

Ruth the Moabitess,
or Blessing and Rest

by Charles Stanley

"Shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?" (Ruth 3:1).

Naomi and Ruth

My object in writing this paper is, not to, interpret the book of Ruth in its typical bearing on the ways of God with the remnant and nation of Israel in days to come; but, principally, to help the young believer to distinguish between blessing of soul and the true ground of solid rest, as this distinction is illustrated in the touching history of Ruth.

I would, however, first notice some solemn instruction in the history of backsliding Naomi. I say backsliding, for when there was a famine, instead of abiding in the land of the Lord, she and her husband, and two sons, went to sojourn in the land of Moab; and, what was still worse, they continued there.

It is very sad, in times of trial, when the children of God, instead of abiding with Him, go down to the world. But it is still worse when they continue there. And what did she find away from the land of Jehovah. Naomi (which means "pleasant") was her name, but bitterness did she find away from her God. Away from His presence, death blights her every hope. First, her husband, then her two sons died, and she was left. And full well does the backslider know it is a bitter thing to wander from the Lord.

Though she had left the Lord, He had not left her; like the prodigal, who heard there was bread enough in his father's house, so the report reached Naomi, "how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread" (Ruth 1:6). And, like the prodigal, "She went forth out of the place where she was". Wondrous indeed is the grace of our God, who never forsakes the wanderer, but draws and restores with cords of love.

Her daughters-in-law arise to come with her to the land of Judah. But dwelling in Moab had done its sad work in her desolate heart. Instead of leading them to Judah's God, she said as it were: Go, return to your land and your gods (cf. Ruth 1:15). She wished them to find rest in the house of that husband on which God had written death.

And such is the influence of every believer, either walking in communion with God and thus pointing souls to Christ; or, away from His presence, leading others to a world of sin and death. The Lord, however, had touched the heart of Ruth, and she could not go back. And now Naomi, having lost all, returned to Bethlehem, and Ruth with her. "The city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi (meaning 'pleasant'), but Mara (meaning 'bitter'), for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty" (Ruth 1:19,20).

Should these lines meet the eye of a backslider, may I not ask, Is not this your picture-true as life? You went out full, and now how empty -- how desolate -- what a life of bitterness. You remember the days when your name was "pleasant", but what a change! The world tempted and promised, but what have you got? But do not say the Lord is against you.

No, the Lord was not against Naomi, though she thought so. He hedged up her path; but it was to bring her "to Bethlehem, in the beginning of barley harvest" (Ruth 1:22). She went out in the days of famine, and she returned in the beginning of barley harvest. How little did the prodigal expect the ring, and the robe, and the fatted calf!

Blessed be the God of all grace, it is always so. However far the child may have wandered -- however deep the sorrow and bitterness in departing; it is always the beginning of the days of barley harvest when he returns. Desolate wanderer! The Lord restores you to the home of His love! What blessing awaits you!

And what blessing awaited the bitter Naomi. Not only was it the beginning of barley harvest, but Boaz, the lord of the harvest, was the near kinsman of desponding Naomi.

Ruth meets Boaz

A stranger goes forth to glean in the field. It is Ruth, the Moabitess. How like a sinner who first goes forth to hear the word of life -- to glean a few ears of blessing. As a Moabitess, in herself she was an alien from the commonwealth of Israel; without God, and without hope. But something had drawn her from the house of death to the field of Boaz. It is so with the sinner, whose heart the Spirit of God has touched. Lost and guilty in himself; a stranger to God and peace; yet he is drawn to the place where the servants of Christ are reaping the field.

And Boaz was there, and said unto his servant that was set over the reapers, "Whose damsel is this?" The servant told him it was Ruth, and what she had done "from morning until now" (Ruth 2:5,7). So he knew where she had come from, and who she was. And full well does the Holy Ghost, who is set over the servants of Christ, know who every sinner is, and where from, that is brought to Christ.

And now Ruth hears the voice of Boaz: "Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field; neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens" (Ruth 2:8). What tender words! He did not drive her from his field as a worthless Moabitess. Oh, no! His words speak such a welcome to her stranger, desolate heart. Precious picture of Him who would not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.

"Come unto me" says Jesus, "all ye that labour, and are heavy-laden; and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). How blessed a fact this is; that, however vile and guilty, and however weak the desire after Him implanted in the heart by Him who draws to Jesus, in the presence of Jesus the sinner finds what Ruth found in the presence of Boaz -- a perfect welcome. As Ruth heard the voice of Boaz, so says Jesus, "My sheep hear my voice; and I know them; and they follow me" (Joh. 10:27).

Finding grace

"Go not to glean in another field" says Boaz, "but abide here" (Ruth 2:8). And, oh! my young believer, abide with Jesus. Go not to seek pleasure in another field. Be not enticed to the ball, or the concert, to the world's parties, or its false pleasures. Are you drawn to Jesus? Cleave to Him with purpose of heart.

I remember a young person in Wiltshire, whose heart the Lord had touched, was persuaded to go to one more ball. She went. She danced. And she was taken from that dance, and laid on her dying bed. Her so-called friends excluded every person who might speak to her saddened heart of the love of Jesus. But they could not exclude Jesus. His is a love that changes not. It was learnt from the nurse, that before she departed she had peace with God. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35).

Let, then, the thought of His love keep you from gleaning in another field. This tender warning is the more needed in our day, as so many seem to be with Christ one day, and with the world the next.

And Boaz said, "And when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels and drink" (Ruth 2:9). How like the words of Jesus! "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink" (John. 7:37). The prophet also said, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters" (Isa. 55:1). And in the last words of Jesus in the book of Revelation, again, we hear, "I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely" (Rev. 21:6). "And let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).

Precious grace! "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 2:10). Yes, it was grace that bowed Ruth to the dust.

And is it not the grace of God that leads you to repentance? She said, Why have I, a poor Moabitess, found grace in your eyes?

And can my reader say, "Why was I made to hear Thy voice, And enter whilst there's room?" Oh, why have I, so unworthy, such an outcast -- why have I found such grace? It is all grace, perfect love to the guilty sinner -- love that came and died for me, the Just for the unjust!

Yes, when the grace of Boaz was known, that grace changed the mind and won the heart of Ruth; and no repentance is true, but that which is produced by the knowledge of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. When the poor sinner is brought really to know Him, that self is bowed to the dust -- the mind is for ever changed -- the heart is for ever won. "We love him because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). What so mighty and irresistible as the love of God?

And now Boaz comforts the desolate heart of Ruth. "Thou hast comforted me, thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thy handmaidens" (Ruth 2:13). My reader may say, I am far from being like one of the Lord's people; but can you say you have found a comfort in the Lord's presence that nothing else could give you? Though your heart was sad and desolate, did you not find comfort at such a meeting, or when you came to glean at such or such a preaching?

When you felt as if you would sink in despair, did you not find comfort in your own room, when none heard you but the God of all grace? You may be afraid to say you are a Christian. But are you a gleaner? Has God put a thirst for Himself in your heart? Have you found comfort in Him, when none could help? Then take courage. He that has begun a good work in you will carry it on until the day of Christ.

And Boaz said, "At meal time come thou hither and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar" (Ruth 2:14a). Oh hungry soul, how free is the bread of life! "Take, eat, this is my body" (Matt. 26:26). What a feast is the table of the Lord. How tenderly did Boaz reach her the parched corn. "And she did eat, and was sufficed, and left" (Ruth 2:14b). When the King sits at His own table, how satisfied the soul that feeds on Him. What unspeakable delight when the soul thus feasts for the first time with Him. I shall never forget the joy and awe I felt when I saw for the first time the table of the Lord, where there was none to preside, but Jesus Himself. Wondrously sweet is the communion of souls who thus own Him.

But still Ruth was only a gleaner. And Boaz said, "Let fall some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not" (Ruth 2:15,16). Oh! how like the ways of our God. Timid gleaner, have you never found handfuls of blessing, dropped on purpose for you? How suited such a word was to you. What a handful you picked up in such a promise. Perhaps you did not know how God had ordered all this on purpose for you.

Thus does this beautiful history picture forth, step by step, the gracious ways of our God, with many a timid soul. The first budding forth of desire after God, in the going forth to glean -- the finding a little blessing amongst the stubble -- then the voice of the Shepherd -- thirst and the freeness of the water of life -- repentance -- the full moral bowing down and judgment of self in the presence of divine grace -- communings with the Lord -- the bread of life -- the Lord Himself -- the soul filled with blessing, on purpose from the Lord - - the gleaning from the word, the beating and the eating. What a picture, I say, of the drawings of divine love.

Finding rest

And yet Ruth had not found rest. "Then Naomi, her mother-in-law, said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?" (Ruth 3:1). This brings us to a deeply important and practical part of our subject. Many a dear child of God does not get a step beyond this. You may have been drawn to Christ -- have found Him precious -- had sweet communion with Him -- thirsty, you have drank of the water of life -- and hungry, you have eaten of the bread of life.

You may have enjoyed all the comfort and blessing described above; and yet not have the knowledge and enjoyment of the true ground of solid rest in God. You are happy when enjoying blessing; but when trial and temptation come, you doubt whether you are really a child of God. "Shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?" God now enable me to write, and you to see, the true ground of rest.

The scene now is entirely changed. It is now no longer the gleaning and the beating. The Martha character ends and the Mary place begins. Ruth is not in the field, but at the feet of Boaz, like Mary at the feet of Christ. She no longer gleanes ears of barley. Boaz himself is her kinsman; and if she got one measure, by her gleaning and beating, she now receives six, and is sent away. But six is not the perfect number, and still she has not rest. However filled my reader's soul may be with blessing, mere blessing is not the ground of rest.

Then said Naomi, "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" (Ruth 3:18). It is of the first importance to note this, that as Boaz thus undertook for Ruth, and could not himself be in rest until he had finished the work he thus undertook, even so our adorable Substitute (I speak of all believers) undertook for us, yea, so took our place, that He could not be in rest Himself until He finished the work that gives us rest in the presence of God for ever.

"It is true" said Boaz, "that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I" (Ruth 3:12). "Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there, and, behold, the kinsman, of whom Boaz spake, came by, unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside and sat down" (Ruth 4:1). He also took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit ye down here, and they sat down" (Ruth 4:2).

And lest there should be any after misgivings or complainings, he tells the other kinsman the whole case of Ruth, and gives him the first and the fullest opportunity of redeeming Ruth and her lands. The other kinsman can manage well with the land, but cannot possibly either redeem Ruth, or "raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance".

"And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem for myself, lest I mar my own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself, for I cannot redeem" (Ruth 4:6).

Now there was in olden times a very curious custom in Israel, "concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour; and this was a testimony in Israel" (Ruth 4:7). This was the end of all controversy; the very end of all claim by the other kinsman. "Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee, so he drew off the shoe" (Ruth 4:8). Thus the ten men of the city were witnesses, that the claims of the other kinsman were ended. He could not redeem. He could not raise up the name of the dead. He could not give rest to poor desolate Ruth.

And who is it, and what is it, that has had the first and the fullest opportunity of saving and redeeming the poor, lost, guilty sinner? It is the law. The other kinsman could do very well with the land. And most excellent and necessary is the law, for God's moral government in the world. But can the law, which utterly condemns the sinner, can it redeem the sinner? Impossible! it can only curse him (Gal. 3:10). Can it raise from the dead? Never! that would be to mar its own inheritance, for it is the inheritance of the law

to kill; but not to make alive. For hundreds of years it had the fullest opportunity of saving men, but could it do so? No.

As the ten elders bore witness that the other kinsman could not redeem, so the ten commandments bear witness, that, on the principle of law-keeping, no man can be saved. If my reader were perfectly righteous, and continued so, in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them, then could it give you life? But is this the case? Does not each of the ten condemn you? Have you not sinned in thought, word, and deed? You may hope to be righteous some day, by keeping the law. But is it not written, "If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain?" (Gal. 2:21). How can you then find rest and life in that which is the ministration of death? (2 Cor. 3:7).

And if the plucking of the shoe, proved the ability and claims of the other kinsman to be ended, how much more when Jesus took the writing of law, and nailed it to His cross? Does He not prove both the utter end of all question of the law's ability to save, and the utter end of its claim on the sinner also? Oh why, then, would you cling to the other kinsman? Why go back to the law, which can never redeem the guilty sinner?

What the other kinsman could not do, that Boaz did do. For he could not be in rest until he had finished the matter. The very elders were witnesses, not only that the other could not. "But ye are witnesses this day; Ruth, the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance" (Ruth 4:10).

Oh, what a day of gladness for poor Ruth! What a perfect work did Boaz finish for her that day -- what a complete change for her -- what perfect rest! No longer the poor, sorrowing, outcast Moabitess -- no more gleaning and beating -- no more coming and going -- no more enjoying blessing with Boaz one hour, and away from him desolate the next hour. The stranger gleaner is now one with him forever. They two have become one, to part no more.

Perfect rest! Happy Ruth! The love that redeemed her would never part with her -- nothing could separate her from his love. She had nothing to bring to him. Boaz had all to give for her. She was purchased to be his wife. Nobly did he undertake for Ruth, and nobly did he finish the work that day. There was joy that day in the gate of Bethlehem. All the people, and the elders in the gate, bore witness, with great rejoicings, of the perfect redemption of Ruth, and her marriage to the mighty man of wealth.

Is it not even so? What the law could not do, God has done, in the sending of His beloved Son. Three things gave Ruth perfect rest. Redemption, resurrection, and marriage -- union with Boaz. And what but these three things, in Christ, does the believer need, to give him solid, everlasting rest?

Redemption, resurrection, and union with Christ

Let me repeat them -- nothing short of redemption, resurrection, and union with Christ, can give the lost sinner rest.

(1) Redemption. It is the happy, present, sure privilege of all believers to say, "We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to [not our good deserving, but] the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7). "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

Redemption through the death of Jesus on the cross is the foundation of everything. Beyond this, the other kinsman has no claim whatever. The law could not reach beyond the cross: there it was nailed. The death of Christ is the very end of the law's utmost possible claim. It cannot go beyond death. And Jesus undertook for us just there. He so really took our place in death, and became a curse for us that He could not, like Boaz, be in rest Himself until He had finished the work of redemption perfectly for us.

He did not merely appear to undertake for us. It was a deep reality. "Made sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21). Oh! my reader, ponder this well. Your doings or your feelings, had nothing to do with this. If you are a believer this vast work was undertaken for you, and finished for you, without your asking. It was the love of God.

After the kinsman had once plucked off his shoe, the case of Ruth could never, on his behalf, have a second trial; the question was settled for ever. It was so with the law. It was a schoolmaster unto Christ. But though man had a fair trial until the cross under law, it could only condemn him. "Now we know that whatsoever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19). And again, the apostle says, "We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead" (2 Cor. 5:14).

Oh! let it be remembered, then, that after this, the cross, man can never be put on his trial again under the other kinsman, law. It has been once and for ever proved that he is only lost and guilty, and the law cannot give him redemption, a new life, and rest with God. Any attempt to get back past the cross, and put oneself on trial again under law, is sheer madness. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us". "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse" (Gal. 3).

This ends the question. The blessed cross is the end of the law, and the beginning and foundation of grace -- the grand barrier, so that they that would pass from one ground to the other cannot. If of my works, it is no more God's grace.

(2) Resurrection

Let us now pass on to resurrection. The death of Jesus, the propitiation for our sins, could never have given rest to the guilty sinner without the resurrection. This is the very point insisted on, where it is written, "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17).

How this marks the deep, real responsibility Jesus undertook for us. If perfect redemption were not made by Him in the giving up His precious life, He could not rise again. If we were still in our sins, unredeemed before God, He must remain among the dead. If our sins are not purged away, He cannot be raised for our justification. He cannot be in rest Himself, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, unless He has for ever purged our sins.

Now the question is this: Has God raised Him from the dead for our justification or not? Is He raised upon high, and there sat down or not? Most assuredly He is. Then this settles for ever the question of our sins. It proves beyond all doubt that they are put away by the

death of Jesus for ever. So long as Jesus sits above, in that very body which hung on the tree, bearing our sins, so long is He our righteousness, and God's assurance to our souls, that our sins and iniquities, He will remember no more. Yes, the resurrection of Jesus, gone up on high, is the answer of our conscience before God.

And far more still. For whatever God did to Christ in raising Him from the dead, He hath also done to us in Him our substitute. Yea, "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved:) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4-6).

So that, just as the condition of Ruth was no longer what she was in herself as a poor outcast Moabitess, but what she was as the honoured bride of Boaz, so, the condition and standing of a believer before God, is no longer what he is in himself as a guilty, condemned sinner; and most certainly not what he is, or would be, if put on his trial again under law. No, these old things are entirely passed away, and his condition and standing is entirely of God in Christ, the Head of the new creation.

Ruth had nothing to bring to Boaz. But what riches had Boaz for Ruth! The sinner has nothing to bring to Christ. But what has not Christ for the sinner? Redemption, life, and union. Just the three things that Boaz had for Ruth. She not only needed one to redeem her, but death was written on her house. We not only needed redemption, but also life, as "death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

We have redemption through His blood. And His resurrection is our life. Not the old man made alive. It was not the old dead husband of Ruth raised again to life, but a new husband. Regeneration is not the old man raised to life again, but an entirely new life -- the resurrection-life. Nor are we put again under the old husband, the law; but "ye are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to Him that is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit to God" (Rom. 7:4).

Surely my reader must see, that when converted, we are not married again to the law, that we should bring forth sin -- that which the law always brings out. No! "We are delivered from the law, being dead to that wherein we were held, that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7:6). May God give my reader understanding in these things. If we are led of the Spirit we are not under law.

Why should Ruth desire to go to the kinsman, who could not redeem her; and why should the believer desire to go back to the law, which could only curse him? Beware, my young Christian reader, for many whom you little suspect would seduce you from Christ. Think not that I would teach that God has set aside His law. No, as the ten elders bare witness of the perfect redemption and union of Ruth to Boaz, so the fulfilled law bears witness. Yes, the death of Christ for His own is the great fulfilment of the law. The law demanded the life of the sinner. Jesus gave His life for the sinner, and the law sits in the gate, a fulfilled witness of the righteousness of God -- not passed over slightly -- no, fulfilled to the utmost.

(3) Union with Christ

I trust my reader now sees, that happy feelings, or the consciousness of blessing, cannot form the true ground of rest, but perfect redemption through the blood of Christ; that the certainty of this is proved by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead; and, even more than this, that every believer is now one with Jesus; that the very expressive figure of marriage is used to show this wondrous union.

When the Emperor married his wife from England, she ceased to be an Englishwoman. She might still have an English nature, but her standing became French; yea, it became what the standing of the Emperor was. Her former station ceased, and became dead as it were. So with Ruth. She ceased to be the poor Moabitess, and became one with the wealthy Boaz.

It is so with every believer, the moment God the Holy Ghost leads the soul to rest in the finished redemption of Christ; for ever afterwards, the former old standing in guilty self is reckoned to cease -- to be dead -- and marriage is marriage before God. The married woman can never again be Miss So-and-so. Is it not equally true that the Christian, now made one with Christ, can never return to the station and standing of what he is in himself? What he is in himself has been judged on the cross, and now ceases for ever before God.

He, like the Empress, may still have the old nature; but the old standing of condemnation never can be his again. There is not such a thing; as it is written: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ" (Rom. 8:1).

Dear reader, if you are a believer, however poor and unworthy in yourself, all this is true of you. You have redemption through His blood. You have His risen life in you. You are one with Christ. Nothing can ever separate you. He will not die again and leave you a widow. You never can be more united to Him than you are, and therefore your everlasting rest never can be more sure than it is.

He has undertaken for you. "Who shall lay anything to your charge? It is God that justifieth; who shall condemn? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us". Can you not triumphantly say, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8).

In conclusion, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:1-4).

All is blessed certainty. Risen with Christ -- sat down with Him -- perfect rest! How could Ruth ever doubt the love of Boaz? All the people and the elders were witnesses. Was, it presumption then for her to be quite sure? Impossible! How can you doubt, then, my fellow-believer? He loved you and gave Himself for you. You are His and He is yours.

It is not presumption. God is witness -- the elders bear witness -- ten thousand times ten thousand bear witness -- all creation shall bear witness: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain" (Rev. 5). Farewell, then, to doubts and fears. No more comings and goings -- no more gleanings and beatings. Farewell to the land of Moab -- farewell to a deceitful world. You are one, redeemed sinner, with yonder Christ in glory. That home above -- that scene of love -- is yours for ever. There, set your affections. There, poor desolate wanderer, is your everlasting rest.