

Sermon by Philip C. Herrmann, May 27, 1973, 7:00

Willo Bible Chapel, Willoughby, OH (45:30)

... had hoped you would do it for yourselves, it wouldn't take too long, but there's a great deal in the book that I think can be left unsaid, and we'll touch rather on the high points of the story. It comes as we know between a book of constant failure, and then recovery, but the failures seem to have lasted longer than the recoveries, and recovery only was succeeded by again falling away and recovery. It seems as if the book of Judges is one constant downward path, and it ends in the remarkable statement, although I think it's not just once mentioned, but at least twice, that in those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

And of course when that's the history of man, we know it's away from God, because man's eyes are not on God. It would be on the earth, and the things of the earth would lead to failure. Well the book of Ruth continues with that same trend. The thought of leaving the land because of famine reminds us of Abraham. Abraham did that very thing, and so did Isaac. They left the land of Canaan which God had promised them, and they went into a land of failure.

The whole book of Ruth should never have been written. That may sound like a strange statement to make, but it all stems from the Garden of Eden. Man should never have fallen. I don't believe it was God's intention that man should fall, but man did, and we're all suffering from the consequences of it. And we go on to the seventh to the twelfth chapters of Genesis and we find that God picked one man, after the flood, and 400 years after he picked one man who was to represent a nation, and was to bring forth, according to the flesh, the Son of God.

And Abraham went into Egypt to escape famine in the land, evidently didn't consult God about it, went there and he took along with him what he should never have taken, he took along Lot and Lot's family, or Lot rather, who had the family later. Well Lot evidently was so pleased with the land of Egypt, although Abraham left it and Lot left it too, but Lot eventually landed in Sodom, saw that the plain was well-watered, it was a fine place for his flocks, and he got to the land of Sodom. And we know what happened as a result of Sodom, Moab and Ammon were born.

And that brings us to the first verse of our chapter. Elimelech, whose name means "my God is king" leaves the land that God has chosen for him, and for the nation of Israel, and goes to the land of Moab, a land perhaps not more than a hundred miles away, but a land that was an enemy of Israel. And when Christians have dealings with the enemy, the flesh, the world, and the devil, it's sure to produce trouble.

I notice in the introduction to the book of Ruth in the Scofield Bible it mentions that Ruth's history, or character, or rather her experience is a type or a normal picture of the Christian's experience. But I rather doubt this. I usually accept the notes in the Scofield Bible as generally good, especially the references. But in this I would have to say that I think the great mass of commentators on the book of Ruth consider this, that although she was a Moabitess, a Gentile, excluded from the congregation of the Lord, she was still not a picture of a Christian. Although she was converted just in the same way we are, but the person she realized was to be her savior was God, whereas we come to God through Christ.

Continuing just the thought that this book should never have been, then we see that Elimelech, “my God is king” should never have left with his family for another land, the land of the enemy. And the reason why the Moabite was never to come into the congregation of the Lord for ten generations was that when the nation of Israel was in the wilderness, 40 years, they applied to the land of Moab for water, and were refused it. In fact there would have been a war between them. So Israel moved on, and later Moab saw that Israel was quite a factor in the land; they hired Balaam, a false prophet to curse the people of Israel. We know the story of Balaam. Balaam on three occasions tried to curse. He was hired by Balak, king of Moab. But God turned each case to a blessing. He said that he found no fault with Israel, although he knew that there was sin in the camp and it was rampant, and eventually Moab got Israel involved in the worship of sacrifices.

I believe this is before the book of Ruth starts, so Elimelech “my God is king”, representing Jehovah to them, certainly knew of this history. It must have been at a time when Moab was not an oppressor of the land of Israel, as we read in the first few chapters of Judges, but it was at a later time.

Well 10 years seems a short time when you read it in a case like this. Within 10 years, Elimelech is no more, he’s out of the scene, the two sons have married, Moabitish wives, and they are out of the scene, and the mother, whose name is Naomi, and whose story occupies most of the first chapter of this book, four chapters, is sorry for herself, and is complaining about the Lord’s dealings with her. Her name, incidentally, means pleasant. And she names herself Mara, which means bitter, and she has bitter thoughts about the Lord. She went out full, and is returning empty.

But of course the highlight in the first chapter is the remarkable conversion of Ruth. Although Naomi certainly was no evangelist, just the opposite, she begged her daughters-in-law to return, and though there’s the two scenes of weeping in this chapter, the success of her plea that they return to their land and to their gods, just think of it, false gods, what a recommendation for any child of God as Naomi was. But Ruth, whose name is “beauty,” or it’s usually accepted that that’s a fair meaning of the name, certainly is beautiful in character. And that’s what we’re here to try to develop this evening.

Along with the historic picture and the way in which it is a type of the nation of Israel that is still to be returned to the land of Israel and to become the first nation on earth, in the time of the Lord’s reign over the earth, this conversion of hers, this statement is one of the highlights in literature, as well as in Scriptures. I don’t think you could improve on this beautiful language, the highlight of which is that she says that “your God will be my God” [Ruth 1:16].

That’s the secret of conversion, isn’t it. The Apostle told the Thessalonians that they had turned to God from idols, exactly what Ruth is doing here. And she becomes, with this declaration she becomes more of an Israelite than thousands of the Israelites who were born that way. They were Israelites by natural birth, she is an Israelite by chosen birth, she is by spiritual birth. She becomes more of an Israelite than they. And that’s why I believe the prohibition of the Moabite not coming into the congregation of the Lord is thereby avoided. That’s cancelled, because she is now an Israelite, she has Israel’s God. “Where thou diest will I die,” the seventeenth verse, “there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.”

And she little knew what she was getting into. And that’s one of the things about conversion. True conversion doesn’t bring us into a palace. It links us with a king, true, but we still have our lives to live in this scene, and the Lord has experiences to tell us. I think I’ve often mentioned that when we

become Christians we enter the school of God. That seems strange, doesn't it. You have everything, you're from abject poverty to immense riches, as II Corinthians 8:9 tells us. he became poor that we might be enriched. But we have a time here on earth to learn more about what we are. We knew that we were sinners, but we didn't realize how bad we were. How great sinners; that's one of the things we have to learn, that but for the constant power of God that keeps us, brings us into the final salvation, that's ours, but for that grace we would fall by the wayside. We wouldn't lose our salvation, but just think of how many who once were bright Christians, that knew the Lord, that loved the Lord, that were interested in him, read his word every day, prayed, and witnessed, and lived a Christian life, lived a life pleasing to the Lord, how they've fallen by the wayside. Where are they? They've gone back, like Orpah, to their gods, because everyone has to have something they worship, something they look to above themselves.

Well the second chapter of Ruth is the story of the application of Ruth to her position. She didn't come back to wealth, she came back to poverty. They'd heard that there was bread in Bethlehem, and Bethlehem means the house of bread; strange isn't it that Elimelech and his family should have wandered away from that. Certainly there was no prayer there, there was no divine guidance about that. David in one of his Psalms says, and I believe he's just giving us the gist of what the Lord's mind was there, he says dwell in the land, and do good; so shalt thou be fed. [Psalm 37:3] If we are interested in divine feeding, I'm sure the Lord will supply it. This book, this letter that God has written for us, this history, this appeal, this tale of man's life, what man has done with what God has given him, What a failure he's made of it. How he's forsaken and forgotten God. All of this should be, is, our food on which the Christian should feed and get sustenance. And the Spirit of God will take of the things that are in this book, this letter that God has written, and make them good to us. They will be spiritual food, they'll grow. "Desire the sincere milk of the word" the apostle Peter tells us, "that you may grow thereby" [I Peter 2:2].

Well, the second chapter of Ruth is the story of Boaz. It's also Ruth, but only Ruth in a small capacity. Ruth, immediately after she is accepted in Bethlehem, the house of bread, just like the birds, you want food you've got to go get it. No one is going to put it in your mouth. And so Ruth takes advantage of what the Lord had previously provided, in the 19th chapter of Leviticus, in the ninth verse, we're told that the Israelite was to leave a part of his field un gleaned. He was to see that the poor and the stranger had something to get from him. In that way he was a contributor to the alleviation of distress, was a divine provision. But what is remarkable is not that Ruth did this, took advantage of this provision of God, but that she should happen to light, it's a remarkable expression but you can see how God was in it, her hap was to light on a portion of the field that belonged to Boaz. Boaz, as we learn from the first verse of the second chapter, is a near kinsman of Elimelech, not Naomi, but he is a kinsman of Elimelech. And therefore there is hope for Naomi and Ruth, although apparently Naomi didn't realize this at the time because in the end of the book of Deuteronomy provision is made for the raising up of a family who had lost all the males, and also for those who had sold their land because of poverty, that land was to be redeemed.

And so you have the maintenance of the family, and the return of their property. What a remarkable thing. There's never been anything like this in any nation that I've ever heard of. In all the Gentile nations, if you were poor, you could be a slave. But here was the divine provision, in the 25th chapter, and the 23rd chapter of Deuteronomy you'll find these provisions made, for the sustenance of the

Israelite even though he had run across bad times. And that's of course what the book of Ruth is about. And she is of course in the geneology of the Lord himself, one of the four women, three of them Gentiles. Remarkable, isn't it, that out of the nation of which Abraham was the father, of which he was the progenitor, that into that line creeps three persons, who are to be in that long line that brought into being the savior of the world.

Well, you'd have to read the whole of this chapter to get an idea of the kindness, and the consideration, of the wonderful character of Boaz. Boaz' name means "in him is strength." He is the power of God. And there's one correction that I'd like to make: in the very first verse of this second chapter, it's that Boaz is described as a mighty man of wealth. Now if you'll look that word wealth up in your concordance, look it up in the Greek, you'll find that that word wealth is the same word that's used of Naaman. Naaman the Syrian is described as a mighty man of valor, though he was a leper. That's the difference here. Boaz, here, is a perfect character of the Lord himself, the one who is the kinsman-redeemer, the one who redeems everything. Creation, every single being, he's purchased it by his blood.

Boaz is only a type of Him, because Boaz didn't make any sacrifice. He probably spent some of his money to redeem this property, and he gained a wonderful wife as a result of it, and through her was brought into being a son who was to be the grandfather of David, so that she comes into the kingly line. You see how the name "my God is king" is perpetuated in the story of Ruth.

Well the remarkable character of Ruth comes out here. She gleans in the field; she keeps after the reapers, and she gathers the grain, and at the end of the day, if you read it you'll see that she must have been a very diligent person, and this is the true character, where she is an example for us Christians. She had diligence. She worked hard for this food. It wasn't easy; she had to provide for two: for herself and her mother-in-law. And this was only to continue as long as the harvest was there. As soon as the harvest was over, there was no more food.

And the words of Boaz are really wonderful; I should read them, I shouldn't pass over them. I think that the words of Boaz in the eleventh verse are worth reading, worth considering. Boaz, after finding out who this person is that is gleaning in his field, tells her to go on reaping, and to stay in that field, and to be protected there. Because what she did was a rather dangerous thing. There would be no love lost between the Israelites and a Moabitess, and so she might have been molested, but just notice, in addition to her diligence, the attitude she takes, after being assured of food, and water. "she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said to him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?"

That was the right attitude, wasn't it. That's the attitude that God likes. He tells us that in the end of the book of Isaiah. The Lord loves the humble, the contrite, those that tremble, those that have reverence for his word [Isaiah 66:2]. He comes to them, he dwells with them. It's remarkable, isn't it. If you'd like to look up some very inspiring words you would find them in the 63rd chapter and the 66th chapter of Isaiah. I recommend reading them; they give, really, an expression of the heart of God.

Boaz answers this woman that's lying on the ground there, and wondering why he should take knowledge of her. It was nice enough for him to allow her to glean in his field, but then to take notice of her, assure her of his protection and friendship. He said "It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done to thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art 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” [Ruth 2:11-12]. This is a remarkable expression, and Ruth uses it, and David uses it. It’s in the 91st Psalm, and several other places, “under whose wings thou art come to trust.” I think the Lord also used it. He used it in connection with his ??? of farewell to Jerusalem, when he said “how often would I have gathered thy people under my wings, as a chicken does, and you would not” [Luke 13:34].

And here, Boaz, type of Christ, type of the Lord himself, uses those very expressions. and Ruth, in the next chapter, remarkably, she speaks when she is at Boaz’s feet, at night there, a picture of the way that the nation of Israel will creep to the Lord’s feet in the day to come, when they realize that here is the Messiah, here is the person we crucified. It will be a wonderful time for them. And Ruth says there “do not spread thy skirt over thy handmaid, but spread thy wings.” She was claiming his protection.

(I wonder what this stone is? I guess that’s the one that Mr. Schultz used the other day. We ought to remove this; I could use that against somebody not paying any attention.)

But this condition that we find Ruth and Boaz in, his being the protector, his watching over her, and telling his men, this is one of the remarkable expressions in the book, “Let some of the handfuls of purpose” some of the handfuls on purpose, handfuls of grain that she needed for her food, I think that’s in the 16th verse “And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean, and rebuke her not.” So that in addition to what she was gleaning, she was getting some from Boaz, she was getting extra material. Reminds me of Solomon, who not only gave the queen of Sheba all that she asked for, but gave her in addition out of his royal bounty.

Truly the Lord is good. And just think of the time when he was here on earth. He fed 5000 on one occasion, and 4000, although I believe it was more. The women and children were not counted. But there were two occasions where there were much, an abundance left over. And this is the way with God, isn’t it. There’s far more that he has to give than we could possibly receive. Open the windows of Heaven, he said he would open the windows of Heaven, that there would not be room enough to receive it. [Genesis 7:11] [II Kings 7:2, 19].

I sometimes think of that verse when we have a heavy rain. We had one the other night; it woke me up at something like two in the morning. It was remarkable; it was just like a cloudburst, lasted just for a few moments. But have you ever thought that if God didn’t restrain the rain, it’s millions of tons of water up above us, if God didn’t restrain the rain, we would be drowned. This could very easily happen, but he is the creator and he is the sustainer of the universe. He preserves everything in order.

Yes, Ruth, in this humble condition, at the feet of Boaz, to thank him, to wonder why he should take notice of her. I think that’s an apt place for us, too. Why should God ever have paid any attention to us. Even those of us that have experienced something of the grace of God, and we’ve been preserved all these years, what return have we made to him for all his love? What have we got to say for ourselves? At the very best, he told his disciples, when you’ve done everything just say you’re unprofitable servants. And that’s I believe pictured in this attitude of Ruth, humility.

The same thing happened with David and Mephibosheth. David remembered that he’d had a covenant with Jonathan, and it occurs to him one day, oh, I haven’t kept that promise, So he says is there is anyone left of the house of Saul that I could show the kindness of God to him. Yes, they tell him,

there's one, Mephibosheth. As a young baby he was dropped by his nurse, or someone, and he's lame on both his feet. Bring him. Mephibosheth is brought and he just cowers like a poor person expecting death at any minute. David sets him at ease, and gives him the highest place he could, a place at his table. Now a crippled person is not a nice sight to see; none of us I imagine could fall in love with a crippled person. They may have wonderful character, and I'm sure they do, some of them, but there's something about their handicap that doesn't appeal to us. We might be in the same position ourselves, some day. There's no telling when you get into a car today whether you're going to get out the same way you went in; very easily could run into an accident that could cripple you. There was an article just on that some years ago in the Readers Digest. There's no guarantee. And so I think these folks that just ride the rods as fast as they can, jam on the brakes, and so on, they're playing with death. One of these days when they hit something or be hit, then life will be different.

Well that's aside from the point, isn't it. Ruth, diligent, and now in the third chapter we read something that I don't think is provided for in the word of God, this was Naomi's idea. Although I think she has advanced from the position she took in the first chapter, and the gratitude she must have felt for the service of Boaz to Ruth, and for the kindness of Ruth to her in supplying her with food, but she has the idea that by nudging Boaz, now, although he is not the nearest of kin, he's only one of the kinsmen, that this will bring about the restoration of the inheritance. That was very important.

Well, Ruth I imagine at first must have thought this was strange that she should do this daring thing, uncover the blanket of a man that's not her husband, lie at his feet, but she did it. And that's one of the lessons we have to learn, and I'm afraid most of us will only learn it in a small part. That is that God's word calls for obedience. If we want to be blessed to the full, there must be a greater measure of obedience than we're accustomed to giving. I think a great many of us are accustomed to take the word of God, that part of it that appeals to us, that we like, that suits us, and that we'll obey. But anything that's a little difficult, that we just think is a little inconvenient, or repulsive, or two demanding, that we can very easily find an excuse for not obeying.

Well I believe this was something that must have been repugnant to Ruth, but it turned out that by obeying it, God used it for the rest that Naomi speaks about in the first verse. Notice, all this is predicated upon what is given us in the first verse of the third chapter, "My daughter, shall I not seek rest" or a resting place "for thee, that it may be well with thee?" [Ruth 3:1] And so the rest of the chapter is the story of what happened. And you can see how it could have been misinterpreted by anyone who knew it, This was a private thing; Boaz so treats it. "Let it not be known that a woman came into" [Ruth 3:14] his chamber, is it, but notice how all this is kept on a high plane. When Boaz is reminded of the fact that he could be a kinsman, he could do the work of a kinsman-redeemer, he says "now, my daughter," verse 11, "fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman."

You see there was nothing of an immoral, or a difficult, or uncertain character here. And again he provides more food, which is something that we can appreciate, from our Boaz, the Lord Jesus Christ, whenever we need it, whenever we're in the position of requiring food, it is his graciousness, it is his kindness to provide it for us. "Go not empty to thy mother in law." Then Naomi said, "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."

Then the fourth chapter goes on to the conclusion of this. The nearer kinsman, that should have been the one that would have been applied to, for Ruth, for the restoration of Naomi's property, her inheritance, and for the name of ELI and his family, that should have been taken up with the nearer kinsman. But Boaz goes to him and tells him of the circumstance, "If thou wilt redeem it," verse 4, "redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And the nearer kinsman said, "I will redeem it." But he didn't know the circumstances.

And this has often been likened to the condition of Israel before the coming of Christ. When the Law was given, you remember the ten commandments on the tables of stone, the first time when Moses came down from the mount he immediately broke them, for the very first one had been broken, the first law. The first of the ten commandments was broken, "thou shalt have no other God beside me." Here they were worshipping the gods that they had seen in Egypt, and were ready to go back there. So then Moses went back again and a lesser, a new method, instead of 100% law, God mixed law with grace. and the ten commandments were again given, but there was grace with it. And the condition of life and blessing was that Israel was to keep this new law, mixed with law and grace, as a condition of life and blessing. If they didn't do that, if they didn't keep that law, if they turned away from God, it would be their death, and a curse. And the condition of course was an impossible one to meet. But it was the condition under which Israel lived until the cross of Christ, until Calvary. And since Calvary, that has been abolished. There's no one made righteous now by the deeds of the law; it's only by faith in the work of Christ. How fortunate we are that we weren't born in the days of which we're reading. It's beautiful to read it and see how the grace of God overcame the sin and the failure of man, of God's people, but it's certainly nice to think that God is treating us, has treated us, now for 1900 years, on the mildest, the simplest, the easiest terms that man could ever have. That's just by simple faith in Christ.

Abraham had that. Abraham was told to look at the stars. Can you count them? No. So shall thy seed be. That is your descendants shall equal the number of these stars. Of course it was an unknown number. Today we talk about billions of galaxies, let alone billions of stars, but Abraham's faith was such that he believed God. You see, he didn't reason. Reasoning would have told him that's impossible. And that's the same way with us. God tells the sinner that if you believe on my Son, put your faith in him, you'll have a new life. You'll have eternal life, your sins will be forgiven, you'll have a place in heaven, your name will be written in the Book of Life. All of that, and much more.

But I believe today, there's more people that disbelieve that than there were people in Israel that were against the promises of God. And so we have this wonderful story that ends with the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, and the issue, a son, in time, who becomes Naomi's son. She treats him as her son, her new life. This is a picture of Israel in the day to come, when they are joined again to the Lord. "Thy maker is thy husband" [Isaiah 54:5] Isaiah tells us. And God will forgive them their sins. They will turn to him, just as Ruth did, and really accept him as their God. And hearing today of Jewish people, how they still hate the person of Jesus Christ, have no use for him, treat him as a traitor, as a deceiver, a false prophet. And I suppose even committing the unpardonable sin, that of treating his work, the works he did here on earth to attest his Deity as the work of Satan, the prince of the demons. That portrays a state of heart God cannot forgive. To link God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit as being the work of Satan, that betrays a state that God cannot forgive.

Well, I should reinforce the statements that I've made about the heir and the inheritance by reading the two passages in Leviticus 25:25 you don't need to look at it, I'll just read it quickly. "If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold." You see this is just exactly what Naomi did. She sold the property; being poor, there was nothing else she could do, hoping that this would come into play. And it did.

And the other is about the inheritance, in Deuteronomy 25. "If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without" or outside, "to a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in to her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother to her" [Deuteronomy 25:5]. And so on.

So that, in three occasions, the lot of Ruth and Naomi were covered by divine provisions. And so, I believe this book was written, it's sort of a transition between the end of the book of Judges and the beginning of the book of Samuel, which introduces us to the kingly line. Israel desired a king. They had turned their backs upon God. They wanted to be like the rest of the nations, and God gave them the man of their choice. He gave them a tall, strapping fellow, a beautiful specimen of manhood, Saul. And Saul did well for the first part of his 40 years. But he disobeyed, and gradually, continually, consistently, his kingship became a matter of oppression of the people of Israel.

[END OF TAPE]