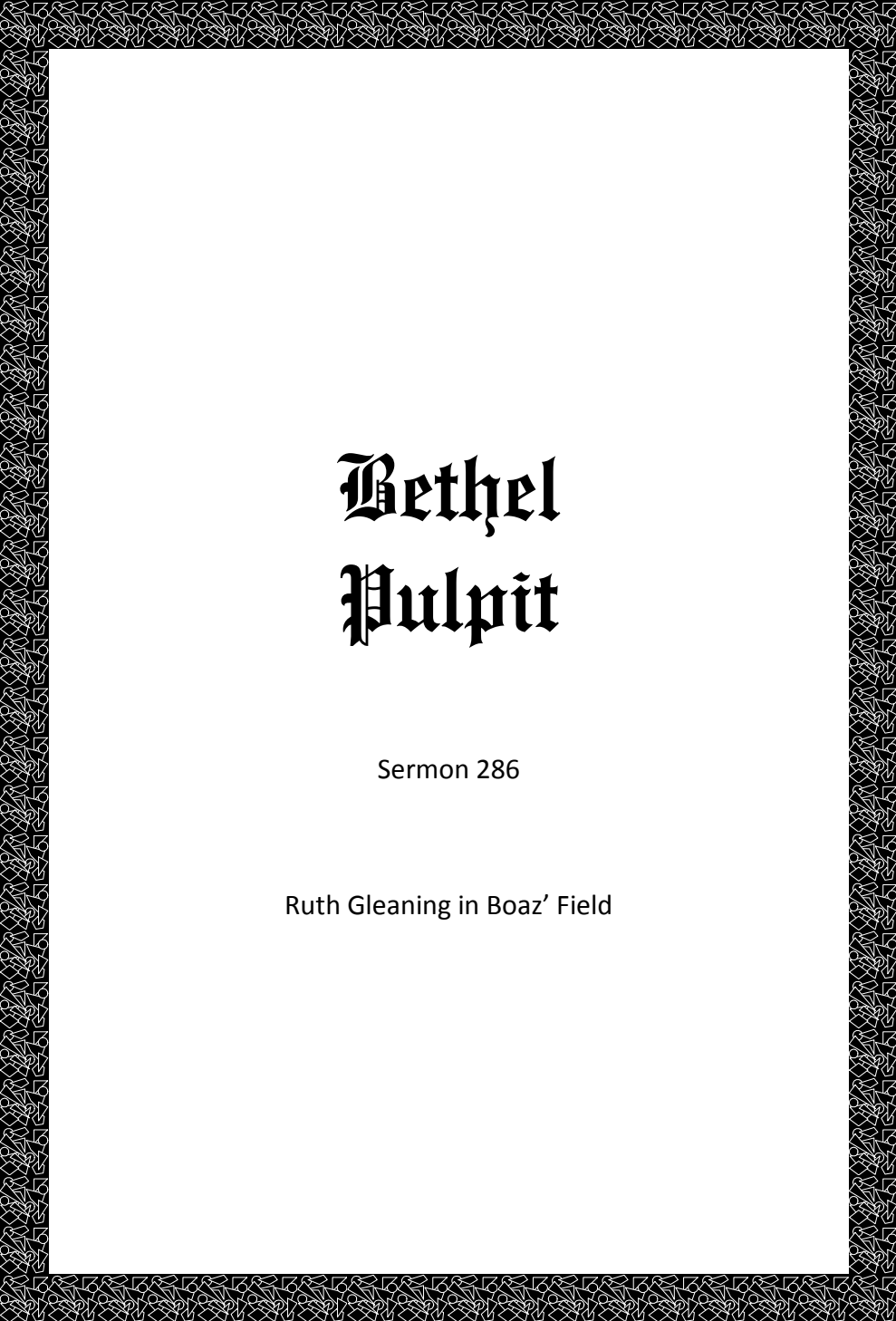




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 286

Ruth Gleaning in Boaz' Field

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 3rd May, 2009**

Text: *"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: let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn. 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?" (Ruth 2. 8-10).*

It seems that God's people in our chapels have always loved the Book of Ruth, understanding it in the light of William Gadsby's hymn:

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

Mind you, I believe one purpose of the Book of Ruth is to show that vital godliness can exist in the darkest times. It is obvious that these happenings took place in the time of the Book of Judges, and when the Book of Judges came to an end, there were the most abominable things, the most disgraceful things happening in the land of Israel. "Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled." There was still this godliness and grace in the fields at Bethlehem. "The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee."

Of course, the other purpose of the Book is opening up all the background and the line of King David and following that the line of the promised Messiah. And then also there is a revelation of what redemption meant in Israel, even literally, naturally, what a redeemer was, what the kinsman-redeemer was. Well, there is so much here: Bethlehem, the redeemer, the bridegroom, so many things that we cannot help seeing in them a beautiful picture of the gospel. An old divine said, Surely we can see in Ruth a type of the church of God in her low estate and then her exaltation.

I think perhaps there is one word in the Book of Job that suits the case of Ruth and it may suit the case of many of you here this evening: “Though thy beginning was small.” Well, Ruth’s was, but not at the end of the chapter. “Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase.”

Well, here we have Ruth the Moabitess brought out of a heathen land and led to Bethlehem, and we find her gleaning. I think you all understand what this gleaning was. It was the work of the poor. It was usually those who could not afford bread who went gleaning. It was hard work. It was back-breaking work. When the harvest was finished, the poor were permitted to go into the fields and pick up any ears of corn that had been left lying about. If you read in the Book of Leviticus (19. 9, 10) those who had corn fields were enjoined by the Lord to leave some little parts of the field not very closely reaped so that there was plenty there for the poor gleaners.

It used to happen, of course, in our country. I have met with aged people who told me when they were little girls how they used to go gleaning. One old lady told me they had to wait until the church bell rang at a certain time in the morning and then they hastened to the field. She said they always knew in the village there was one old farmer and you would find more ears of corn left there than anywhere else, so they went there first. She said what hard work it was, and they used to have their little piles and mark them with a handkerchief. But they were able to gather a lot and able to live on it for a time.

Now why did Ruth go gleaning? Because she was poor; because she was hungry; because she could not afford to buy bread. She hoped she could find something she could take home and beat it out and she and her mother-in-law could live upon it. Really that is how real religion often begins. You perhaps do not know what is the matter with you. You could not write it down. You could not say, This is the new birth; this is faith; this is a call by grace. But you know you are poor; you know you are needy; you know you are hungry; you know there is something you want; and you see the gospel of the grace of God just like Boaz’ field, and gleaners are welcome to go and to glean there. So there is an attraction to the gospel field – a great point in your religion if you have it, beloved friends. Do not let Satan rob you of these little tokens He gives you – that

attraction to the gospel field, the beauties of Jesus, the glories of the gospel, the wonder of salvation by grace.

And so you venture and you come gleaning, if only you can find something for yourself. Ruth did not just want to spend her day talking with the other gleaners. She could not be satisfied with a few stalks. She could not be happy until she had a few good ears of corn that she could take home so that she would live and not die. And if your religion is real, you will be a gleaner, especially at the beginning, but not only at the beginning; you will be a gleaner to your journey's end. You will glean in the Word of God. When you come to chapel, you will come gleaning. "I seek and hope to find a portion for my soul." Beloved friends, that is how I am approaching our services tomorrow [special services to be held on the Bank Holiday Monday]: "I seek and hope to find a portion for my soul." I hope that is how many of you are approaching the services tomorrow, and may the reaper, in the analogy of Ruth chapter 2, let fall a few handfuls of purpose for us.

O to be this gleaner in the gospel field! She could not go home empty-handed. She could not go home with nothing. Do you come to chapel constantly, continually, and go home with nothing, nothing at all? And are you happy with that? Are you satisfied with that? Living souls cannot be satisfied. It was an urgent, pressing case with Ruth; it was not just a hobby. She had this hunger and she must live and not die. And she was poor. What do we sometimes sing?

"Our souls can live on nothing less
Than Christ's eternal righteousness."

Are there any Ruths here this evening and you have come gleaning in the gospel field? Just a little help or a token for good, or a word in season, or a soft heart, or a promise, or a glimpse of Christ, or a sense of His dying love.

"Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace." Now is there one person who can honestly say that word this evening? "And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers." Her beginning was small. And the eye of Boaz was upon her. There was no poverty with Boaz. He was "a mighty man of wealth," and he looked on Ruth and he loved her. As the Book of Ruth unfolds, he became her redeemer. He redeemed that lost inheritance which

belonged to her family and which had been lost, and he redeemed it. He bought it back for her. He redeemed her, and then he became her bridegroom. Now she did not know that, and neither did you know it when you first came gleaning in the gospel field. It was the case of your never-dying soul. If you could only find something, just a little, that you could take home. But you see, the eye, the loving eye of Boaz was upon her. "Behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem."

But the words I have read to you, the first meeting between Ruth and Boaz. It was while she was gleaning that she met Boaz. You will meet with Christ in the gospel field. That is the place where Christ will meet with you. She did not feel worthy of it; neither will you. She said, "I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens." I suppose literally she was different in her appearance and in her speech, coming from Moab. "I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens." That is how you will feel. But Boaz sought her out, and Boaz seeks out all these gleaners. The Lord Jesus knows where all His gleaners are in the gospel field and He seeks them out. It came as a solemn, sacred surprise to Ruth. But you know what it is in all its fulness:

"Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God;
He, to save my soul from danger,
Interposed His precious blood."

That is the Redeemer and that is redemption, redemption by price.

"Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearst thou not, my daughter?" I think she was surprised he should take notice of her. She was more surprised that he should speak to her. But if you are gleaning, whether you know it or not, the eye of the Lord Jesus is upon you and He is watching over you, and the time is coming when He is going to find you out and He is going to reveal Himself to you, and He is going to speak to you. "Hearst thou not?" He was not going to chase her out of his field; nor will He with you. Meditating on this this last day or two, that word keeps coming back again and again that closes Gadsby's beautiful hymn on Ruth gleaning in Boaz' field:

"The meanest gleaner in His field,
At length shall walk at large."

Now may some of you be able to hold that fast by faith tonight.

“The meanest gleaner”

– seeking, longing, enquiring souls –

“The meanest gleaner in His field,

At length shall walk at large.”

“Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter?” Really it was a word of affection right from the start, and really he claimed her as his own. He called her, “My daughter.” I could not help but think of that poor woman with the issue of blood. She was weak; she was helpless; she was poor; she had spent all she had on physicians; she was not getting better; she was growing worse. It was a long, long time she had been suffering. It was a deep-seated disease. What was it – twelve years? It rendered her unclean. “When she had heard of Jesus, [she] came.” “If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole.” There was every obstacle she could imagine in the way. She could not get near Him for the crowd, and you will find that. You will find it if you are seeking the Lord Jesus, and you will find it if you are burdened about making an open profession of the Lord’s name. You will find every obstacle that Satan can think of and your unbelieving heart can think of. “If thou press on, the crowds will fly.” She pressed on through the crowd. She had an urgent, pressing case. She could not go back home. And there was an unseen, divine power that pulled her right through the crowd – that pull of grace, that drawing power of grace, that pull of love, that drawing power of love. Afterwards she was going to go away quickly. She did not want anyone to know. But the Lord would have that humble confession. “Who touched Me?” Tremblingly she had to tell her little tale. And then like Boaz with Ruth, the Lord Jesus called her His daughter. “Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.”

“Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence.” Now I suppose if those gleaners in our country in the last century, if they went to a field and the old farmer was really kind to them, perhaps they felt that the next day they could not go back again; they could not expect him to keep on being kind to them, keep on helping them, keep on providing for them. They would have to go somewhere else. But the more you venture on the Saviour, the more you honour Him. “Go not to glean in another field.” If the Saviour has helped you today, do not try to manage it yourself tomorrow, or do not think He will refuse to hear you the week after.

“Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field.” But also this: keep close to the gospel of the grace of God. If once you start wandering away from the glorious gospel, you will end in darkness and bondage and confusion. Leave not your first love. Remember how you first met Christ. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him.” “Go not to glean in another field.” Do not think of a different way to heaven. Do keep closely to the place where your soul is fed.

I had a strange experience on that some years ago. There was a lady up in the Midlands asked if she could speak to me. I knew her reasonably well. She had a question she wanted to ask me. She said, “I am not sure exactly which chapel to attend.” For some reason she could not go where she always had been, and there were quite a number of good chapels round about. She said, “How would you advise me which of these chapels to go to?” I said, “Go to the chapel where your soul is fed.” Well, she did, and her soul was fed there. She was soon baptized there and the strange thing was that in a sense she got a double blessing, because the pastor there had lost his wife, and soon after this lady went there, he married her. But always go to the place where your soul is fed.

“Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens.” Keep close to the people of God. Cleave to them. Follow them as they follow Christ. Really it is the same truth under a different figure, the same truth I was speaking about recently: “Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock.” Seek to keep in the footsteps of the flock. “Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens.” It seems to join up with that prayer: “Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon.” She wants to be found where the Lord’s people are. She wants to be with them, to go with them, to keep with them, to cleave to them. “Why should I be as one that turneth aside?” Beloved friends, do not turn aside.

“Abide here fast by my maidens: let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them.” Which I take to mean singleness of purpose. She had to keep her eyes on the field, and I think Ruth knew it. She was not looking about here and there.

“To keep our eyes on Jesus fixed,
And there our hope to stay.”

“Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap.” May there be that singleness of eye, that holding fast to the gospel. “This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before.” With Ruth it was “this one thing I do.” She was a gleaner and she wanted to find something for herself. “This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

“Let thine eyes be on the field” – the world behind your back, your affections set on things above, and in its fullest, truest sense, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of your faith, looking unto Jesus in dependence, in hope, looking to Him for every need, for every blessing, looking to Him for these ears of corn in the gospel field. “Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them” – not after the world; not after your own carnal desires – after the people of God as they are gleaning in the gospel field.

“Go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee?” I am sure it is not wrong, thinking of the analogy of Boaz and Ruth and the gleaner and Boaz’ field and the gospel, to think of these reapers as the ministers of the everlasting gospel. “Have I not charged” these reapers, “the young men that they shall not touch thee?” Now a true, gospel minister will never harm you. He will reprove you sometimes, he will rebuke you, he will correct you, he will even wound you; but a true, gospel minister will never harm you. There is a divine commandment: “Have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee?” Never seek to do any harm to a child of God. You may find that some of the Lord’s people treat you badly sometimes, but do not try to get your own back on them. Never do anything to harm the people of God. I had that burnt in my heart many, many years ago. Never do anything that would harm the people of God. The Lord Jesus has given the gospel ministry a sovereign commandment never to harm the people of God. “Have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee?”

He had given them another charge. He did not tell Ruth that, but he had, and you know what the other charge was that Boaz had given to his reapers: “Let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her.” She was gleaning. She was seeking if she could find an ear of corn there and an ear of corn somewhere else, and Boaz had charged the reapers to keep their

eyes open for her and drop a few handfuls for her here and drop a few handfuls for her there. That is the loving concern of the great Head of the church, our heavenly Boaz, for these gleaners in the gospel field. "Let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her." You come to chapel; you have a heavy case; you have a burden; you have a prayer; you have a desire. The minister does not know anything about it, but there is a divine charge, and there is going to be a handful of purpose let fall for you. O the wonderful love and the wonderful kindness of the Lord of the harvest to these poor gleaners in the gospel field! "Have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee?" You see the loving concern, the affection of Boaz for Ruth. How much more so the Saviour who died for sinners.

"And when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn." Do you know where they drew the water from, these reapers in Boaz' field? Have you ever thought of it? They got it from the well of Bethlehem, the deep, sweet well of Bethlehem. In a spiritual sense, the well of Bethlehem is still there. There is a springing well in every true gospel pulpit. When I first went out to preach, Mr. E.G. Rowell (as an old man) said he wanted to tell me a few things, and this was one. He said, you will always find in a real, gospel pulpit there is a springing well there. And that is where we seek to draw the water and to fill the vessels for the gleaners when they are athirst. But doesn't our Lord and Master say, "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely"? The water that flows from Bethlehem's well satisfies the poor gleaner.

"Spring up, O well! be this my theme,
Thou water sweet from Bethlehem."

"When thou art athirst." You see the loving welcome he gives. There is no prohibition. Dear Ruth was getting a lot more than she ever thought, than she ever expected. The secret was that Boaz loved her. She did not know it. He was going to be her redeemer, but she did not know that yet. He was going to be her husband, but she did not know that yet.

"The meanest gleaner in His field,
At length shall walk at large."

"When thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn." And then you have Ruth's response, and it

will be your response if the Lord Jesus our heavenly Boaz ever meets with you and if He ever speaks to you. “Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground.” If ever you receive a word from the Lord or a blessing from the Lord, this will be the proof of it: it will humble you. That is the difference. If you have imagined it yourself, you will perhaps be proud of it, but a blessing from the Lord, a word from the Lord will always humble you, and you will fall on your face and bow yourself to the ground, and you will say, “Why me?”

“Why me, why me, O blessed God,
Why such a wretch as me?
Who must for ever lie in hell,
Were not salvation free.”

Why me, Lord? “Why have I” – “not like unto one of thine handmaidens,” a Moabite by birth and practice, a sinner – “Why have I found grace in Thine eyes, that Thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?” Really that is just what it is all about, that the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ takes knowledge of strangers, and He makes Himself known to them, and as He makes Himself known to them, they are “no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” This is the way the Lord Jesus deals with those who by nature are afar off. “Ye” – Ruth from the land of Moab, by nature, by birth an idolater – “Ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.”

“Why have I found grace in Thine eyes, that Thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?”

“Why was I made to hear Thy voice,
And enter while there’s room;
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?”

“Why have I found grace in Thine eyes, that Thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?” But she was not a stranger in chapter 3 when Boaz becomes the kinsman-redeemer.

“You to save, your flesh assumes;
Brother to your souls becomes.”

Not anyone under the law could be a redeemer. The Word says a brother may redeem them (Lev. 25. 48). We see Boaz in love, the love of a

kinsman-redeemer, going and laying down the ransom price for her, and then in chapter 4 uniting her to him as his beloved bride.

“Though thy beginning was small.” If it starts under the Spirit of God’s influence in gleaning in the gospel field, it will end in heaven at the marriage supper of the Lamb. And yet the attitude of your soul there will still be that of Ruth when Boaz first met her. “Why, Lord?” “Why have I found grace in Thine eyes, that Thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?”

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

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

O what a heavenly field!
What handfuls it contains!
What strength and comfort gleaners get,
To recompense their pains!

Rejoice, ye mourning souls;
Ye broken hearts, be strong;
The field is ripe for harvest now,
And ye shall glean ere long.

Ye gleaners, one and all,
Let Christ be all your song;
He is your strength and portion too,
And you to Him belong.

All blessings He contains;
He cannot let you starve;
The meanest gleaner in His field,
At length shall walk at large.

William Gadsby