

A.B. Simpson:

"Thy Maker is thy Husband, and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel." Isaiah 64: 5.

The Book of Ruth is really a part of the Book of Judges. It is a sort of vignette inserted on the background of that mingled picture of the dark ages of the Old Testament, and is thus a sort of companion picture to the one last given us, the story of Micah. Both are incidents gathered out of the same period of Hebrew history and illustrating the life of the people; the one on the dark, the other on the bright side.

There is another dark picture on the canvas which we have passed over. It is the shocking series of incidents recorded in the last three chapters of Judges, all growing out of a single unholy relationship. It is the story of a licentious woman destroyed at last by the very wickedness that she had herself pursued; and of a sinful man who allowed her to draw him into her wicked life, and who, through her influence, became unfaithful to his high calling as a priest of the Lord. Out of their relations grew, at length, a frightful crime which involved in a destructive civil war all the tribes of Israel -- a war which did not cease until three armies had perished and one whole tribe in Israel had become almost extinct. So fearful are the consequences of even the slightest sin. How solemn and how true is that little verse in James which gives the pedigree of sin: "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death!"

But we pass over this dark picture, and we come to the story of Ruth. It is like a little oasis in a desert. Goethe has called it the finest poem in human language; and yet how few of the children of God really understand its beautiful meaning and teaching. It is said that a literary man once read it in an English drawing-room to a select company of cultivated people, slightly changing the principle names and the style of the story, but reading it substantially as it is given in the Bible, and his audience was delighted with this new and wonderful literary production, and eagerly questioned him about its authorship and origin. They retired, with significant silence, when they learned that it was one of the books of their neglected Bible.

It is scarcely necessary to recall the incidents of the story -- the famine in Bethlehem, the emigrant family, Elimelech and his wife Naomi, with their two boys, Mahlon and Chilion. Then came the death of the father and the marriage of the two boys to two maidens of Moab, named Ruth and Orpah. And then, in due time, they died and the three widows were left alone in a foreign land. Then Naomi turned homeward, but with unselfish consideration, she tried to dissuade her daughters-in-law from the journey which promised so little for them or her. Orpah, the more demonstrative of the two, expressed great affection, and went home; but Ruth clung to Naomi with those ever memorable and noble words, which have been inscribed with the point of a diamond as the loftiest expression of loyal affection and devotion: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

And so two lone widows came back to Bethlehem and began to seek a livelihood in the humblest way. Ruth took upon herself, as a loving daughter, the support of the home, and went out, like Jewish maidens, to glean in the wheat and barley fields. It was there that she met Boaz, the rich farmer, who had heard of her kindness to her mother and her maidenly modesty and who became attracted to her, and showed her special kindness without sacrificing in any way her own womanly independence. Naomi, meanwhile, kept watching with motherly intuition the whole situation, looking constantly to God, in whose wings they had come to trust. At length, Naomi found that Boaz sustained to her and Ruth the peculiar relation of the Goel, or nearest of kin, whose duty it was to redeem her husband's inheritance and take his widow to be his wife. Naomi advised Ruth to take the bold yet modest step by which she could claim her rights.

The sequel, we all know. Boaz recognized the claim, but kindly told her that there was another who had intervened; but, should he refuse to do the kinsman's part, he, Boaz, would be true. And so it came about that the nearest kinsman declined to do his part lest he should mar his own inheritance in merging his name in another family; and then Boaz stepped in, redeemed the inheritance of Elimelech and took Ruth as his bride; and out of this union came the birth of Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David. And thus Ruth, the daughter of Moab, became the grand-mother of David, and the ancestress of Jesus Christ, the Son of man, and the King of kings.

I. We see in this story some beautiful examples of domestic virtue and lofty character. How fine is the picture of Naomi, one of the much-abused class of mothers-in-law, who was, indeed, a true mother, and who so wisely sought the interests of her children and deserved and gained their confidence and love.

Perhaps the sorest need of society today is true mothers, and the guilt of many a lost girl lies heavy on the soul of selfish, ignorant and unholy motherhood.

How beautiful is the character of Ruth; her filial love, how true; her maidenly modesty, how perfect! This is woman's finest jewel, and her most attractive quality in the eyes of every true man. This was what drew Boaz to her, because she went not after the young men, but clung to the maidens and stayed with her mother when her work was done.

The social freedom of our day is bound to bear its fruit in social corruption. "If she be a wall," says Solomon, "we will build upon her a palace of silver; and if she be a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar."

Then Ruth was an industrious maiden; she was not afraid of hard work. It is not a bad suggestion for our idle and pleasure-loving girls to know that it was in the harvest field that Boaz fell in love with her, and even when he did, he let her stay in the harvest field, only making her work a little easier, but not for a moment destroying her independence by offering to provide for her without her own honest labor. Luther has well said, "The devil tempts men, but the idle man tempts the devil;" and this is just as true of woman as of man.

Above all is the piety of Ruth. It was not merely the love of her mother that made her true; but it was the love of her mother's God. Very finely Boaz alludes to it when he speaks of "the wings of the Almighty under which she has come to trust."

Just as fine, in his way, is the character of Boaz. He is wealthy and influential, but simply and unostentatiously he goes down to his field and works with the men, and yet he maintains his dignity and reserve, and holds his position without pride on the one hand or undue freedom on the other. How fine his chivalrous spirit and manly respect for Ruth! How delicate and thoughtful his kindness; just enough to encourage her, but not enough to hurt her self-respect! How just and upright his conduct in relation to the nearest of kin, giving him every chance to claim his rights, although his own heart was so deeply interested in Ruth, and then meeting the obligation so nobly! And how manifest his deep piety and his recognition of the piety of Ruth and Naomi!

One of the finest evidences of lofty character is the power to discover the noble qualities of others, and we see in Boaz that fine touch that fully recognized the nobility of Ruth and Naomi, and was as honorable to him as it was to them.

What beautiful examples we find in this pastoral poem to mothers, to daughters, to maidens, to men, to all classes and ranks of society, especially in these days of social heartlessness, homelessness and selfishness!

II. We have in this story a beautiful illustration of divine providence. We see God working in human affairs to carry out His divine purpose. We see Him overruling the sorrow of former days to bring about some greater blessing. Sorrowing one, He that watched over the lone widows of Bethlehem will some day wipe your tears away, and make you even thank Him for the trials that now you cannot understand.

We see Him leading out that family, in order that, through them, He might lead in this daughter of a Gentile race, and make her a partner in the hopes of His people. We see Him fitting the times and seasons of our lives in bringing these wanderers back to Bethlehem just at the right time, the harvest season. We see His loving care of His children finally expressed in the beautiful figure of Boaz, "the wings of the Almighty." Under those sheltering wings His children still lie, and the God of the widow and the fatherless is not dead, but through each perplexing path of life He will guide their footsteps, providing for their need and safely leading them home.

III. We have a type of redemption. In the helpless condition of Ruth we see the picture of our lost condition. Ruth was born of a Gentile race, and the race that was especially under the curse. Moab literally means "son of his father;" and we know that the tribe was descended from the accursed union of Lot and his daughter. Ruth well represents the sinful state of God's redeemed people under the curse of a fallen race. She was not only a Gentile and a stranger, but she was a widow; her natural protector was gone, and her nearest kinsman who had the right to redeem her refused. How well she represents our helpless condition; not only lost, but none to help, and even the very Law, which came, as it seemed, to save, was helpless and unwilling to deliver the sinful soul.

But, in beautiful contrast with all this, how fine the picture of redemption unfolded in this Book! Under the Mosaic law, there is a statute providing for what is called Levirate marriages, under whose provisions a family name was not allowed to perish from the tribe; and so, when a man died, his brother was to take his wife and redeem his inheritance and raise up seed unto his brother. Now, under this provision, Elimelech and his sons having died, it was the right and duty of the nearest of kin to step in and save their inheritance and family name,

and through the widow raise up seed unto the dead husband. This, of course, involved the forfeiture of the kinsman's own family name, and marred his inheritance; but it was recognized as a patriotic and social duty, overriding personal considerations.

Now, this is just what Boaz did for Ruth, and what the nearer kinsman refused to do. Boaz merged his own personality and family in Ruth's family, making a real sacrifice, and thus he became her kinsman redeemer, and then, also, her husband.

This is the beautiful type of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Kinsman Redeemer. For us He has sacrificed His own divine rights. This is what the apostle meant when he said, "That being in the form of God, He thought it not a thing to be eagerly grasped and retained that He should be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Christ gave up forever a place of dignity and right on yonder throne, where He was known as God and God alone. Henceforth, He is forever known as man, still divine, but not exclusively divine, but united to the person, flesh and form of a created being, and His whole inheritance merged in ours. He lay down His rights and His honors, and took up our wrongs and reproaches, our liabilities, disabilities and responsibilities, and henceforth He has nothing but His people. He is the merchant man seeking goodly pearls, who, having found one pearl of great price, sold all that He had and bought that pearl. The Church, His Bride, is all He owns; He has invested everything in us. The Lord's portion is His people; therefore, let us make up to Him what He has laid down; let us understand His sacrifice and love, and let Him find in us His sufficient and everlasting recompense.

But the redeemer not only sacrificed his own inheritance, but also brought back the forfeited inheritance of the dead husband; and so our precious Goel has brought back for us all that we lost in Adam, and added to it infinitely more -- all the fulness of His grace, all the riches of His glory, all that the ages to come are yet to unfold in His mighty plan, victory over death, the restoration of the divine image, sonship with God, triumph over Satan, a world restored to more than Eden blessedness and beauty, the crowns and thrones of the coming kingdom, and all the exceeding riches of His grace and kindness toward us which in the ages to come He to show. All this and more is the purchase of His redemption,

"In whom the tribes of Adam boast
More blessings than their father lost."

But the best of all the blessings brought by the Kinsman Redeemer is Himself. Not only does He redeem the inheritance, but He purchases the bride and He becomes her Bridegroom. When Boaz bought the inheritance of Elimelech he took Ruth also in and she became his bride. And so our blessed Kinsman Redeemer is also our Husband. Not only does He come down into our nature in the incarnation, but He takes us up into His person in that wondrous betrothal which is to reach its consummation in the Marriage of the Lamb.

IV. Once more we see in Ruth's example the pattern of a faith that dares to claim and enter into all the possibilities of its inheritance. It needed on the part of Ruth a very bold and decided act to claim her rights under the Levirate law. They would not have come to her as the snowflakes fall, but they had to be recognized and definitely claimed. And so her mother told her all about it, and showed her that she was doing no unwomanly or immodest thing to put herself at the feet of Boaz and in the place of which she was entitled and leave upon him the responsibility of accepting or refusing her. Still, it cost her many a struggle and many a tear before she robed herself in her wedding garments and, stealing through the eventide, lay down at the threshing floor of Boaz, putting herself and all that was dear to a woman's honor at his mercy. It was the abandonment of faith, but faith must always abandon itself before it can claim its blessing. It was thus that Mary, in later days, consented to risk her very reputation at the angel's message and believed for the mighty blessing that was to bring the world its Redeemer at the cost for a time of even Mary's reputation. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord," she cried, "be it unto me according to Thy word," and the answer came, "Blessed is she that believed, for there shall be an accomplishment of the things that were told her from the Lord." And so faith must ever claim its promised rights. Every victory costs a venture and the blessing is in proportion to the cost. Faith must still see its inheritance under the promise and then step boldly forward and take what God has given. Salvation is not now bestowed as mercy to a pauper, but is claimed in Jesus' name by a trusting child who inherits under his Brother's will. So we take His forgiveness and so we must take every blessing and answer to our prayer all along the way. God has given us the right to take this place of boldness. We are not presuming, but we are honoring His word. We are not entering beyond our rights, but we are showing our confidence in our Father's truth and love by daring to take all He has dared to give. So let us have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus

"And to its utmost fulness prove

(Danger Lines in the Deeper Life) 10. OUR KINSMAN REDEEMER; LESSONS FROM THE BOOK OF RUTH

The power of Jesus' name."

V. Finally, the fruit of the union was the dynasty of David and the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of man, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. Ruth's faith brought her into a family of princes and a kingdom of glory. And so for us, too, redemption means a crown and a throne at the Master's glorious coming. But back of the throne and the crown lies the love story of redemption and the bold appropriation of faith. We must learn to know the Bridegroom now if we would sit with Him upon His throne then and share the glory of His millennial reign. Oh! shall we take Him as our Redeemer, our Husband, and our coming Lord, and have Him say to us, "Thy Maker is thy Husband and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel, the God of the whole earth shall He be called."