

Comments on the book of Ruth

By H.L. Rossier

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Introduction

The events of the Book of Ruth take place during the sad conditions and circumstances characterizing the rule of the Judges; yet there is nothing in common between this account's train of thought and that of the account preceding it. The Book of Judges describes the ruin of the people of Israel left to their own responsibility. This ruin was without remedy despite the tender care of divine mercy which sought to restore the people and often succeeded in partially restoring them. In contrast to the drought and barrenness of the ways of unfaithful man in the Book of Judges, the Book of Ruth is full of freshness. Here we find the “waterbrooks ... springs, and ... deep waters” that Moses spoke of (Deut. 8:7). The Book of Ruth is as fresh as a morning sunrise. Everything in this book breathes grace and no discordant note disturbs its delightful harmony. It is like a green oasis in the desert, a pleasant idyll amid Israel's somber history. When we meditate on this little book of four chapters, it becomes infinitely great to our souls. The scene has not changed, and yet we can say that heaven's feelings and affections have come down and made themselves at home on earth. It is difficult to understand that this country, the witness of so

many wars, shameful deeds, and abominable idolatries, was at the same time the theater of events whose lofty simplicity takes us back to the blessed times of the patriarchs.

Yet this can be explained. From the time of the fall two histories have been unfolding side by side: the history of man's responsibility and its consequences, and the history of God's counsels and promises along with the way in which He would carry them out in spite of all that is to the contrary. This is grace. Only grace is involved when it is a matter of divine counsels and promises; for man in responsibility cannot attain them, his guilt is unable to change them, a scene of ruin is incapable of fettering them, and God Himself rebukes Satan when he attempts to oppose them (Zech. 3:2).

In the measure in which evil spreads, the history of grace develops in ever-increasing proportion and with irresistible progress until it attains its appointed purpose. Grace begins in the heart of God and centers in the person of the Lord Jesus. Its final culmination is the radiant glory of the Second Man and the blessings we shall share with Him. This is why the Book of Ruth ends with the prophetic mention of Him who is the Root

and Offspring of David, the glorious Redeemer promised to Israel.

But if Ruth is a book of grace, it is necessarily also a book of faith. Grace and faith ever go hand in hand, for it is faith that lays hold of grace and appropriates it, and that cleaves to the divine promises and to the people who are the subjects of these promises, and it is faith that finds its delight in Him who is the bearer of the promises and their heir. Such is the marvelous character of the book we are about to consider.

Chapter 1

“And it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land” (v. 1). These words indicate the specific circumstances of the scene. We are in the days of the judges in the land of Israel. But there is a famine, this is a period when God's providential ways are operating in judgment on His people. “And a certain man went from Bethlehem-Judah, to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.” Bethlehem, the city which would become the Messiah's earthly birthplace (Micah 5:2) and which would have the privilege of seeing the brightness of Israel's long expected

star at the moment of its first appearance, saw only man's poverty and absolute destitution during the days of Naomi. The hand that had supported the people was now withdrawn and the people had nothing. This truth, thoroughly developed in the Book of Judges, is merely noted in the Book of Ruth, but with certain important facts added in verses 2 to 5.

During these days of ruin and under God's disciplinary ways Elimelech, (whose characteristic name means “God the king”) leaves his country together with Naomi (whose name signifies “my pleasantness”) and his children. Under divine government they seek refuge among the Gentiles. In the midst of this desolation Naomi is still, in spite of all, united with her husband and her children. Her name has not changed and she still bears it in spite of the ruin. But Elimelech, “God the king,” dies, and Naomi is left a widow. Through their connection with the idolatrous nation of Moab her sons profane themselves and likewise die. To all appearances the stock of Elimelech is extinguished without hope of posterity and “My pleasantness,” in mourning and henceforth barren, is plunged into bitterness.

“And she arose, she and her daughters-in-law, and returned from the fields of Moab; for she had heard in the fields of

Moab how that Jehovah had visited His people to give them bread. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she had been, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah” (vv. 6-7). On hearing the news that the Lord had shown grace to His people Naomi rose up and set out to return to her own land. Israel's condition had remained unchanged, but God Himself had put an end to the days of providential judgment which had befallen the nation, and this poor widow, bowed down under the weight of affliction, could again hope for better days. As we have said, grace is the first and dominant note of Ruth. All the blessings contained in this book depend on the fact that “Jehovah had visited his people to give them bread.” The Old Testament uses this well known expression to characterize the benefits that will be brought to Israel by the Messiah. “I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her needy ones with bread” (Ps. 132:15). Oh! if only the nation had so desired, these blessings would have been her portion permanently when Christ appeared in her midst, multiplying bread for 5000 and for 4000 men!

Naomi's daughters-in-law accompany her, moved by the thought of returning with her to her people (v. 10). But this good intention is not enough, for nothing less than faith will do in order to enter into relationship with grace. The behavior of Orpah and of Ruth illustrates this principle. In appearance there is no difference at all between them. Both leave with Naomi and walk with her, thus demonstrating their attachment to her. Orpah's affection is real: she weeps at the mere thought of leaving her mother-in-law; and full of sympathy, sheds still more tears when she finally leaves her. Orpah, the Moabite, also loves Naomi's people: "They said to her, We will certainly return with thee to thy people." But it is possible to have a very amiable character without having faith. Faith makes a gulf between these two women who are so similar in so many ways. Confronted with impossibilities, the natural heart draws back, whereas faith is nourished on impossibilities and so increases in strength. Orpah gives up a path which has no outcome. What could Naomi offer her? She was ruined, stricken by God, and filled with bitterness; did she yet have sons in her womb to give as husbands to her daughters-in-law? Orpah kisses her mother-in-law and returns to her people and to her gods (v. 15).

Here at last the secret of the natural heart is unveiled. The natural heart may attach itself to God's people without actually belonging to this people. A woman like Naomi surely is worthy of awakening sympathy, but that is not the sign of faith in operation. In the first place faith separates us from idols, causes us to give up our gods, and turns us to the true God. This was the Thessalonians' first step in the path of faith, too (1 Thess. 1:9). Orpah on the contrary turns away from Naomi and the God of Israel in order to return to her people and her gods. Confronted by this difficulty, she shows that she is unable to endure the test. She indeed weeps as she leaves, but she does leave, just like that charming young man who went away sad, unable to decide to separate himself from his possessions in order to follow a poor and despised Master.

Ruth's case is quite different. What precious faith she displays: full of certainty, resolution, and decision! No objection can change her mind. How clearly faith sees its goal! She listens to Naomi's words but her decision has been made, for she knows only one path, which for her is the necessary path. What are nature's impossibilities before faith's necessities? Ruth neither allows herself to be deterred by the prospect of not finding an-

other husband, nor even by the Lord's hand stretched out against her mother-in-law; in the obstacles that mount up she sees only so many new reasons for clinging to her decision. Naomi is everything to Ruth, and Ruth cleaves to Naomi.

“Do not intreat me to leave thee, 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. Jehovah do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part me and thee!” (vv. 16-17). To accompany Naomi, to walk with her, live with her, and die with her who was the only possible link with God and His people for Ruth: this was the longing of this woman of faith. But her thoughts go farther than simple association with Israel; she identifies herself with the people, whatever their state might be, in order to belong to the God of Israel, the true God who does not change: “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” Having turned her back on Moab and its idols, she now belongs to a new cause with which she identifies, excluding every possibility of separation. Only death can break such bonds. Here we see how God and faith meet, understand one another, and unite together. How clearly

this account leads us to understand that faith is the only means of bringing sinful man into relationship with God! Just as Ruth clung to Naomi, so faith clings to the Mediator, the object of God's counsels, who alone can give an assured relationship with the true God and an unshakable position before Him.

How precious and touching is the journey of these two afflicted women returning to Bethlehem! Naomi had gone out rich and full and she was returning poor and empty. Was there any desolation to be compared with hers? Deprived of her husband and her two sons, too old again to belong to a husband, with no human hope of an heir, Naomi was a true picture of Israel: for her everything on the side of nature and the law was ended. Moreover, the hand of the Lord was stretched out against her and the Almighty Himself, who it seemed ought to have been the support of her faith, filled her with bitterness under the weight of His chastening. She had exchanged her name “My pleasantness” for that of “Mara” (meaning Bitterness), because Jehovah's hand had gone out against her and the Almighty had dealt very bitterly with her. Her companion Ruth, likewise a widow and without children, (but who had never yet borne children), and who was moreover a foreigner, the daughter of a

cursed people, had not known Israel's past blessings and had no right to their promises. So these two went together, the one fully recognizing her condition and the hand that was weighing down upon her, and the other having no connection with God other than her faith and Naomi. Their path is strewn with difficulties but they see a shining star guiding them. Grace has dawned: God had visited His people to give them bread. The two women return to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest, thus coming to the place of blessing at the very moment it is being dispensed. There they will find Boaz!

Readers who are even slightly familiar with prophecy cannot fail to see in this scene a picture of Israel's past history and of the Lord's ways toward them in the future. Although they have been driven among the heathen on account of their unfaithfulness, certain bonds still subsist between the people and God. Has not the Lord said through one of their prophets: "Although I have removed them far off among the nations, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries whither they are come" (Ezek. 11:16). But their Elimelech is dead; the only head of the family of Israel, Christ the Messiah, has been cut off; and so

the nation has become like a widow deprived of children and barren in the midst of the Gentiles. But when she acknowledges and accepts God's judgment upon her and drinks this cup of bitterness in humiliation, then the dawn of a new day will arise for this poor people. God's ancient Israel, in their ripe old age the object of God's ways in foreign lands, in its bitterness of soul sets out once again to find the blessings of grace. With ancient Israel a new Israel rises up, a Lo-ammi who was "not His people," but who, springing as it were from Ruth, return as a poor remnant from the fields of Moab in order to become "the people of God." They are presented to us under the figure of a foreigner because on the basis of the law they have no right to the promises, and because new principles, principles of grace and faith, bring them into relationship with the Lord. On this basis God will recognize them as His people and give them a place of high honor, associating them with the glory of David and of the Messiah. A refreshing fountain has sprung up out of fruitless ground: a fountain which, however, sprang up only at that moment when all human hope was lost. This fountain becomes a stream, a deep, wide river, the river of divine grace carrying Israel to the ocean of messianic and millennial blessings!

Chapter 2

In chapter 1 we have seen the admirable expression of Ruth's faith. Indeed, it is admirable, for such is the character of all that comes from God. Did not Jesus Himself admire the centurion of Capernaum who through faith acknowledged his own unworthiness and the omnipotence of the Lord's word to heal his servant? Chapter 2 now shows us different characteristics of this faith and the blessings that grace brings to it.

Up to this point Ruth's faith was resting on the work of grace which God had done on behalf of His people: but her faith must have an object, a personal object, and it is impossible for her not to find it. Ruth does not yet know the mighty man spoken of in verse 1, but she hopes to meet him on the basis of grace. Listen to her speak to Naomi: "Let me, I pray, go to the field and glean among the ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find favor" (v. 2). Surely this land of Israel where God had visited His people to give them bread would also have some ears of grain for her. Although she is poor and without rights she knows she can count on the Lord's resources. Her path is clear, as faith's path ever is, but she does not choose her path of her own will. We often incline to consider the result of

our own thoughts or the fruit of our natural hearts' desires as the path of faith, whereas faith never acts except in full dependence on the Word of God. Ruth consults Naomi and Naomi tells her: "Go, my daughter!" Certainly God will guide her in this path. His providential grace brings her into the field of Boaz.

Boaz, a member of the family of Elimelech who had died, takes his place, so to speak. Naomi has a protector in Israel: a wealthy and powerful head of her family. "In him is strength" to restore this poor, completely ruined house. He bears the name of one of Solomon's future temple's two pillars (1 Kings 7:21), erected by the king as witnesses of the establishment of his kingdom, the glorious period that would follow the afflictions of David's reign. Boaz comes from Bethlehem, calls out the blessing of the harvest to his servants (Ps. 129:8), and immediately notices Ruth in the midst of the reapers. Just so, grace goes before faith. When asked, the servant who is set over the workers bears witness to the Moabite woman. She came poor and humbly supplicating, he says, set to work immediately, and has allowed herself scant any rest. Just like this servant, so the Spirit of God today bears witness to the charac-

ter and activity of our faith. “Remembering unceasingly your work of faith,” the apostle writes to the Thessalonians. Faith takes pains and does not rest until it has gathered in the blessings that God scatters upon her pathway.

What a touching beauty is in this first meeting of Boaz and Ruth! The words falling from the lips of this wealthy man resound like heavenly music in the ears of the poor stranger. Will he reproach her for intruding? Who could think thus of him? No, “Hearest thou not, my daughter?” he says. In my very field, and not in another I desired you to be and desire you to remain. Let nothing induce you to leave it. — He associates her with his maidens. She need not fear anyone; has he not given orders concerning her? And just as Boaz's field offers her nourishment, so there she also finds what is needed to quench her thirst. How many are the favors here heaped up for Ruth. But wait: this chapter has yet fresh gestures of grace in store for her and the following chapters others yet. They multiply and grow greater until they reach the bounds of eternity! What should Ruth say to all this? If faith is already admirable, how much more admirable is He who is faith's object. What majesty united with deepest condescension, yes, with almost maternal

tenderness are seen in him! He towers up like the pillar of brass in Solomon's temple, he stoops to the most minute and delicate attentions of love, a love that has nothing in common with human passion, a love full of holy, merciful majesty, raising up its beloved object to himself after having consented to stoop to her level. This is Boaz, this is our Jesus!

The understanding of the resources of grace does not come to us in a moment. These resources are ours according to the measure of our faith's activity. Bit by bit Christ opens to us the enjoyment of the infinite treasures of His heart.

The first thing Ruth does is to fall on her face and bow down to the ground. Should she not be thankful when Boaz expresses himself in this way? You who profess to know Christ have never truly believed if the words of His mouth have not bowed you down at His feet. Oh, what dried up hearts and arid souls you have, you rationalists of our day who dare call yourselves Christians but judge the word of our Lord instead of receiving it! You fools who proudly exalt yourselves in His presence and sling out your criticisms and cutting remarks at Him, criticisms really more insulting than the blasphemous curses of uncouth soldiers. You ought to cast yourselves down, overwhelmed, at

His feet! Go, get back, persevere in your pride until judgment reaches you; Boaz's fields and His promises and His person will never be yours!

In turn, Ruth opens her mouth. “Why,” she asks, “have I found favor in thine eyes, that thou shouldest regard me, seeing I am a foreigner?” I love this “why” that demonstrates the deep humility of this young woman: “I have no right.” she says as it were, “to such favor.” She is not concerned with herself except to confess her unworthiness, but how she appreciates him! “You took notice of me when I was nothing to you!”

The servant had given witness to the poor Moabite woman; now the master himself declares what he has found in her. She was not standing before him with her righteousness as Job once did before God. Her experiences had begun where Job's experiences ended, and he before whom she was bowing down takes it upon himself to bring her character to light, for he knew everything. “It has fully been shown me, all that thou hast done to thy mother-in-law since the death of thy husband, and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come to a people that thou hast not known heretofore.” In Ruth Boaz sees the work of love, the fruit of

faith; her care for Naomi, a type of the afflicted, distressed people of God, had not escaped the master. Yes, this poor daughter of Moab was a true Israelite in whom there was no guile. Also as a true daughter of Abraham she had left her land and her family and had made her way to a people unknown to her. Boaz sets his seal of approval on such love and faith; then he offers her a reward: “Jehovah recompense thy work, and let thy reward be full from Jehovah the God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to take refuge!” The reward is not faith's object, but rather serves as its encouragement.

Ruth answers as Moses once did in Exodus 33:13. Boaz's praise does not puff her up; she is well aware that all is grace and she desires to find yet more grace. She recognizes his authority over her and declares herself to be his unworthy servant. Then he singles her out for honor by inviting her to his feast. Ruth sits at Boaz's table! What a mark of favor for this poor foreigner! “She ate and was sufficed, and reserved some.” Isn't this scene similar to that of Jesus multiplying the loaves?

The fellowship that Ruth has just found at Boaz's table does not cause her to forget her task. On the contrary, she draws new strength from it for fresh activity with more abundant and more

blessed results than ever before. In order to be effective our work must flow from what we have received for ourselves and it will be all the richer in results the greater the measure in which we have personally enjoyed the Lord's presence.

A heart nourished and refreshed by Christ can never be selfish. Is it not written: "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38)? Ruth thinks of Naomi, and when she returns she brings her the remainder of her meal and that which she had gleaned. Likewise, the believer devotes the fruit of his labor to God's people and seeks their prosperity. How few Christian there are who realize these things! What importance does the prosperity of Christ's Church have for those who prefer their own church or their own people and their own gods? God's poor, afflicted people do not appear to be worth caring for to these indifferent hearts. They may perhaps insist on the work of the gospel before the world, but a heart that is in fellowship with the Lord does not sacrifice the one for the other. The apostle Paul was just as much a minister of the assembly as he was a minister of the gospel. He loved the Church which Christ in His love had purchased with His own blood. It was far from Paul to love a sect or a church of his own inven-

tion; he knew only Christ's Assembly, and he was jealous as to her with a jealousy which was of God, so that he might present her to the Lord as a chaste virgin.

Naomi's heart is full of gratitude toward the man who had shown regard for Ruth when he might have rejected her as a foreigner. What sweet conversation is this exchange between these two God-fearing women! Ruth speaks the charming name of Boaz, and Naomi responds by giving thanks to Him who had not left off His kindness toward the living and the dead.

What a touching character Naomi displays! Ruth shows more the initial enthusiasm of young faith, whereas Naomi reveals the experience of a faith matured in the school of testing. Young Christian souls, don't heedlessly pass over the experience of those who have known the Lord longer than you have. Naomi helps her daughter-in-law to know him better: "The man is near of kin to us, one of those who have the right of our redemption." Experience always goes hand in hand with intelligence. Naomi is aware of what is becoming in Israel; she knows the order that is to adorn God's house. The counsels of Christian experience always bind souls to the family of God and to Christ just as Naomi's counsels attach Ruth to those who

surround Boaz. These counsels, however, also separate her from every other field (v. 22). These other fields might well afford just as many ears to the gleaners, but they would lack the presence of the one to whom Ruth's heart was henceforth indissolubly bound as well as the peace and joy that he dispenses. The experience of those who have grown old in the path of faith is precious, for such experience promotes a walk in holiness among the young! This voice of experience also will ever understand how best to give thanks, for it knows the grace and kindness of the Lord in the past as well as in the present. Ruth cleaves to Boaz and dwells with her mother-in-law.

Chapter 3

Naomi, as we have said, presents us an example not only of experience, but also of intelligence. How fortunate for Ruth to find such a guide! Naomi commands, but her orders are in no way irksome, for they are the commandments of love. “My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?” (v. 1). That which she directs she does in view of her beloved Ruth's well-being, but also because she knows the heart of Boaz: “Is not Boaz of our kindred?” Ruth, the woman of

faith, obeys: “She ... did according to all that her mother-in-law had bidden her” (v. 6). May we obey in the same way. Obedience is easy to those who know that God loves them and desires only their rest and well-being, that Christ loves them and constantly bears them on His heart. But obedience becomes difficult when the soul aims to satisfy itself and to find happiness outside of Christ.

Boaz's labor was approaching its end. After the grain had been harvested he must winnow it in the threshing floor and then he would gather it into his barns. His heart was merry; would he drive the poor Moabite girl away? Naomi is full of confidence and is able to indicate the pathway of blessing to Ruth. “Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thyself, and put thy raiment upon thee, and go down to the floor; make not thyself known to the man until he shall have done eating and drinking. And it shall be, when he lies down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall have lain down, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thyself down; and he will show thee what thou shalt do” (vv. 3-4). Ruth must prepare herself for this encounter; she is to lie down at his feet and wait for his word. This will characterize also the poor remnant of Israel who will be found

faithful at the moment when the Messiah will arise after their long night of waiting. But, I would ask, should not this character be ours too, for even greater reason? We have heard the call telling us to wash ourselves, to anoint ourselves, and to adorn ourselves for Him alone. Have we forgotten that voice? Where are we now? Have we gone into His threshing floor to spend the night or into the threshing floor of strangers? Have we answered like Ruth from the depths of our heart, “All that thou sayest will I do”? Yes, He desires that we should be worthy of Himself in a practical way, that lying down at His feet, acknowledging His rights over us, we should quietly, peacefully wait for His word throughout the night hours. Soon our Boaz will break His silence. Will it be to reproach us severely or to express His approval of our conduct?

In the middle of the night Boaz recognizes the woman who has placed herself under his protection and blesses her. The Book of Ruth, this tale of grace, is full of the blessings of the giver and of those who receive. Every heart rejoices from the moment that Boaz enters the scene. His presence stimulates praise and thanksgiving for around himself he sows the favors of grace. What infinite joy to be able to praise our Boaz! But is it

not also a joy to receive, as Ruth did, the testimony of his satisfaction with regard to us? May we be eager for Christ's approval! It humbles us to think that we seek it so little. Men's praise inflates us but His praise never does. He approves us for what His infinite grace sees in us, and He sees in us that which His grace has produced and which answers to His thoughts.

Boaz praises Ruth because she had shown “more kindness at the end than at the first.” She had first exercised love toward her mother-in-law who represented the people of God to her, and now she was acting out of love for Boaz. She had not gone after young men, poor or rich; she had not sought companions according to her natural inclinations, but she had come to him whose rights she acknowledged. He reassures her and promises to grant her all her requests (v. 11). What encouragement for believers! We receive everything from His grace, but He also gives us according to the measure of our obedience and according to the measure of our devotion to Him. “Give, and it shall be given to you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over!” (Luke 6:38). As soon as Ruth had known Boaz she did everything with him in view; and now, he is doing everything for her. He is not satisfied simply not to be

indebted to us; He desires to give to the faithful in heart according to all their needs.

“All the gate of my people knows that thou art a woman of worth.” Ruth unites in herself the qualities of which the apostle Peter speaks, which make one neither idle nor unfruitful as regards the knowledge of the Lord. To her faith she adds virtue, and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, endurance; and to endurance, godliness. To brotherly love she adds love and shows more kindness at the end than at the first. And so she receives an abundant entrance into the kingdom. This faithfulness touches Boaz's heart: “All that thou sayest will I do to thee!” What an example for us! Let us be ambitious to receive an answer like this. The church of Philadelphia receives such an answer. She has kept Jesus' word, and like Ruth has walked in His patience and in practical holiness, and Jesus tells her: I will do everything for you! The Lord will also bless the poor Jewish remnant in the end times according to the virtue, holiness, and practical righteousness they will demonstrate in their ways. Today He blesses us in the same way: “Whatsoever we ask we receive from Him, because

we keep His commandments, and practice the things which are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:22).

But there was an even nearer relative who had precedence over Boaz as to the right of redemption. Would he be willing, would he be able to avail himself of this right? We will come back to this. Meanwhile, Ruth has the privilege of continuing to lie down at Boaz's feet until morning. This will be the portion of the remnant and it is also ours. As long as the night lasts we can rest at His feet. Isn't this a blessed place — at His feet, enjoying His approval as to our walk, recipients and objects of His promises, filled with the assurance that He has heard us and that all the toil of this miserable life will soon end, giving place to the public manifestation of our relationship with Him and to the possession of the glorious fruit of His work!

Now it is Boaz (v. 14) who looks out for Ruth's reputation and vindicates the righteousness of the one whom he will make his companion. But before taking up her cause openly he fills her cloak with barley, secretly giving her the pledge of what he will do for her (v. 15). He acts in the same way toward us. The dawn is about to break, but before we can see Him and “recog-

nize Him” He has already given us the Holy Spirit of promise as the earnest of our future inheritance.

Richly laden, Ruth returns to her mother-in-law and tells her, not what she has done for Boaz, but “all that the man had done to her.” Her heart is full of him but she needs her mother-in-law’s exhortation to patience. She will not have long to wait, for he who has taken her cause in hand will not delay to make it triumph. “The man will not rest until he have completed the matter this day,” says Naomi. Why? Because he loves her. This is the great and the unique reason for His work on our behalf.

And we, my brothers, do we speak like Naomi? Do we have this blessed consciousness of the love of Jesus for us? Do we wait for Him as the One who will not rest until he will have completed the matter today? This “today” stands for the daily expectation of our Lord. He wants to have us with Himself. Yet a little patience, for He that is coming will come and will not delay!

Chapter 4

Naomi spoke the truth. Boaz would not rest until he should have completed the work that he in his kindness and energy had undertaken. He wanted the one he loved to find rest and that it might be well with her (Ruth 3:1), and he knew that this could only be possible when united with himself. So it is with the Lord and us. His life on earth was a life of toil for our sakes crowned by the unspeakable “travail of His soul” on the cross. Thus He has fulfilled His promise, “I will give you rest.” We already possess rest of conscience in the knowledge of His work and rest of heart in the knowledge of His adorable Person. But the Lord continues to work today to bring us into the future rest remaining for the people of God, satisfied love's rest where all will correspond to the thoughts of His heart eternally.

Boaz was also determined to give rest to his well-beloved because she had toiled and suffered with the people of God. Likewise, the Holy Spirit tells us: “It is a righteous thing with God to render tribulation to those that trouble you, and to you that are troubled repose with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven” (2 Thess. 1:6-7). “God is not unrighteous to forget your work, and the love which ye have shown to His name,

having ministered to the saints, and still ministering” (Heb. 6:10).

This Book of Ruth speaks much of work and rest: of work and rest in service, the work and rest of faith, and the work and rest of grace. The reapers work and rest; so does the lord of the harvest; so does Ruth, the bride of his choosing. How peacefully she rests at Boaz's feet during the hours of the night! And how she rests afterwards while waiting for her redeemer's efforts to prepare for her the rest of which our chapter speaks!

According to the custom in Israel it was a question of raising up the name of the dead and of re-establishing his inheritance. This duty fell to the nearest relative. Now there was a man there who had closer rights than Boaz over Elimelech's inheritance. Boaz speaks to him in the presence of numerous witnesses. Indeed, this man would like to have had the inheritance, but knowing that “the seed would not be his own” he does not consent to take Ruth to himself. Had he done so he would have impoverished himself and marred his own inheritance, for Ruth's children's possessions would not have returned to him nor to his family.

This close relative is a graphic type of the law. Indeed, like this man, the law which had prior rights over Israel demands; it takes, and it gives nothing. It would just no longer be the law if it could undertake the work of grace. Nevertheless, its weakness does not come from itself, but from those to whom it is addressed. The law expects something from man; but man shows that he is incapable of pleasing God. It promises life on condition of obedience, but since man is a sinner and disobedient the law can only condemn him. The law is a minister of death and cannot give life to the dead. Barren as it is, the law will never produce a posterity and cannot give birth to sons as divine progeny of the Messiah.

Grace alone can undertake such a task. Declaring man to be lost and expecting nothing of him, grace imposes no condition on him, makes no promise to him, but gives to him liberally, unceasingly, and eternally. Grace begets through an incorruptible seed and communicates life; grace puts man into relationship with God, produces fruit in him that God can acknowledge, and introduces him into glory.

Thus the law declares that it is powerless in the presence of the “Second man” who comes after the law, that is, in the presence

of our Boaz in whom is strength. He will resurrect His people Israel and “He shall see a seed,” as Isaiah says, but only, as we know, after having “poured out His soul unto death” (Isa. 53). In the meanwhile all the result of his work at the cross applies to us Christians. As for our souls, we are already raised together with Him; as for our bodies, we will soon be raised just as certainly as He has been. For us, Boaz is a type of the resurrected Christ.

The nearest relative removes his sandal — the law cedes its rights to Christ: rights that are acknowledged by the witnesses brought together for this very purpose. Boaz redeems the inheritance in order to possess Ruth, for he has more interest in this stranger's well-being than in all that belongs to her. Christ has done even more for the Church. He surrendered all that was His in order to purchase her. The poor remnant of Israel will also recognize this with joy when they shall see their Messiah who was once rejected return in glory.

The witnesses of this scene, the people and the elders, acclaim and bless mighty Boaz, for such kindness is worthy of all praise. The Holy Spirit places prophetic words in their mouths: “Jehovah make the woman that comes into thy house like

Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel!” (v. 11). The history of the people will begin once again, so to speak, with this poor Moabite. It will recommence on the basis of grace. Here it is not Leah but Rachel, the beloved wife, the wife of Jacob's free choice, the one for whom he had served so long, who comes first. In every respect and detail the Book of Ruth fixes our gaze on grace. “And acquire power in Ephrath, and make thyself a name in Bethlehem!” These cities, the witnesses of grace, will also be the witnesses of Boaz's power: “And let thy house become like the house of Pherez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, of the seed which Jehovah shall give thee of this young woman!” May his seed, like Pherez, be established according to the election of grace!

“And Jehovah gave [Ruth] conception.” In the presence of this heir whom grace has given, the women again take up the people's prophetic line of thought. To Naomi they say, “Blessed be Jehovah who has not left thee this day without one that has the right of redemption!” They transfer the right of redemption that Boaz had exercised to the head of his son, and thus foresee the future redemption to be accomplished by the man born of Ruth. In Him, they add, the old age of the people will find a

nourisher, their weakness will find a restorer, and His name will be associated with that of Ruth — this poor remnant with her affections set on Naomi, the much afflicted people of God, to whom she is worth more than a perfect number of sons (v. 15).

Naomi nurses Obed in her bosom; he comes forth, like the Messiah, from this barren people. Then the neighbor women also raise their prophetic praise: “There is a son born to Naomi!” The circle becomes more intimate and along with this comes an increasing measure of intelligence. The nearer one is to God's people the more one appreciates Christ and His grace. If one is content with the relationship of “the elders and all the people” one will not go beyond their level of spiritual intelligence; whereas the heart that is attached to the Church will have a more intimate and more personal knowledge of Christ. “There is a son born to Naomi!” Just so the Israel to come will rejoice before Him as in the joy of harvest and as when one divides the spoil, and they will say: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name is called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6).

“And they called his name Obed.” Obed means “He who serves.” This is the Lord's title of glory before all His other marvelous titles. This Servant is the Root and Offspring of David, the bearer of royal grace. Do not all our hearts beat with joy when we call Him by this name? He the Counselor, the Mighty God, has served, is now serving, and will remain a Servant for ever for the benefit of those whom He loves! Our highest blessings are comprehended in this title of Servant: His devotion to God, His love for us, His entire work even to the sacrifice of His own life, His present grace which condescends to wash our feet, and His eternal service of love when one day we shall be with Him in the glory of the Father's house!

*As saved by faith,
Fruit of Thy victory,
When Thine own in glory,
Shall ever be with Thee,

There, in celestial courts,
Beneath the Father's gaze,
Thy love's eternal service
Is ours through endless days!*