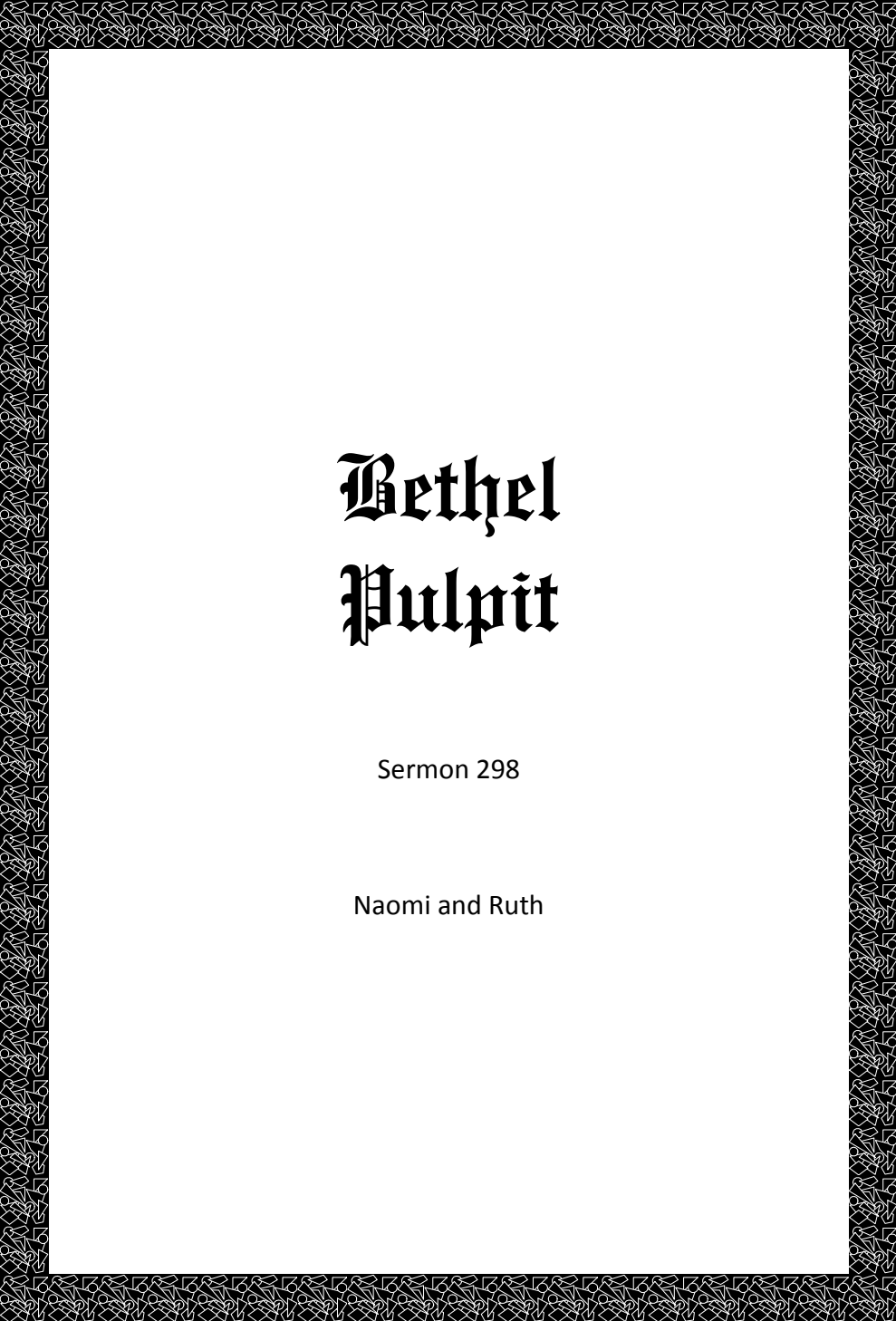




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 298

Naomi and Ruth

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 7th March, 2010**

Text: *"Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it be well with thee?" (Ruth 3. 1).*

The Book of Ruth is a lovely Book. I believe the Lord's people have always specially loved it. At the beginning we find that the Lord had a purpose of love and mercy to this girl Ruth living in a wicked land, in Moab, lost in the ruins of the Fall. She was one of His lost sheep, and the appointed time had come for Him to seek her out and find her.

It was a strange providence, an Israelite and his godly wife, Elimelech and Naomi, leaving the land of promise, leaving Israel, going into an ungodly land, running away from their troubles – and what always happens when God's people try to run away from their troubles: they come into more troubles. They had the chastening hand of God out against them, and Elimelech died and both their two sons died. Godly Naomi was left with a broken heart, and there were these two young widows. Then there came that gracious resolve with Naomi to return to her own land. She had heard it was barley harvest there. She had heard "that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread," and she resolved to return, and both her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, decided that they would go with her, and they both set out with her. If you had been watching the scene, you could not have told the one from the other.

But then there came the testing time as there always does come the testing time, whether your religion, whether my religion is real. Naomi spoke very faithfully, very graciously. She warned them to count the cost. She was a sorrowful woman. She was a widow woman. They would be strangers when they came to the land of Israel. They would be leaving their homes and friends and loved ones behind. There did not seem any prospect of them marrying again. She warned them. Then the time of decision came. That is not Arminianism. There is a time of decision, but the point is that you and I with our perverted wills choose wrongly when brought into the valley of decision. And like Moses, Ruth by faith chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God," while Orpah went back to her home and her people and her gods, and she went back forever.

You see these two sorrowful widows, an old one and a young one travelling to Bethlehem. But there you see the reality of vital godliness. There is a lot in that word, beloved friends – I know it has often been misunderstood and often been perverted – but, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” Ruth had passed from death unto life and she not only loved the brethren, but she clung to them, she clave to them, and more than that, she did not just cling to Naomi, but she clung to Naomi’s God. “Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee.” She had seen what grace was in a godly woman and it attracted her. She wanted that grace to be hers. She wanted that religion to be hers. And she clung and clave to Naomi.

Some of you remember dear old Mr. Gascoigne of Wellingborough, perhaps the quaintest preacher we have had. I remember when I was a boy hearing him preach on Ruth and Naomi. He said, “You know what it was. There was a piece of heavenly sticking plaster there.” It was a quaint expression, but there is a lot of good divinity in it: a piece of heavenly sticking plaster. They were bound together. If you will, Ruth saw a child of God – you understand what I mean – at her worst, in the furnace of affliction, in trouble, in sorrow, under the chastening hand of God, but she said, Let this religion be mine. I think there were two things with Ruth: the longing desire, the prayer: “Thy people shall be my people,” and then the gracious resolve.

Now have we got a Ruth here this evening? You have a sweet hope that you have been brought out of the Moab of this world. You have seen the difference between the world at their best and God’s dear people at their worst. You see they have something you have not got. You see them as the excellent of the earth. So you cling and cleave to them. Orpah went back, “but Ruth clave unto her.” I do like that religion which clings and cleaves to the people of God. I believe she was not only looking at Naomi, but Naomi’s God, and she clung and clave to Naomi’s God.

“Intreat 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.” And do you know what Naomi saw? “That she was stedfastly minded.” If your religion is real, beloved friends, you will be stedfastly minded. You perhaps feel, I am not. You perhaps

think you are easily tossed about, easily moved. But there will be some things on which you are stedfastly minded, and sin and Satan and the world and unbelief can never rob you of them. You want to be one of the Lord's people. You are stedfastly minded.

“I must have Christ as All in all,
Or sink in ruin, guilt, and thrall.”

Real religion – there is a steadfastness in it that Satan can never destroy.

So Ruth and Naomi returned. “And they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.” In the second chapter we have that lovely account of Ruth gleaning and her meeting with Boaz, how Boaz spoke kindly to her. But there were one or two things with Ruth. She had a little help, a little encouragement, but there was the great matter that was not resolved, and that was the lost inheritance that had belonged to her husband, belonged to her husband's father. The great point was to find a redeemer, one who would redeem that lost inheritance for her, one with the wealth to do it, one with the love and ability to do it, one with the willingness to do it.

And with Naomi, there was this burden, this exercise, this concern that Ruth would not only find in Boaz a redeemer, but she would find a husband, and that is why she said, “My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?” She was praying for Ruth. She was a woman of a sorrowful spirit. She was a woman of a broken heart. She knew the reason the Lord had dealt bitterly with her, but still in the depths of her sorrow and grief and disappointment she was not embittered. She wanted the best for Ruth, even if she could never have it for herself, and she was praying for Ruth, and she was seeking Ruth's welfare. Beloved friends, these Naomis are a wonderful blessing in the church of God. We call them *mothers in Israel*. They are concerned for others. They pray for them. They have a burden and exercise. They carry them. And they speak a gracious word, a word of encouragement, a word of warning, a word of advice, a word of reproof. Now may the Lord bless us with some of these Naomis at Bethel, mothers in Israel. They have no need to be old women. You are praying for other people; you are seeking their rest spiritually; you are seeking that it may be well with them.

“Shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?” It was the language of love. I have thought of this word concerning you

parents and your children. Haven't you something of the spirit that Naomi had for Ruth? You seek that the Lord will find rest for them, that there will be a place for them in life, that they might be happy, that they might be content, that it might be well with them. But we pray it especially in a spiritual sense, that it might be well with them, as Rutherford says, "for evermore."

"Shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?" And then our Sunday school teachers. They have that burden for the children. "Shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?" We think of them, their labour of love on the Lord's day afternoon. Do you think about them? Do you pray for them? Their burden through the week and their prayers for the children, and what to say, and that there might be a blessing resting upon it.

"Shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?" And then a minister, a pastor with his congregation. Do you know, I think I have entered into the spirit of this more in recent months than ever before. Eternity *is* a tremendous sound, and a vast eternity is near, and each of us is standing on the brink. As I look round on you this evening, as I pray for you in my study, "Shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?" That you might find rest in Christ, that you might hear His voice saying, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," and that it might be well with you. "Well with you while life endure, and well when called to die," because more and more I think of the awfulness of a lost eternity. O may none of you be left to perish in your sins! But, "Shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?"

Now so far I have been taking the Book of Ruth in an entirely literal sense, the spiritual truths, the spiritual blessings, Ruth and Naomi as two godly women, their burdens, their cares, their concerns. Now I want to come to it in more of a symbolical sense, because people have always seen in the Book of Ruth something symbolical, Boaz as a type of Christ and Ruth a type of a seeking soul who later becomes His beloved bride. I noticed that the Geneva Bible at the beginning of the Book of Ruth says people have always seen in this the love of Christ to His people in the case of Boaz and Ruth.

One or two things seem specially to emphasise this. One is there is such a connection between Boaz and Ruth as progenitors according to the

flesh of the promised Messiah, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Then secondly, the great point about Boaz here is he was a redeemer. He redeemed Ruth. He redeemed the lost inheritance. There is an explanation of what redemption was, and all this points forward to Him of whom we read, “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem” – that He might be a Redeemer – “to redeem them that were under the law.” There are some of you here and I know you love that title of the Lord Jesus: *the Redeemer*.”

“Thou dear Redeemer, dying Lamb,
We love to hear of Thee.”

So I want to come to it in a spiritual and symbolical sense. I would just put two words of warning at the beginning. First of all, you cannot try to make everything fit something, or you might end in confusion. Secondly, the customs of Ruth chapter 3 are so opposite to our customs today. A girl going at night and lying down in a field at someone’s feet and asking him to do everything for her, to be her redeemer, to undertake, perhaps even be her husband – it is absolutely foreign to us today, but this was a custom then, and if you read the Word of God carefully, she had the law of God on her side; she had the Word of God on her side in all that she did.

So now I want to go into this in a symbolical sense – Naomi’s concern for Ruth, that she might find a redeemer, that she might find rest, that she might find a husband, that she might be blessed, that she might be blessed eternally. And Naomi knew there was only one place where she could find it: at Boaz’ feet. That is it, beloved friends, as we pray for you, as we seek rest for you, as we seek that it might be well with you, we point you to the place, the only place where you can find this rest, where it will be well with you, and that is as you are found at Jesus’ feet. “My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?” Is it a concern with some of you that it might be well with you now and for ever? Is it a concern with you that you might find rest? “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.”

“Shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee? And now is not Boaz of our kindred?” Now have you noticed the point about the kinsman? It was a person who had the right, the authority, the ability to redeem. Under the law, if there was an inheritance lost or an inheritance mortgaged, not anybody could be a redeemer. The Word of God said he

must be a near kinsman. In one place it says that a brother may redeem him. That is why the Son of God came to earth. “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same,” that He might be a Redeemer, that He might have the right to redeem. He must be a near kinsman. He must be able to stand in our place. He must be able to pay our debt. He must be able to bear our sins.

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

“Is not Boaz of our kindred? ... Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshingfloor.” She told Ruth where Boaz could be found, and that is what the gospel does, and that is what we do. We point out the place where Jesus is to be found. That is the glory of the gospel, and may the Holy Spirit apply it, fulfil it.

“Point out the place where grace abounds;
Direct us to the bleeding wounds
Of our incarnate God.”

He is to be found in His holy Word. He is to be found in the house of God. He is to be found at the throne of grace. He is to be found at the blood-sprinkled mercyseat. He is to be found in the promises. Well, she graciously told Ruth where he was to be found. “Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor.” We must not over-press all these points, but naturally, just like a loving mother does tell her daughter to make sure that she is dressed properly if she is going for an important interview or an important meeting. “Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee.” A sinner going to Jesus’ feet cannot wash herself, but she needs to pray to be washed in His blood; and she cannot anoint herself, but she prays to be anointed by the Spirit. But I feel that God’s people, His little ones, His Ruths, as they would go on the errand of faith to Jesus’ feet, they do not feel very much as if they have washed and anointed themselves. They feel their blackness, darkness, sin and unworthiness. You know what it is:

“Go just as thou art, with thy woe” – *just as thou art* –
“Fall down at the feet of the Lamb,
He will not, He cannot say, Go.”

You have heard me tell the story of how in the Middle Ages there was a courtier who dearly loved his king, his sovereign, and day by day he loved to go to the king's table, but woe betide anyone who did not go appropriately dressed in the robes that the king had provided. One day, this courtier was sad. Something had happened – I think he could not find his royal robes to go into the king with, or they had been torn or spoilt in some way. Then it came to him that in the same room the king had a table for beggars, and they could go in all their rags and filth, and the king used to go and lovingly talk and commune with them. He thought, "I cannot go as a prince, but I will be welcomed as a beggar." Is there a sinner here who has ever felt like that? You long to go to Jesus. You long to go to the throne of grace. You long to pray. You need Him. You must have Him. O but your defilement, your guilt, your sinfulness, and you cannot feelingly venture as a child. O but you have to come on the old ground as a beggar, and "beggars are freely welcome still to Christ, the sinner's Friend."

"And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in." What do you think of the love and the obedience of Ruth? Blessed character, wasn't she, even naturally? She said to her mother-in-law, "All that thou sayest unto me I will do." So just speaking naturally, you mothers-in-law, do not be afraid to speak graciously to your daughters-in-law, and you daughters-in-law, do not resent, do not despise what your mothers-in-law say in love to you. "And she ... did according to all that her mother in law bade her." Naomi was praying for her; while she was on this errand of mercy, her mother-in-law was praying for her. She was still seeking rest for her. She was still seeking that it might be well with her, and she knew this was the person, and this was the place at Boaz' feet. That is it: at Jesus' feet. And Ruth knew it now, and she believed it, and here she was on this venture.

"And she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down" – the place where no sinner ever perished, where no sinner ever will. Tell me, have you ever by faith gone in softly by night? You will not rush in; you will not go proudly; you will not go presumptuously. You will go as a sinner on mercy's ground, and you will go in softly by night, and you will lie down at Jesus' feet, and there you will wait, and there you will look until Jesus appears, until Jesus speaks; and He will. This is the place where it was well with her and this is the place where she found rest.

“And he said, Who art thou?” It was dark. “Who art thou?” How would you answer the Lord Jesus if He asked that question to you? You know how John Newton answers it in one of our hymns. He 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.”

“Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth,” the Moabitess. Now this is it. She is on the errand of faith. She is on the venture of faith. She is seeking that it might be well with her. She is seeing that she might find rest. And this is her prayer: “I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman,” or as the margin gives it, thou art a redeemer. She knew he had the right to redeem, she knew he had the ability to redeem, and she had a sweet hope that he would redeem her. You know why. When she had been gleaning in Boaz’ field, he had taken notice of her. He had let fall a few handfuls of purpose for her. He had bid her at mealtime come and sit with the reapers and dip her morsel in the vinegar. She was not disappointed, and venturing faith is not disappointed. Jesus’ feet is not the place of disappointment.

“I am Ruth thine handmaid” – she did not rise any higher than that – “Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.” What did she mean, “Spread thy skirt over thine handmaid”? Well really she means this: claim me as thy own, unworthy as I am. Do for me all those things I need, sorely need, badly need, that it is impossible for me to do for myself. “Spread thy skirt over thine handmaid.” Thou art a redeemer. She wants him to redeem her from her lost inheritance. To take it a step further, in a gospel sense, a sinner at Jesus’ feet, “Spread therefore Thy skirt over Thine handmaid.” Cover my naked, unworthy soul with the robe of Thy righteousness.

“Bold shall I stand in that great day,
For who ought to my charge shall lay?”

And then I shall find rest and then it will be well with me.

Is there one person here this evening venturing along with Ruth? You see her as your sister, your friend. You are a companion of her. David said, “I am a companion of all them that fear Thee.” Do you find companions in Scripture? Have you got a companion in Ruth? Can you

venture as a sinner tonight to Jesus' feet, and can you tell Him your unworthy name and say, "Spread Thy skirt over Thine handmaid; for Thou art a near Kinsman"? O what a prayer! What a desire! What a concern!

And it received a blessed answer. "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter." O what an answer! What a pleasant surprise for Ruth! He called her "my daughter." Naomi had at the beginning. She said, "My daughter," but it is different now. Boaz says, "My daughter." "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter." Now what about this. This is prayer; this is prayer answered; this is Ruth finding the rest she sought. "And now, my daughter." He claims her as his own. "My daughter." "And now, my daughter, fear not." This is it: "I will do to thee all that thou requirest." O what an answer! What a pleasant surprise for Ruth! How she had had to say, "I am not like unto one of thy handmaidens." How she had had to say before, "Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?"

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

But, "Blessed be thou of the Lord.... And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest." And then he went out to pay the redemption price, to buy back the mortgaged inheritance, the lost inheritance, to restore it lovingly and freely to Ruth. And more than that: for Ruth became his beloved bride. So it is a blessed end, and God's people consider the Book of Ruth as William Gadsby did in the hymn we sang just now.

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

And how it ends up:

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

And as Ruth got up and went home from Boaz' feet, she walked at large and he gave her six measures of barley. Well, they were token of his love, tokens of his affection. That is what He does for His people. He

gives them a few tokens of His love. She went home with six measures of barley. You can understand Naomi's delight. Her exercise was not wrong. Her burden was not in vain. Her prayer did not fall to the ground. "My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?" And now Ruth is returning, and she is telling her mother-in-law of all the help, all the blessings that she received, and as Naomi had the first word in the chapter, so she has the last: "Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day." In other words, Ruth, you can leave it all in his hand. You can trust him. "What more can he say than to you he has said?" Your redemption is secure. It will be well with thee. You have found that rest I desired. Blessed word to a sinner who has been enabled by faith to go in softly to the feet of Jesus, to breathe out your care, your concern, to leave it all there. "Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day."

There are two rests in this chapter, one in the first verse, one in the last. One was Ruth's rest that Naomi sought for her and prayed for her and which she found, and the other was Boaz' rest. You know what his rest was: when he had accomplished this work of redemption for Ruth, and when he made the arrangements that she should be his beloved bride. There is a word about Jesus: "He will rest in His love." Well, He will. "He will rest in His love."

One last thought. When the dear Lord Jesus went forth to accomplish the work of redemption for His beloved people, He had no rest as He hung bleeding, sorrowing, suffering, dying on the cross, until at last He cried with a loud voice, "It is finished," and then He bowed His head, and He rested that day, because the work of redemption was complete. And that is the place where all His beloved people find their rest: the finished work of Jesus at Calvary, the work of Jesus the Redeemer. And that is why, and that is where it shall be well with them for ever, well with them for evermore.

"My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?" "Sit still, my daughter ... for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day."