned: but what sayest Thou?" Moses had spoken; shall Christ contradict him? The law had pronounced its sentence of death; will grace reverse it and grant life? Is the Saviour powerless to save in the presence of these would-be champions and executors of the law? Is the grace of God to be like Darius, intently desirous of delivering Daniel out of the lions' den, but prevented by the inexorable law of the Medes and Persians "which altereth not?" Let us wait and see.

Boaz says to Ruth, "Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth: lie down until the morning." It is night and dark when Ruth hears of the nearer kinsman's claim; and if law is to have its way it is dark, *dark*, DARK for the sinner. But morning comes and with it the full settlement of the difficulty. "Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such an one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, . . . and he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here.

And they sat down." And there, in the gate, the matter was gone into and settled to the satisfaction of all.

Boaz went to the gate, mark. Now the gate was the Hebrew court-house—the *place of judgment*. And Calvary was the place where Jesus, the Saviour, met all the claims of law and justice. It was written of Him that He should "magnify the law and make it honorable." This He did, not only by keeping it perfectly during His life, but by fully meeting its every claim in His death upon the cross. There was no other way by which He could become the sinner's kinsman-redeemer. So He "stooped down," we read, "and with His finger wrote on the ground," when urged by the Pharisees as to whether He would have the poor, guilty woman condemned, or her sin remain unjudged and pass unpunished. In His humiliation He "stooped down" to a malefactor's death on Calvary. There for the sinner's sin He went down into the dust of death. The law written on stone declared the transgressor must die. Jesus writing on the ground as much as says, "I will die, and bear the sentence of the law upon the transgressor."* He is therefore not

*[In this "writing upon the ground" the Lord seems also to bring to the accusers' remembrance that the sentence of death had been pronounced against *every* sinner, as death is appointed to all. Compare Gen. ii. 17 with Rom. v. 12. So, conscience convicted, they go out "one by one, beginning at the eldest." ED.]

compelled to condemn to death the transgressor, but says, "Go, and sin no more." Grace reigns through righteousness. The nearer kinsman has perfect justice accorded him.

The nearer kinsman at first says, "I will redeem it;" but when Boaz puts before him all that was involved in the transaction, he relinquishes all claim, saying, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it." This was like the law. It first proposed to give man life. "This do, and thou shalt live." It held before him the promise of blessing on condition of his obedience. But, this obedience man never rendered; and so as a means of blessing to man the law failed utterly. In the twenty-seventh chapter of Deuteronomy two mountains are mentioned, Gerizim, the mount of blessing; and Ebal, the mount of cursing. From these two mountains the Levites, who represented the law, were to pronounce either blessing or cursing on Israel as the case might be—of obedience or disobedience. They were instructed fully as to the curses. Twelve times they were to cry, "Cursed!" and it was to be "with a loud voice." But they did not once say, "Blessed," for law can only bless the good; and "there is none good, no not one." No Levite voice was ever heard on mount Gerizim pronouncing blessings on the head of Israel, for none but the righteous, under

law, can inherit blessing; and "there is none righteous, no not one." Must sinners, then, remain unblest? Must justice effectually and forever withstand God's purpose of love? No! Listen: "For what the law *could not do*, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin (or, as a sacrifice for sin), condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. viii. 3). Sin, not the law, has met its condemnation in the cross of Christ. The law was weak through the flesh. It promised life and blessing on condition of obedience, but the flesh in man prevented his yielding that obedience; so, as a means of blessing, it was "weak." It demanded, but gave with its demand no power to fulfil. The nearer kinsman said to Boaz that he could not act the part of a redeemer without marring his own inheritance. And how marred would be the majestic dignity of God's holy law if it could let sin pass unpunished, and bless transgressors whom it was, in its very nature, bound to condemn and curse. So it must step aside, like the nearer kinsman, and say, not, I have no right to curse, but, *I cannot bless*.

So the great Redeemed does what the law could never do. He is the One who "speaks in righteousness, mighty to save." Hallelujah!

Boaz does the kinsman-redeemer's part and claims Ruth as his bride. She becomes his wife, and fruit—a son, is the result of the union.

In Rom. vii., we have the believer's deliverance from the law. We are delivered from law's every claim "that we should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth *fruit* unto God." God in His grace grant that each one of us who has been made one with Christ may be "fruitful in every good word and work." Amen.

O soul, if unsaved, Christ stands ready to be your blessed Redeemer to-night. You have not to seek a redeemer to befriend you, like Ruth. The Redeemer and Friend of sinners is Himself seeking the lost. You may be blessed right now and here. "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."