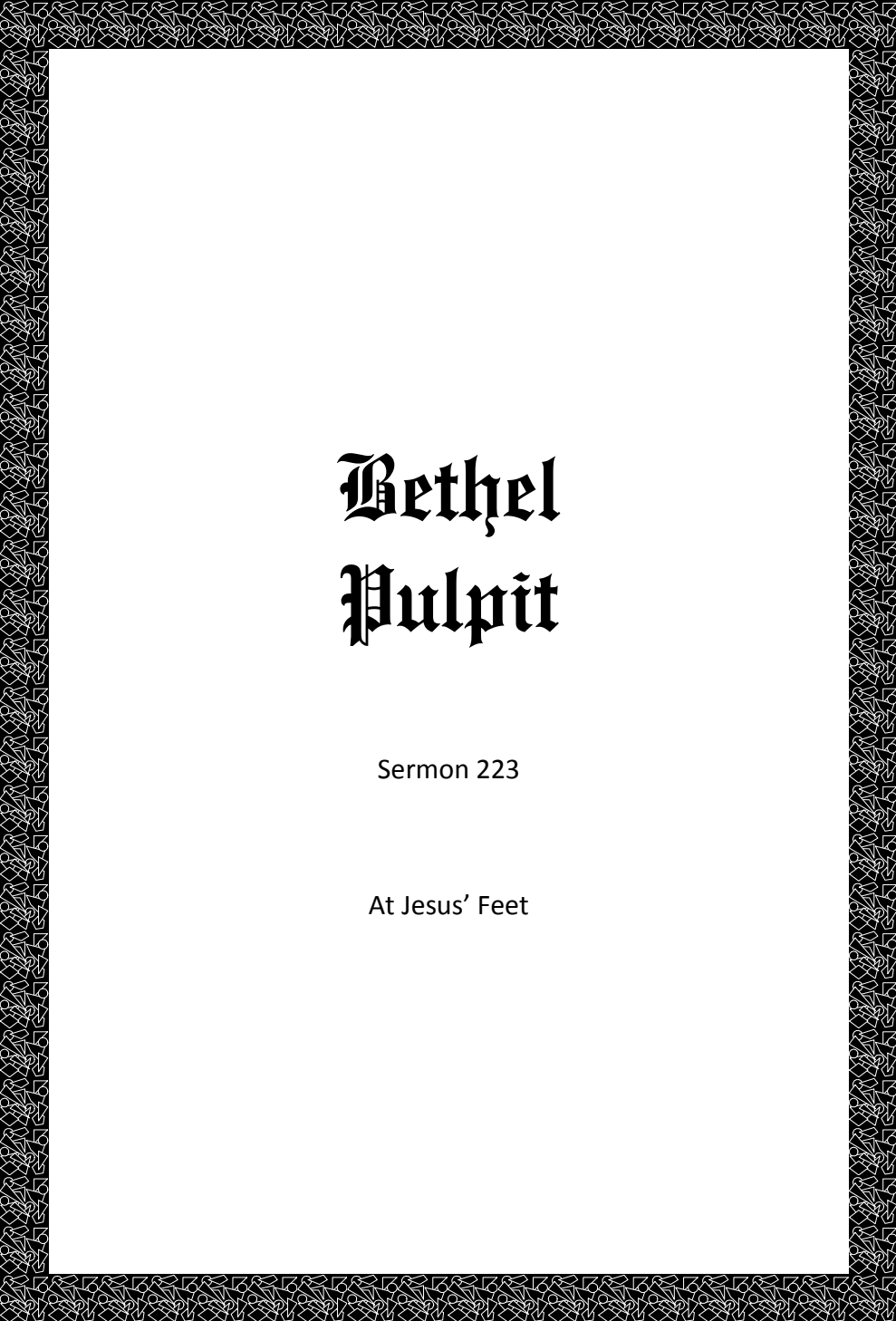




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 223

At Jesus' Feet

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 18th January, 2004**

Text: *"And she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down"*
(Ruth 3. 7).

There are two different ways in which the Book of Ruth can be read. One is literally, and the other is typically, and whichever way you read it, both of these ways have always been very attractive to the people of God.

Now what do we mean by reading the Book of Ruth literally? Well, the account of how Naomi and her husband wrongly went into the land of Moab, the warning against running away from trouble, and yet the mysterious overruling of it by God in His divine wisdom, in His divine purpose, in the call by grace of Ruth the Moabitess. The sorrows, the trials, Naomi, Ruth, Orpah, each of them losing their husband, and then Naomi's resolve to arise, to return to Bethlehem. She hears that the Lord has visited His people in giving them bread. And the trial of faith, how those two, Orpah and Ruth both seemed the same. They both had a natural love for their mother-in-law. They both went so far, and yet when the testing time came, one went back, yet "Ruth clave unto her." This is what I mean by the literal, and when I say *literal*, I do not mean devoid of the spiritual.

I wonder if there is a Ruth here this morning who wants to cling and cleave to the people of God. "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." You see in the Lord's people something you have not got, something you need, something you long for, something you seek. You know you must have it before you die. O but to be found amongst the despised but eternally-loved people of God. Is there that Ruth here? "But Ruth clave unto her." As I tell you so often, that is a good religion that clings and cleaves to the people of God, and of course I believe Ruth had just a little glimpse of more than Naomi. She looked beyond her to Naomi's God, and did she look beyond to the One who according to the flesh should be descended from her, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge ... where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried." You want to live and die with the people of God and you want to be buried with them.

I have told you so often, we do not read of remarkable things with Ruth, wonderful blessings, angels from heaven, miracles, as there are with so many of the Old Testament characters. She just had this great point, that she clung and she clave to the people of God, and in doing that she clung not just to the people but she clung to Israel's God. "Nearer, nearer, to Him clinging, let my helpless soul be found." Well, that is what I mean by the literal sense of the Book of Ruth.

There was one thing struck me this morning in reading the chapter that never struck me before. I think I have told you that some years ago I did have a special burden and a special desire under the word, "Covet earnestly the best gifts," that the pulpit reading on the Lord's day might be made a help and blessing to me and the people. But it was the testimony that Boaz gave of Ruth: "All the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman." You think of it, a poor, Gentile sinner, a poor Moabitish woman come from another land, and think of the attitude of God's ancient people to those who were outside. She had not been in Bethlehem very long, but though she had not been in Bethlehem very long, "*All the city*," says Boaz, "*All the city* of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman." You cannot hide grace. She was not a talker. She kept in the background. She was humble. But you cannot hide grace. You cannot hide it in a congregation and you cannot hide it in a town or in a city. Why? Because grace will separate; because grace will make a difference. There was one thing that Ruth clearly possessed and it was the tender fear of God, and it affected everything. The world could see the difference. They were not all godly in Bethlehem. It is very clear in the Book of Ruth they were not all godly in Bethlehem. It was the time when the judges ruled. These were terrible days in Israel, but the ungodly as well as the godly could see the difference in Ruth. Can the congregation see a difference in you between what you once were and what you are now, and a difference between you and the people around? And can the people you meet with at work, or business, or hospital, or college, see a difference? Are you a Ruth in that sense? It is a most striking testimony: "All the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman."

Well then secondly, what do I mean by the typical side? It is very, very clear that in the Old Testament we have these stories which are actual stories, actually true, yet they have a deeper, hidden meaning. For instance, 1 Corinthians 10 takes up Israel journeying through the wilderness and it tells us that clearly these things were given to us as types.

They were a picture – Israel in the wilderness, a picture of God’s people travelling through the wilderness of this world; the Amalakites, a picture of the enemies God’s people have to deal with; the smitten rock, well the New Testament is very bold here: “They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ”; the manna, the bread from heaven. Now in our chapels we have grown to love the Book of Ruth, thinking of it in the light of William Gadsby’s beautiful hymn:

“Jesus my Boaz is;
My strength and portion too;
His Word of grace the precious field,
Where I a-gleaning go.”

So we have Ruth a gleaner. Gleaning was the work of the poor. When harvest was finished, by God’s commandment the very edges of the fields had not to be reaped, and there were also the ears of corn that were dropped accidentally, or as is clear from the Book of Ruth, sometimes a kind reaper dropped them purposely and the poor could come and gather these ears of corn that were left in the field. We have that expression, *gleaning in the gospel field*. “His Word of grace the precious field, where I a-gleaning go.” Now in that sense is there a Ruth here this morning?

Gleaning was hard work. It was back-breaking work, bending down under the burning, eastern sun. But a gleaner could not be satisfied if she went home at the end of the day and she had not got anything. She wanted to take something home on which she could live. I knew an old lady from Cambridgeshire who back in, I suppose, the 1880’s used to go gleaning as a little girl and she said they used to gather enough – they were so poor – to feed their few hens all through the winter and help with the bread. But it was hard work, and a gleaner could not be happy going home empty-handed or with very little. Do you come to chapel as a gleaner? Do you want to take something home? Or are you happy just to come and go? Ruth did not want to talk with the other gleaners or meet with the other gleaners. She wanted some ears of corn on which she could live and not die.

And then Boaz, a type of Christ, a “mighty man of wealth,” loved Ruth, though she did not know it. He was going to be the bridegroom. We sang of it just now. “Wait till the Bridegroom of your souls reveal His love with power.” And Ruth waited, and the bridegroom of her soul did reveal his love with power.

But there is so much in the Book of Ruth. There was a near kinsman. He had the right to redeem. There is so much about redemption. Ruth had lost the inheritance her husband had had, and she could not afford to buy it back. She needed a redeemer, and she found a redeemer, and then we read so beautifully of how that redeemer became her bridegroom.

“When Ruth a-gleaning went,
Jehovah was her Guide;
To Boaz’ field He led her straight,
And she became his bride.”

That is what I mean by the typical meaning, the typical side. It is this typical side I want to speak to you about this morning. Here is Ruth. She is so poor. She is so helpless. She is so needy. Boaz has met her. Boaz has spoken kindly to her. She has been gleaning. She has gathered a few handfuls of purpose. Sometimes she has gathered a little bit more. On one occasion Boaz asked her to come and sit with the reapers at mealtime and dip her morsel in the vinegar. But there were one or two things that were not cleared up. There was the lost inheritance. But she wanted a redeemer, and a redeemer must be a near kinsman. She did hope that Boaz would redeem the inheritance for her. So, encouraged by godly Naomi, she went in softly by night and in the harvest field she lay down at Boaz’ feet. One thing is abundantly clear, that you just cannot apply modern-day European conventions and social traditions to ancient Israel, because things were completely different. And one thing, Ruth had the law of God on her side in what she did. “She came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.”

Now surely many of us this morning feel something like Ruth. We just want to fall at the Saviour’s feet. We just want to put everything in His hands. We just want to leave everything with Him. We just want Him to do everything for us. We want Him to “engage to manage all, by the way and to the end.”

Well, I would not be surprised if many of you are there this morning. You find so many in the Word of God. What about Hezekiah? “Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me.” I am weak, helpless, sorrowful, in trouble. I am at the end of everything. Death seems to be staring me in the face. I do not deserve anything. I cannot do anything. My only hope is if Thou dost undertake for me, do everything for me. “O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me.”

“She came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.” And David was there. “Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.” Where should I be, what should I do, if Thou wert to leave me? But, “Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.”

“Thou hast helped in every need;
This emboldens me to plead;
After so much mercy past,
Canst Thou let me sink at last?”

“Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.”

“She came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.” Jehoshaphat was there. Jehoshaphat was always getting into trouble, and he was always getting into trouble through his own fault, but though it was his own fault, the Lord never forsook him in the day of trouble. That is mercy. “Call upon Me in the day of trouble” – even though it is self-procured trouble, even though you deserve it. “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.” So Jehoshaphat with this vast army against him, two armies against him joined by a third, said, “O God ... we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee.” And no sinner ever perished there.

“She came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.” Ruth was poor; she was needy; she was helpless; she was unworthy; she was an alien; she was a stranger; she was sad; she was bereaved. There was so much she wanted, she needed to be done. She could not do any of it herself. She knew that Boaz could, and she had a little, sweet hope that he would, and so encouraged by godly Naomi she went softly by night and she lay down at his feet and put everything in his hands. She left everything at his feet. She trusted him completely and she left it all there. “She came softly.” She did not go rashly, proudly, boldly, presumptuously. “She came softly.” A godly woman encouraged her, and she knew she had the law of God on her side. But especially she needed a redeemer. This inheritance had belonged to her husband, but she had lost it. It had been mortgaged, it was gone, and she wanted a redeemer to buy back that lost inheritance, to redeem it. Now she came softly to the

redeemer's feet. She came to his feet because she knew he was a redeemer. He had the right to redeem.

And he said, "Who art thou?" Good John Newton says,

"Dost Thou ask me who I am?

Ah, my Lord, Thou know'st my name;

Yet the question gives a plea,

To support my suit with Thee."

Well, beloved friends, "Who art thou?" What are you going to tell the Lord Jesus if He says to you this morning, "Who art thou?" Are you going to say, "A beggar poor at mercy's door"? What are you going to say? "Who art thou?"

"And she came softly." She said, "I am Ruth." She was simple; she was straightforward; she told him exactly who she was. "I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid." Claim me as thy own. Grant me thy protection. Do everything for me that I cannot do myself.

"For thou art a near kinsman," or as the original means, thou art a redeemer. O how attractive to a living soul, how attractive to living faith, just that very title, that very name: the dear Redeemer. Well, we think of it of the Lord Jesus, the Redeemer. It immediately takes us to Gethsemane and to Calvary. It takes us to suffering, to precious blood. It takes us to death. O the great work of redemption! "Thou dear Redeemer, dying Lamb, we love to hear of Thee." But we want to be found at His feet. Spread Thy skirt over me. Especially cover me completely with the robe of Thy righteousness to cover all my sin, all my defilement. "Spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman." Under the law of God, in the Book of Leviticus, not anybody could be a redeemer. The law was very clear. It says, "One of his brethren may redeem him." He must be a near kinsman to have the right of redemption. We sometimes sing, "You to save, your flesh assumes; *Brother* to your souls becomes." "Thou art a near kinsman." Have you ever seen the incarnate Son of God as a near Kinsman? "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same."

"She came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.... And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid:

spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsmen.” What is your concern? What weighs you down? What burdens you this morning? Your sin, your soul, eternity? Now can you go softly to the Redeemer’s feet? Can you uncover His feet? Can you lie down there? If only you can get to Jesus’ feet, because no sinner ever yet perished there and no sinner ever will.

“Come just as thou art, with thy woe,
Fall down at the feet of the Lamb,
He will not, He cannot say, Go,
But surely will take out Thy stain.
A fountain is opened for sin,
And thousands its virtues have proved;
He’ll take thee, and plunge thee therein,
And wash thee from filth in His blood.”

“She came softly.” O that going softly, a sinner unworthy, humble, no plea in self, the only plea in mercy, the only plea mercy through blood! Do you know what it is to go softly by night to Jesus’ feet? That is the way the blessed Spirit of God leads all the Lord’s people. What do we read of them? “All His saints are in Thy hand: and they sat down at Thy feet.” They all, all of them, “sat down at Thy feet.”

Well, there is one chapter in the New Testament, and they all sat down at His feet. You have the mad Gadarene, and he is sitting at Jesus’ feet. You have Jairus, and he is sitting at Jesus’ feet. You have the woman who pressed through the crowd to touch the hem of His garment, and she is sitting at Jesus’ feet. I do not think you can find three more different characters in the whole of the New Testament. You think of the mad Gadarene, and then think of the poor, helpless woman, and then think of Jairus, a ruler of the people. Why were they all found at Jesus’ feet? For the very same reason Ruth was found at Boaz’ feet. They had a hard case; they could not deal with it. It was too hard for them, but it was not too hard for the dear Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the dear Redeemer. They knew He could deal with their case. They had a sweet hope that He would, and so in the spirit of the Book of Ruth, they came softly by night and uncovered His feet and laid them down. “There humbly fall before His feet, for none can perish there.”

What else is there? Is there that concern about the hour of temptation, that sudden blast of fierce temptation, lest it should overcome

you, lest you should fall, lest you should dishonour your Lord and Master? “She came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.” He “is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.”

“She came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.” A sinner at the Saviour’s feet. Now what is it? All these providential concerns you have. What about tomorrow? What about this coming week? What about the unknown way? O like Ruth to come softly, to fall down at Jesus’ feet, to put it all into His gracious hands, to leave it all with Him.

“‘Cast,’ He said, ‘on Me thy care;
'Tis enough that I am nigh;
I will all thy burdens bear;
I will all thy needs supply.’”

“She came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.” And we say, “Go, and do thou likewise.” But there are some of you with these problems with your health, some of you with these problems in your family, some of you with these problems concerning your work, some of you with your sorrows and your troubles and your burdens and your loneliness and your disappointment. And some of you have those unseen, hidden burdens that you cannot talk about to anyone else, and perhaps some of you “fear where no fear is,” and with some of you it is a multitude of things. Perhaps you are ready to sink. But you see Ruth, helpless, unworthy, all these things she had, and she was just incapable of managing them herself. But Boaz – she did not know it, but his love toward her. O that tender, compassionate heart, his wisdom and his power! He was so capable of doing all she wanted that she herself could not do. There is a greater than Boaz here, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. His wisdom – He knows how to deal with your case; and His tender compassion – He understands. “A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench.” “He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.”

“She came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.” You say, “What is it practically? We do not want something sentimental.” Well, it is this: “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.” It is this: “The cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me, and I will hear it.” It is this: “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.”

It is this: “Commit *thy way*” – Ruth knew what her way was; she knew what lay heavy on her heart. So do you; so do I. “Commit *thy way* unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.” O to be blessedly enabled to go just as you are and to fall down in humility, helplessness, dependence, love at Jesus’ feet, and in humble prayer to leave everything with Him, to commit everything into His hand!

What then? What did Naomi say? “Sit still, my daughter.” Now that is it, if only you could sit still. Perhaps we fall at Jesus’ feet and then we do not sit still. “Sit still, my daughter.” Why? Well, Naomi’s grace and wisdom and logic were good. She really said this: Ruth, you cannot do anything. You cannot, you know you cannot. But you do not need to do anything. It is all completely in Boaz’ hands, and don’t you really believe he can manage it better than you? And don’t you really believe that he will manage it for you? “Sit still, my daughter ... for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day.” That is what Naomi said.

What about Boaz himself? “Now, my daughter, fear not.” He claims her as his own. There is a relationship here. That is what the Lord Jesus says to these poor souls at His feet. “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine.” “Now, my daughter, fear not.” If the Lord Jesus says, “Fear not,” to you this morning, then you have no cause to fear. There is some beautiful language in Newton’s paraphrase of Isaiah 54, his language to the “pensive, doubting, fearful heart.”

“Fear thou not, nor be ashamed;
All thy sorrows soon shall end,
I, who heaven and earth have framed,
Am thy Husband and thy Friend;
I, the High and Holy One,
Israel’s God, by all adored,
As thy Saviour will be known,
Thy Redeemer and thy Lord.”

“Fear not.” A sinner at Jesus’ feet. “Fear not.” “And now, my daughter, fear not.” This is it: “I will do to thee all that thou requirest.” Now, “What more can He say than to you He has said?” Boaz could not say one thing better than that to Ruth. He said, “I will do to thee *all* that thou requirest.” If you and I had been allowed to write the promises ourselves, we could not have made them any better, any more suitable.

And, “What more can He say than to you He has said?” And may He say it. “Yes, He speaks, and speaks to thee,” those of you who with your heavy burden, your case, are drawn, driven, forced to Jesus’ feet this morning. “My daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest.”