

(The Book of Ruth) 3. Ruth - the Gleaner in the Field

by Roy Hession

The sermon explores Ruth's humility and faith as a model for seeking God's grace and provision in our lives.

Duration: 56:41

Scripture: Ruth 2:10, Ruth 2:13, Matthew 6:33, John 1:16, Romans 7:14, Ephesians 1:7, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Ruth"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher reflects on the story of Ruth and draws parallels to the lives of believers. He emphasizes that believers have sold and lost their inheritance and blessings due to sin and folly. However, he highlights the hope that believers have in Jesus, who has the right and power to redeem and restore all that has been lost. The preacher encourages humility and seeking after a deeper experience with God, acknowledging that there may be something missing in one's spiritual life. He concludes with a prayer for God to extend His grace and cover believers with His mantle.

Transcript

This morning we're going to read quite an extensive passage of this book of Ruth. I don't know that we can really presume on everybody's knowledge of this little book. Some of you may have been reading it through in your own devotions, others of you may be continuing with your normal reading.

And after all, we do call this morning gathering of ours a Bible reading. And so we're going to read the whole of chapter two, and into chapter three, right down to verse ten. Now in order to make this a little more interesting for us, I've asked various folks to take the parts of the various characters in this book, in this passage.

We are reading from the authorised version, and various ones are going to read when various characters speak. I'm going to be the narrator, John is going to be Boaz, Joyce Nelson is going to be Ruth. But my wife said she has a different accent, they might not have.

Well I said Ruth had a different accent. So that'll be very suitable. Wendy Moyner is going to be Nanny, and Leslie Darby is going to be the foreman.

Yes, the place where the foreman speaks. And there's one place where the reapers all speak together, where they say in verse four, and they answer to him, the Lord bless thee, you're going to be the reapers. All right, let's stand up.

And we haven't rehearsed this, we may get a bit fumbled, it doesn't matter, it's just a way of making the reading a little more interesting, a little further forward, that's right. And Nanny had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Alimelech, and his name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Nanny, let me now go to the field and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace.

And she said unto her, go my daughter. And she went and came and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and her hat was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Alimelech. And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said unto the reapers, the Lord be with you.

And they answered him, the Lord bless thee. Nice relationship between employer and employees there. Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over his reapers.

Whose damsel is this? And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, it is the Moabitess damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab. And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves. So she came and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.

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 brought.

Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger? And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shown me all that thou has done unto thy mother-in-law, since the death of thine husband, how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and out come to a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust. Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord, for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thy handmaidens.

And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime, come thou hither and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers, and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed and left. And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not, and let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.

So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned, and it was about an ether of barley. And she took it up, and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned, and she brought forth and gave to her that she had reserved, after she was sufficed. And her mother-in-law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to-day, and where wrought ist thou? Blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee.

And she showed her mother-in-law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to-day is Boaz. And Nehemiah said to her daughter-in-law, Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Nehemiah said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.

And Ruth Amorbitus said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest. And Nehemiah said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field. So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest, and dwelt with her mother-in-law.

Then Nehemiah her mother-in-law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee? And thou is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to-night in the threshing-floor. Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor. But make not thyself known unto 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 lie. And thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down. And he will tell thee what thou shalt do.

And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me, I will do. And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother-in-law bade her. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn.

And she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down. And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself. And behold, a woman lay at his feet.

And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth, thine handmaid. Spread therefore thy skirt over thy handmaid, for thou art a near kinsman. And he said, Blessed be thou, the Lord my daughter, thou hast showed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followest not young men, whether poor or rich.

Thank you. Thank you so much, readers. I think that made it a little more interesting.

So far, on the first study, we saw Naomi filling the picture. Yesterday, we saw Boaz filling the picture. And now, this morning, Ruth seems to fill the picture.

May I just recap for a moment as to the main lessons we have seen? We have seen ourselves as those who have sold and parted with their precious inheritance or much of it in Christ. Not that we have lost our salvation if we have been truly saved, but we have lost an awful lot else. And not only have we parted with that inheritance of blessing and a walk with him because of our sin and folly in various matters, but we have also sold ourselves because we saw there was the possibility of a man, through poverty, not only selling his inheritance, but he could sell himself.

And we are described in Romans 7 as those who are sold under sin. And we have seen there is nothing we can do to recover ourselves or our blessing or our happiness by our own efforts. Once through sin, we have lost it.

But we have seen with gratitude that you and I have a nearest kinsman, the Lord Jesus, who because of his incarnation and his death upon the cross, has the right to redeem and restore all that we have lost. Not

only the right to do so, but the power to do so, all my failures, his power redeems. And not only the power to do so, but what is perhaps more important, the willingness to do so.

Can you believe it? When a man begins to humble himself, Jesus loses his heart to him. Indeed, he lost his heart to him even before he humbled himself, because we never do humble ourselves unless he takes the initiative in working that in our hearts. And now, this morning, we come to Ruth, after whom, of course, the book is named.

Everything for Ruth began with that momentous decision she made in the land of Moab, recorded in the first chapter, when she said to her mother-in-law, with whom she had no blood ties at all, the only ties she had with her mother-in-law, Marlon was dead. And the natural thing was for her to go back, like her sister had. But she said, entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee, for whither thou goest, I will go, where thou lodgest, I will lodge, thy people shall be my people, that was a big one, the biggest of all, and thy God shall be my God.

She chose to share the poverty and sorrows of Nehemiah. And I believe it was because, not merely of an affection for Nehemiah, though there was obviously that, but she'd caught a sight of Nehemiah's God. And she wanted that God to be her God.

And if there was a people who knew the blessedness of living with such a God, she wanted those people to be her people. It was a tremendous renunciation of her background, and a choice of Jehovah to be her God. Now when she came back, and people learnt of the choice she'd made, it impressed everybody.

It was the talk, I imagine, all round Bethlehem. And the news of it came even to Boaz, because he says, it hath fully been shown me all that thou hast done. It was an amazing thing.

Normally, they would despise and exclude a Gentile, but a Gentile, who for their sakes, and for Nehemiah's sakes, and above all, for their God's sake, had chosen to part with her background, and put herself under his wings, they rarely touched them. And they couldn't but look with pleasure on this foreign girl in their midst. And as I say, this impressed Boaz.

And he describes it, you see, it's fully been shown me all that thou hast done. How thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and hath come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore, the Lord recommends thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou hast come to take refuge. And she was willing to do just that, even if it meant being offered nothing but poverty with Nehemiah, even if it meant the only way in which they could keep body and soul together was for her to take the lowest and the poorest job in Israel, that of a gleaner.

There was a big difference between a reaper, who had wages and did a real job, and a gleaner. They just followed after the reapers, and just picked up the little bits of barley and corn which they had left behind. It really was the lowest and last and poorest place, but she was willing even for that.

She preferred, it seems, to be a gleaner in Israel, because of Israel's God, than a reaper anywhere else. Can't you see that this would really touch them all? And I believe it was this that attracted Boaz to Ruth, when he found her talking to him and turning up in his fields, having made so great a renunciation and now just being a little gleaner, picking up the bits that the others had left. I believe he was attracted, as I say, to Ruth for this very reason, not because she was pretty.

I don't know whether she was. And probably Israel's idea of beauty would differ very much from the Merbite's idea of beauty. He was attracted to her not because he was her kinsman, because it seems to me that at that point he hadn't realised he stood in that relationship to this Merbite woman.

And Ruth certainly never understood that he was a kinsman. She probably didn't understand what that would mean in Israel if she'd known that he was a kinsman. But it was this, what shall I call it? Well, humility.

This isn't quite the word, but you know. It was this in her that drew his attention to her in a special way. If that's how things began with Ruth, that is also how things begin in a deeper way with us, when we make the same sort of humble choice that Ruth was prepared to make.

You see, the blessing we know we need and which we unconsciously lack is so often incarnated in people. And as you meet them, you say, they've got it! They've got that which I know I've lacked! They have something that I haven't got. How many a person, giving their testimony how they first began with Christ, they testified, I met some folks and I realised they had something I hadn't got.

That's very often how we begin. And when we want to go deeper and there are deeper needs revealed in our lives, at that other level you can meet saints. They've got something that I haven't got.

And in your heart, you can make that choice. Those people, I'd like to be my people. I'd like to get alongside them and hear them speak and share their testimonies because maybe something that they've got might rub off on me.

And their God, I would like to be my God. He seems to sort of fit them. They're no better than me, at least they're all the time telling me they're not.

And by the things they tell about themselves, the stark honesty, my, they're not a bit better. But they're so peaceful, they're rejoicing, they've found freedom and liberty. What a God must their God be? And I'd like their God to be my God.

Frankly, you may say, I'm not satisfied. I've come to Southworld, I'm not satisfied, I haven't really got the answer. I'm floundering around, I'm struggling and trying and never making it.

I think I'd like to sit with them. I'd like their God, if somehow it'd be possible, to become my God. And we are willing to class ourselves as seekers, as mere gleaners.

Now this is a very humbling step to take. I've seen pastors own quite honestly, I'm only a gleaner, I'm a seeker. Some folks have got something I haven't got and I want it.

I told you the story of the missionary who realised if some people had this sort of new experience, he's prepared to come all the way from Brazil to England to find it. That was a missionary, who had an outstanding ministry it would seem. Come all the way from California to exercise it.

But he knew there was something missing. And to admit it is very, very humbling. For you to admit there's something missing, I haven't got what it takes.

I haven't found the answer, but I believe there's some who have, and I believe their God could be my God. I'd class myself ostensibly as a seeker, quite apart from how long I've known the Lord, quite apart from the fact I've done some preaching, that I'm in a place of leadership. It's a beautiful thing.

And if there are leaders here, I beg you take that place. I remember once in one of our early conferences, we had a meeting where we asked everybody to say, why we've come, why I've come. And one man stood up, he said, I'm the unsuccessful vicar of an unsuccessful parish.

Was there a better candidate for Jesus than that man? When you know things aren't right, and some of you do, I'm sure you do. And there are new areas where I'm seeing it too. And nothing draws his heart to us, as us taking that place.

I'm a failed Christian. I'm a failed, I'm an evangelist. I'm a failed evangelist, and I want to tell you I am.

I've had some new experiences, as only yesterday. A failed evangelist, a failed leader, a failed father, a failed mother, and you make no bones about it. I tell you when you take that place.

I said, I'm a gleaner, I'm a seeker. I know there's an answer, and I want to be a candidate for it. Nothing attracts Jesus.

Nothing attracts the grace of God to us so much as that, as when he sees us taking that low place. Now here there might be a difficulty. The whole story, of course, is an illustration of the message of grace, and apparently it was this thing in Ruth that attracted Boaz to her.

But you said, I thought grace didn't have to find anything in us to be attracted to. I thought grace was grace just because it was God's love for those in whom there was nothing good. Therefore if there is something in me that attracts grace, surely grace is hardly grace.

But what is it that attracts grace? The admission that you have failed. The admission that you haven't got what it takes. The admission that there's sin and things aren't right.

Why don't you see, that is the one thing that can be in you. Without making grace, not grace. Indeed, when there's that confessed in you, you make yourself ostensibly a candidate for grace, which you were not.

When everything's okay, I'm being blessed, I'm quite a successful Christian. Oh, he still loves you and pities you when you're in that position. But oh, when you take the opposite stance, you become a candidate indeed for that marvellous grace of our loving Lord.

Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt. Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured there where the blood of the Lamb was spilled. And you live in new areas, there may well be, where you've never really taken that low place about.

You've learned to live with certain things in yourself. You say, Lord, this is all wrong, I'm just defeated, I'm empty, I'm done for. And we feel to say that is to cut our own throats, it's the very opposite.

It's to make yourself an adequate candidate for grace. And it's that in him, which in the very nature of the grace, attracts the grace of God to you. And when Ruth had her first confrontation with Boaz, he said to her, surprise, it has been fully showed me all that thou hast done about her mother-in-law.

It occurred to me this is rather like what Jesus said to Nathanael. Or what Nathanael said to Jesus, whence knowest thou me? And when you have your contemplation, and I do with Jesus, it is I know. I know your sorrows, I know your sighs, I know you've been admitting there's something wrong.

You say, whence knowest thou me, Lord? Before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. I heard your sighs, and I've come in answer to your prayer. But you say I didn't pray.

I was too weak, too down to pray. But did you sigh? Yes, Lord. Your sigh was your prayer.

I saw you. I heard you under the fig tree. And so praise the Lord, what an encouragement this is, to take the place that Ruth take.

And because he was drawn to Ruth when she turned up in his field, he took special note of her, and gave her every encouragement he could. And I can see in chapter two, three marks of special encouragement he gave her. First, in chapter two, he says, glean not in another field, my daughter, neither go out from hence.

Abide here fast by my maidens. He didn't reprove her. What's this, another gleaner, all these gleaners.

Ah, and she's a stranger, look, she looks different. No, he'd heard, he'd seen. And he said, I don't want you to go into any other field.

If you're going to be a gleaner, don't be a gleaner in any other field but my field. And you know, when you start taking the place of a needy one, he gives you, he begins to give us encouragement after encouragement, which you never get under law. Under law you don't get any encouragement.

You ought to be this, you ought to be that, you haven't been it, you're no good. But not under grace. When you take the place of the needy one, the wrong one, you find you're on the receiving end of special attention from Jesus.

And one of the things I think he says is this, glean not in any other field. Don't glean in any other field than the field of grace, my field. Because there are other fields you can glean in.

There are other directions where you think your need might be satisfied. Indeed, to be in a state of need can be rather perilous because everything depends in what field now, in that state of need, you're going to glean. You may try a bit in this field, then another field, then another field.

I've done them all. Because there are other fields in which you may glean. But Jesus says don't glean in any other field than the field of grace.

I know it means continually admitting your need, your poverty. I know you have no immediate dramatic change in your experience, but nonetheless you stay in this field, the field of grace. Grace implies you're wrong, you have to be admitting that fact.

Don't move somewhere else. What a pity, said Neb in Sheehechathin. Don't go to any other field lest he find you, lest his maidens meet you in another field.

Oh, I thought you were going to be with us. I thought you had the special attention of Boaz, and now you're off to another field thinking you might do better. It's a very embarrassing thing.

Please turn the cassette over now. Do not fast wind it in either direction. I thought you had the special attention of Boaz, and now you're off to another field thinking you might do better.

It's a very embarrassing thing when your brothers and sisters in Christ find you leaning in another field, find you seeking another sort of blessing than that which comes to you at the foot of the cross. You see, the other fields, that which is received there, at bottom, seek to offer you blessing and an answer without having to take a sinner's place. They all purport to make you something other than what grace says you are, a sinner.

They all purport a quick way for your wings to grow. Mine haven't grown yet. I'm staying in the field of grace, though I have had, I confess, my excursions from time to time in other fields.

One occasion I nearly forsook the way of brokenness and the way of grace for something more spectacular that would make me a bit more successful, and it hasn't only been then. There have been other occasions when my brothers have found me trying to glean in another field, and I'm thankful to them. They challenged me, and I nearly lost that where the treasure is.

I'm not going to identify what other fields may be except to say, at bottom, there's something that adds to Christ. I'm not necessarily thinking of one thing more than another. In my case, it wasn't what you think, but it might be in your case.

And it seeks to make you something other than a weak, helpless man at his feet. It seeks to give you a righteousness other than that of the blood, and a success other than that which comes to a poor man as gift to a beggar. And it seems to relieve us of the necessity of continuing to take, right the way through life, the beggar's place in ourselves.

Because, as we shall see, that's the only way in which the beggars are made rich. There are special graces reserved for beggars which there aren't for rich. The rich, it says, he sends empty away, but not the beggars who come to the cross.

Never! They go there empty, granted. They never remain empty. They get filled.

But beware lest you think that fullness now is something inherent in you. Something will happen which will show it isn't inherent. Inherent and back you'll have to go to that old, rugged cross again.

To be full again. Glean not in any other field. And then, in verse 14, she found he wasn't only welcomed into the field and told to be happy there, but at mealtime Burrs himself asked her to come hither, and he told her to eat the bread and dip the morsel in the vinegar, and he himself actually reached her.

Parched corn, which was better than barley, and she was sufficed. And you know, as you begin to take this place, admitting your need, no, you haven't found the answer yet, don't worry for the moment. You'll find.

You're on the receiving end of the grace of God. And you say, it's funny, since I started being honest, I'm getting so blessed. I have a sort of feeling that I'm sitting at his table.

I thought he had to sit at my table. I found it mighty hard to provide for him, but now I know I can't do that. I find I'm sitting at his table.

It isn't me doing things for him, it's grace beginning to do things for me. You say this isn't as it should be. No, this is grace.

Grace does what shouldn't be, by rights. And then the third mark of special encouragement was he said to his reapers, now he said, don't push her back. Let her come right among the reapers.

And he said, what I want you to do is to let fall handfuls on purpose just for her. Just be a little careless in the way in which you reap. In fact, in the revised version he says, pull out some bundles for her.

Don't let her see it, but I mean just, and she'll find there's plenty for her. And another thing he said, and reproach her not. Three to twice.

Verse 50, reproach her not. Verse 16, rebuke her not. Let her come, let her take.

And so it is with us. It's a strange thing when you're really honest about yourself. You find that all sorts of extra things are coming your way.

He's beginning to bless. As you read your Bible perhaps with tears. My, it seems to light up.

It never did when you were such a good Christian trying to keep steady with your devotions. And he's letting fall all sorts of handfuls on purpose. Do you know the old gospel song, when we come to the end of our hoarded resources, and when we admit we have, our Father's forgiving has only begun.

For out of his infinite fullness in Jesus, he giveth, he giveth, and giveth again. And so there's every encouragement, friend, not to reap in any, lean in any other field. Ah no, you haven't got satisfied yet, but don't budge.

What does that old chorus say, free from the law? Cling to the cross. Your burden will fall. It hasn't yet.

Now my, you go on clinging. You go on staying in that place. You go on expressing, exposing need, going deeper about it all with Jesus.

The burden will fall and you'll come into a place of union with Jesus like Ruth did with Noah. Lean not in any other field. And what was her response to this extraordinary and surprising grace that was being shown to her? In verse 10 she says, Why have I found grace in thy sight? That thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger.

And at the end of verse 13 says, Though I be not like one of thy handmaidens. Why? Why am I being shown this grace? Why is he taking knowledge of me? I'm only a foreigner, a Moabitess. I'm not like the other Israelite reapers.

And yet I seem to be marked out for special attention. And that's all you do say under grace. You say, Why? Why should he love me, sir? Why should my saviour to Calvary go? Why? Tell me why should he love me, sir? Nobody can quite tell you why.

But that's the natural thing. Why, Lord? Me? I'm about the biggest failed Christian in the hall. But why are you talking to me like this? I'm not like the other Christians, the other handmaidens of Boaz.

They're all so much better than me. But I don't know, I seem to be, blessings are hitting me from this corner and that corner. Why? And already some of you, I've heard, I've had lovely conversations, people have told me they've had this sort of experience.

They began to admit they were wrong. They began to take a sinner's place. They began to take God's side against themselves.

And everything began to go their way. Oh, in small ways or perhaps larger ways. Why? Why is he taking notice of me? I'm only a stranger.

I'm not like one of the others. It's because you are a stranger and you're not like the other Christians that you are a fit subject or object of the grace of God. Grace is for people who aren't like his other handmaidens.

Grace is for those that are strangers and foreigners to the household of faith. My dear friend, you qualify just because of these great lacks in us. And so she came back to near me with this terrific haul of barley.

She beaten it out and she says, where has the sun gleaned today? Where in the world do you get such a wonderful result? So much result with so little work on your part. That's great. So much result, so much blessing with so little striving on your part.

Where have you gleaned? Oh, she said, I gleaned in the field of a man called Boaz. She didn't know what that name was going to mean to her in later years. She didn't know she'd often have cause to sing how sweet the name of Boaz sounds in a believer's ear.

This was her first mention of the name. She didn't really know very much about him. Said near me, Boaz.

How amazing. Do you know, he's one of our relatives. And as such, he is a Goel.

He is a Goel. He is one of those that has the right to redeem for us. And as they talked it over, and near me explained this old ancient law in Israel, they both saw that her very poverty and her very widowhood were her qualifications for the Goel.

They saw that very ancient law of the Goel was intended for people exactly in the situation in which Ruth. And you know it's wonderful when you, yes, you're getting best, and then you begin to see a larger vision of Jesus. A larger vision of what the grace of God has for failed saints.

And you begin to see that this law of the Goel, of the kinsman redeemer, is meant for people exactly in the sad situation in which you've come to see yourself. And the next thing, quite obviously, was for Ruth to make her daring claim on her Goel. On the one that had the right to redeem for her.

And so she was bidden by Neri to do what she had to do. It was all very new to her. This was a law they didn't know in Moab, but she was going to come in on it here.

And she was told to change her clothes, anoint herself, and put what good clothes she had on. I rather think that she, and people think that up to then she'd been wearing the rags of a widow. Because widowhood lasted a long time.

And everybody knew she was a widow. But in changing her clothes and putting on her best, she was, in other words, declaring for those who saw her, that she was available to be married. And she was bidden to go down to the threshing floor, the great culmination of the harvest was a great feast and merrymaking, and to stand in the shadows and not be seen by anybody.

And wait till the fire had died down, and many had gone home, and until Boaz lay down to sleep. Because he had to sleep by the gathered harvest, lest it should be stolen by another. And she saw him lie down in the shadows.

And she saw him pull his garment over him. And when he was asleep and the others had gone, she stole him. And she lay at his feet and lifted a bit of the garment and pulled it a little bit over her.

At midnight he stirred, he woke, and behold, a woman lay at his feet. He said, Who are you? I am Ruth, thy female slave. That's what a handmaid means.

And she said, Spread thy skirt over thine handmaid, for thou art a near kinsman of Goel. Now what is meant by spreading the skirt over another? Well, Ezekiel 16, keeping your finger in Ruth, turned back to Ezekiel 16, and you here have another reference to spreading of the skirt. We can't go into the whole of the beautiful passage, it's a sort of parable that was given to God by God to Ezekiel.

Verse 8, Ezekiel 18, Ezekiel is after Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel 16. Verse 8, Now when I passed by thee and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love. And I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness.

Yea, I swear unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, and thou became as mine. I spread my skirt over thee, and thou became as mine. And apparently it would seem that when a man had made his choice of the girl that was to become his wife, he would symbolically spread his skirt over her, and thus claim her to be his.

Now normally it was the work of the man to do the spreading of the skirt. And he had to make the choice. And not many girls would ask a man to spread his skirt over them, because it would mean tantamount to her proposing to him.

But that's what Ruth does. She said, I'm Ruth. One who had no claim on him it would seem, naturally, a Gentile.

She said, spread thy skirt over thine handmaid. And he said, in other words, do you know what she said? Marry me. Marry me, Boaz.

Marry me. You say how improper. I call this most immodest.

But wait a minute. The sentence isn't finished. Spread thy skirt over thine handmaid.

Marry me. For thou art a girl. Thou art one that has to the right to redeem for me.

That put it right. She was asking him to exercise the right that God had given him. He didn't realize that was the situation.

But the moment she says thou art a girl, he saw it. His relative's inheritance, about to be sold, finished. The childless widow of his relative, there.

And the moment she used at Naomi's instigation that blessed word, Goel, kinsman, redeemer, he saw it all. It wasn't improper. This was his right.

And she was appealing to that ancient law that he should exercise that right to give us last and to take on his widow and raise up children to inherit that inheritance and to raise up children by her. Spread thy skirt. Marry me.

This is the thing. Thou art a Goel. No argument.

He knew immediately the whole thing. Now this is what we're to do. Oh, it's a lovely thing.

When Jesus finds a woman at his feet. Because they've seen him to be what he is. And behold, a woman lay at his feet.

An impoverished woman, a widow, had nothing. But she lay at his feet. And oh, you can't be so down in such a tangle.

But there's a place sanctified for you. You can lie at his feet. And nothing moves him.

To see and behold, a failed Christian, a failed mother, a failed father, a failed young person who made a profession has gone back and he says, I don't belong here. I don't know why in the world I'm here. Oh, it's lovely when such a man sees that Jesus is exactly for that person.

Oh, your conscience has been giving you a bad time. You know what mum and dad expected of you? You haven't given it to them. You feel they're disapproving.

And what one person doesn't disapprove of is Jesus. And there's a place for you as you are if you're prepared to confess what you are at his feet. And you can say, spread thy skirt over me.

Take me on Lord. A failed Christian if ever there's one. Take me on.

Bail me out Redeem what I've lost. But above all, take me on and do something with this life of mine. Because thou art my nearest kinsman.

Because thou art a Goel. Because thou art the one who has the right to redeem what a failed Christian's lost. Not only the right, but the power.

Not only the power, but I believe Lord, the willingness. And I'm on your hands. I want to try and illustrate this approach to Jesus.

Is it John Newton that has a hymn that I love and two lines of which go like this? Thou callest burdened souls to thee. And such, O Lord, am I. You are specialised, I'm told, in burdened souls. Yes, I do.

Those are my speciality. Well, Lord, then I qualify. Spread thy skirt over this fellow.

Extend the border of thy mantle. Even include me. Take me on.

And my mess. But of course you've got to confess it's a mess and it's your mess. You've made the mess.

No, this isn't a way to short circuit this humbling acknowledgement of sin. But it isn't enough. You make the acknowledgement of sin and you go to Jesus.

You lie at his feet. And you say, if it's true you specialise in failed Christians, then I qualify. Thou art the saviour of such, the redeemer of such.

You pledge your honour to be that to such. And of course, he doesn't fail you. Cover me.

Cover me. Extend the border of thy mantle. Of thy garment of redemption over me.

Not only myself but my situation. I'll have to put some things right and how in the world they'll receive it. I don't know.

I want to tell you he'll work it out. I've heard some stories since being here. People have told me.

I tell you this. There are lots of people who are in the process of having this blessed Ruth experience of recovery and redemption. Not all complete yet.

It didn't happen in a day for her. Naomi had to say, sit still my daughter. Wait a bit.

Wait a bit. He's got it in his hands now. The man will not be at rest until he's finished the matter.

Because tomorrow we will see there was an obstacle. But that will have to wait until tomorrow. But even so, the man will not be at rest until he's finished the matter.

He takes you over. And he begins to restore. Forgive immediately.

And begins to restore in experience and in circumstances. All that's lost. And as I've said before, to do so in the grand manner that is characteristic of the Lord Jesus so you're left with nothing but songs of praise.

Last night the message was, why tarriest thou? Why tarriest thou? Well what have I got to do? I'll tell you what you've got to do. Just this. Why are you tarrying about going and lying at his feet? Offering yourself by the confession of wrong as a candidate for Jesus? Why are you tarrying? You say, Lord I'm a flop, a fail, I'm all wrong, there's this and that.

Take me over. That's what you've got to do. You say, well there's some things I can't get the victory.

That's not what you've got to do. He'll deal about with this particular thing in your life or that. But he can't deal with it unless you ask him and allow him to take you on and take you over by the confession of wrong and weakness and emptiness.

Now why tarriest thou? Before you go and lie at his feet, at the foot of the cross and say, Lord here's why. I don't make any bones about it, don't mind anybody knowing. Take me on.

Bail me out. Because, because, you are my nearest kinsman, nobody else. If others blame me, you don't.

Your right is to redeem, not to blame. My last minute or two is on this. What was his response? He thanked her.

Verse 10 he said, and he said, Blessed be thou the Lord, my daughter. He was delighted. Oh, I said, thank you for making your appeal to me as your go-out.

Not because he merely loved her, I believe he had lost his heart, but to think that he had the boldness of faith in all her poverty and foreignness to nonetheless appeal to this Lord of Jehovah, the God of grace. Oh, he said, thank you for giving me the privilege of exercising my right as a go-out, as a redeemer, as a nearest kinsman. And, you know, when you go to the foot of the cross, Jesus thanks you for going.

Do you know what he says to you? Can you believe it? Thanks for the privilege. I tell you where this comes out. Do you know when Jesus says, hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name.

Ask and it shall be given unto you. In other words, he's asking us to ask. If he's got one complaint against us more than another, is it that we haven't asked? He's asking us to ask.

Usually we think that prayer is somehow an attempt to conquer his reluctance. And the way we pray, we sort of feel that. It isn't.

It's a laying hold of his willingness. He's asking you to ask. He's asking you to come and take Ruth's place.

He's asking you to present the mess to him. And he thanks you for the privilege. Can you believe it? Yes, we thank him, but can you believe it? Nothing makes him so happy as to see another one lying at his feet.

And you're not going to have any cause to fail. There's more in this verse, which perhaps we'll think about tomorrow, when he says thou hast showed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch thou followest not young men, whether poor or rich. She didn't cut her losses and say, well, I'm quitting Naomi.

I'm going to find another man. No, she said, I've got a vision for the revival of that old, dying family. And this is the way.

Oh, he said, how wonderful. You could have gone after other young men, but you didn't. You're stuck by Naomi.

Naomi's family's in a dying condition, but here's my chance to have a seed in Naomi's name, for Naomi's inheritance. You know, it's very easy, when things have gone wrong, to try and cut your losses and start afresh. God does not want you to launch out on a new thing.

He wants you to have a vision for the revival of the old. And when he sees you with a vision for that, Lord, I'm not going to quit. I want this situation to be revived.

Oh, he says, thank you. Thank you, thank you. You could have found some other way out, but you applied to me.

Isn't that beautiful? What a saviour. Now, this is the message of grace, the message of revival. This, this is the way.

This is what happens when God moves among his people. People lie at his feet and say, extend the border of thy mantle over me. Let us pray.

Let us pray as our closing prayer, our chorus. You lie at his feet in spirit this morning. Maybe you've been getting there, even as the message has been going on.

You've been feeling comfy there. You've been feeling welcome there. All right, let this be your prayer this morning.

Cover me. Cover me. Cover me.

Extend the border of thy mantle over me. Let us pray. Let us pray.

Cover me. Cover me. Let us pray.

Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.

Cover me. Shall we say the grace together? The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

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