

CHAPTER 2

There is scarcely any chapter in all the sacred history that stoops so low as this to take cognizance of so mean a person as Ruth, a poor Moabitish widow, so mean an action as her gleaning corn in a neighbour's field, and the minute circumstances thereof. But all this was in order to her being grafted into the line of Christ and taken in among his ancestors, that she might be a figure of the espousals of the Gentile church to Christ, ^{<250>}Isaiah 54:1. This makes the story remarkable; and many of the passages of it are instructive and very improvable. Here we have,

- I.** Ruth's humility and industry in gleaning corn, Providence directing her to Boaz's field (v. 1-3).
- II.** The great favour which Boaz showed to her in many instances (v. 4-16).
- III.** The return of Ruth to her mother-in-law (v. 18-23).

<RTH> RUTH 2:1-3

RUTH IN THE FIELD OF BOAZ

Naomi had now gained a settlement in Bethlehem among her old friends; and here we have an account,

I. Of her rich kinsman, Boaz, *a mighty man of wealth*, v. 1. The Chaldee reads it, *mighty in the law*. If he was both, it was a most rare and excellent conjunction, to be mighty in wealth and mighty in the scriptures too; those that are so are mighty indeed. He was grandson of Nahshon, who was prince of the tribe of Judah in the wilderness, and son of Salmon, probably a younger son, by Rahab, the harlot of Jericho. He carries might in his name, *Boaz* — *in him is strength*; and he was of the family of Elimelech, that family which was now reduced and brought so low. Observe, 1. Boaz, though a rich and great man, had poor relations. Every branch of the tree is not a top-branch. Let not those that are great in the world be ashamed to own their kindred that are mean and despised, lest they be found therein proud, scornful, and unnatural.

2. Naomi, though a poor contemptible widow, had rich relations, whom yet she boasted not of, nor was burdensome to, nor expected any thing from when she returned to Bethlehem in distress. Those that have rich relations, while they themselves are poor, ought to know that it is the wise providence of God that makes the difference (in which we ought to acquiesce), and that to be proud of our relation to such is a great sin, and to trust to it is great folly.

II. Of her poor daughter-in-law, Ruth.

1. Her condition was very low and poor, which was a great trial to the faith and constancy of a young proselyte. The Bethlehemites would have done well if they had invited Naomi and her daughter-in-law first to one good house and then to another (it would have been a great support to an aged widow and a great encouragement to a new convert); but, instead of tasting the dainties of Canaan, they have no way of getting necessary food but by gleaning corn, and otherwise, for aught that appears, they might have starved. Note, *God has chosen the poor of this world*; and poor they are likely to be, for, though God has chosen them, commonly men overlook them.

2. Her character, in this condition, was very good (v. 2): *She said to Naomi*, not, “Let me now go to the land of Moab again, for there is no living here, here there is want, but *in my father's house there is bread enough*.” No, she is *not mindful of the country from which she came out*, otherwise she had now a fair occasion to return. The God of Israel shall be her God, and, though he slay her, yet will she trust in him and never forsake him. But her request is, *Let me go to the field, and glean ears of corn*. Those that are well born, and have been well brought up, know not what straits they may be reduced to, nor what mean employments they may be obliged to get their bread by, ²⁰¹⁵Lamentations 4:5. When the case is thus melancholy, let Ruth be remembered, who is a great example,

(1.) Of humility. When Providence had made her poor she did not say, “To glean, which is in effect to beg, I am ashamed,” but cheerfully stoops to the meanness of her circumstances and accommodates herself to her lot. High spirits can more easily starve than stoop; Ruth was none of those. She does not tell her mother she was never brought up to live upon crumbs. Though she was not brought up to it, she is brought down to it, and is not uneasy at it. Nay, it is her own motion, not her mother's injunction. Humility is one

of the brightest ornaments of youth, and one of the best omens. Before Ruth's honour was this humility. Observe how humbly she speaks of herself, in her expectation of leave to glean: Let me glean after him *in whose sight I shall find grace*. She does not say, "I will go and glean, and surely nobody will deny me the liberty," but, "I will go and glean, in the hope that somebody will allow me the liberty." Note, Poor people must not demand kindness as a debt, but humbly ask it, and take it as a favour, though in ever so small a matter. It becomes the poor to use entreaties.

(2.) Of industry. She does not say to her mother-in-law, "Let me now go a visiting to the ladies of the town, or go a walking in the fields to take the air and be merry; I cannot sit all day moping with you." No, it is not sport, but business, that her heart is upon: "*Let me go and glean ears of corn, which will turn to some good account.*" She was one of those virtuous women that love not to eat the bread of idleness, but love to take pains. This is an example to young people. Let them learn betimes to labour, and, *what their hand finds to do, do it with their might*. A disposition to diligence bodes well both for this world and the other. Love not sleep, love not sport, love not sauntering; but love business. It is also an example to poor people to work for their living, and not beg that which they are able to earn. We must not be shy of any honest employment, though it be mean, *ergon ouden oneidos* — *No labour is a reproach*. Sin is a thing below us, but we must not think any thing else so That Providence calls us to.

(3.) Of regard to her mother. Though she was but her mother-in-law, and though, being loosed by death from the law of her husband, she might easily suppose herself thereby loosed from the law of her husband's mother, yet she is dutifully observant of her. She will not go out without letting her know and asking her leave. This respect young people ought to show to their parents and governors; it is part of the honour due to them. She did not say, "Mother, if you will go with me, I will go glean;" but, "Do you sit at home and take your ease, and I will go abroad, and take pains." *Juniores ad labores* — *Youth should work*. Let young people take advice from the aged, but not put them upon toil.

(4.) Of dependence upon Providence, intimated in that, I will *glean after him in whose sight I shall find grace*. She knows not which way to go, nor whom to enquire for, but will trust Providence to raise her up some friend or other that will be kind to her. Let us always keep us good thoughts of the divine providence, and believe that while we do well it will do well for

us. And it did well for Ruth; for when she went out alone, without guide or companion, to glean, *her hap was to light on the field of Boaz*, v. 3. To her it seemed casual. She knew not whose field it was, nor had she any reason for going to that more than any other, and therefore it is said to be *her hap*; but Providence directed her steps to this field. Note, God wisely orders small events; and those that seem altogether contingent serve his own glory and the good of his people. Many a great affair is brought about by a little turn, which seemed fortuitous to us, but was directed by Providence with design.

⌘ RUTH 2:4-16

RUTH IN THE FIELD OF BOAZ

Now Boaz himself appears, and a great deal of decency there appears in his carriage both towards his own servants and towards this poor stranger.

I. Towards his own servants, and those that were employed for him in reaping and gathering in his corn. Harvest-time is busy time, many hands must then be at work. Boaz that had much, being a mighty man of wealth, had much to do, and consequently many to work under him and to live upon him. *As goods are increased those are increased that eat them, and what good has the owner thereof save the beholding of them with his eyes?* Boaz is here an example of a good master.

1. He had a servant that was set over the reapers, v. 6. In great families it is requisite there should be one to oversee the rest of the servants, and appoint to each their portion both of work and meat. Ministers are such servants in God's house, and it is requisite that they be both wise and faithful, and *show their Lord all things*, as he here, v. 6.

2. Yet he came himself to his reapers, to see how the work went forward, if he found any thing amiss to rectify it, and to give further orders what should be done. This was both for his own interest (he that wholly leaves his business to others will have it done by the halves; the master's eye makes a fat horse) and it was also for the encouragement of his servants, who would go on the more cheerfully in their work when their master countenanced them so far as to make them a visit. Masters that live at ease

should think with tenderness of those that toil for them and bear the burden and heat of the day.

3. Kind and pious salutations were interchanged between Boaz and his reapers.

(1.) He said to them, *The Lord be with you;* and they replied, *The Lord bless thee*, v. 4. Hereby they expressed,

[1.] Their mutual respect to each other; he to them as good servants, and they to him as a good master. When he came to them he did not fall a chiding them, as if he came only to find fault and exercise his authority, but he prayed for them: "*The Lord be with you, prosper you, and give you health and strength, and preserve you from any disaster.*" Nor did they, as soon as ever he was out of hearing, fall a cursing him, as some ill-natured servants that hate their master's eye, but they returned his courtesy: "*The Lord bless thee, and make our labours serviceable to thy prosperity.*" Things are likely to go on well in a house where there is such good-will as this between master and servants.

[2.] Their joint-dependence upon the divine providence. They express their kindness to each other by praying one for another. They show not only their courtesy, but their piety, and acknowledgement that all good comes from the presence and blessing of God, which therefore we should value and desire above any thing else both for ourselves and others.

(2.) Let us hence learn to use,

[1.] Courteous salutations, as expressions of a sincere good-will to our friends.

[2.] Pious ejaculations, lifting up our hearts to God for his favour, in such short prayers as these. Only we must take heed that they do not degenerate into formality, lest in them we *take the name of the Lord our God in vain;* but, if we be serious in them, we may in them keep up our communion with God, and fetch in mercy and grace from him. It appears to have been the usual custom thus to wish reapers good speed, ^{<4090>}Psalm 129:7, 8.

4. He took an account from his reapers concerning a stranger he met with in the field, and gave necessary orders concerning her, that they should not touch her (v. 9) nor reproach her, v. 15. Masters must take care, not only that they do no hurt themselves, but that they suffer not their servants and

those under them to do hurt. He also ordered them to be kind to her, and *let fall some of the handfuls on purpose for her*. Though it is fit that masters should restrain and rebuke their servants' wastefulness, yet they should not tie them up from being charitable, but give them allowance for that, with prudent directions.

II. Boaz was very kind to Ruth, and showed her a great deal of favour, induced to it by the account he had of her, and what he observed concerning her, God also inclining his heart to countenance her. Coming among his reapers, he observed this stranger among them, and got intelligence from his steward who she was, and here is a very particular account of what passed concerning her.

1. The steward gave to Boaz a very fair account of her, proper to recommend her to his favour, v. 6, 7.

(1.) That she was a stranger, and therefore one of those that by the law of God were to *gather the gleanings of the harvest*, ~~GEN~~ Leviticus 19:9, 10. She is the Moabitish damsel.

(2.) That she was allied to his family; she came back with Naomi, the wife of Elimelech, a kinsman of Boaz.

(3.) That she was a proselyte, for she came out of the country of Moab to settle in the land of Israel.

(4.) That she was very modest, and had not gleaned till she had asked leave.

(5.) That she was very industrious, and had continued close to her work from morning even until now. And the poor that are industrious and willing to take pains are fit to be encouraged. Now, in the heat of the day, she tarried a little in the house or booth that was set up in the field for shelter from the weather to repose herself, and some suggest that it is probably she retired for her devotion. But she soon came back to her work, and, except that little intermission, kept close to it all day, though it was not what she had been used to. Servants should be just in the character and reports they give to their masters, and take heed they do not misrepresent any person, nor without cause discourage their master's charity.

2. Boaz was hereupon extremely civil to her in divers instances.

(1.) He ordered her to attend his reapers in every field they gathered in and not to glean in the field of another, for she should not need to go any where else to better herself (v. 8): *Abide here fast by my maidens*; for those of her own sex were the fittest company for her.

(2.) He charged all his servants to be very tender of her and respectful to her, and no doubt they would be so to one to whom they saw their master kind. She was a stranger, and it is probably her language, dress, and mien differed much from theirs; but he charged them that they should not in any thing affront her, or be abusive to her, as rude servants are too apt to be to strangers.

(3.) He bade her welcome to the entertainment he had provided for his own servants. He ordered her, not only to drink of the water which was drawn for them (for that seems to be the liquor he means, v. 9, drawn from the famous well of Beth-lehem which was by the gate, the water of which David longed for, ^{<BIB>}2 Samuel 23:15), but *at meal-time to come and eat of their bread* (v. 14), yea, and she should be welcome to their sauce too: *Come, dip thy morsel in the vinegar*, to make it savoury; for God allows us not only nourishing but relishing food, not for necessity only, but for delight. And for encouragement o her, and direction to the servants, he himself, happening to be present when the reapers sat down to meat, *reached her parched corn* to eat. It is no disparagement to the finest hand to be *reached forth to the needy* (^{<BIB>}Proverbs 31:20), and to be employed in serving the poor. Observe, Boaz was not scanty in his provision for his reapers, but sent them so much more than enough for themselves as would be entertainment for a stranger. Thus *there is that scattereth and yet increaseth*.

(4.) He commended her for her dutiful respect to her mother-in-law, which, though he did not know her by sight, yet he had heard of (v. 11): *It has been fully shown me all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law*. Note, Those that do well ought to have the praise of it. But that which especially he commended her for was that she had left her own country, and had become a proselyte to the Jewish religion; for so the Chaldee expounds it: “Thou hast come to be proselyted, and to dwell among *a people whom thou knowest not*.” Those that leave all, to embrace the true religion, are worthy of double honour.

(5.) He prayed for her (v. 12): *The Lord recompense thy work*. Her strong affection to the commonwealth of Israel, to which she was by birth an

alien, was such a work of the divine grace in her as would certainly be crowned with a full reward by him *under whose wings she had come to trust*. Note, Those that by faith come under the wings of the divine grace, and have a full complacency and confidence in that grace, may be sure of a full recompence of reward for their so doing. From this expression, the Jews describe a proselyte to be one that is *gathered under the wings of the divine majesty*.

(6.) He encouraged her to go on in her gleaning, and did not offer to take her off from that; for the greatest kindness we can do our poor relations is to assist and encourage their industry. Boaz ordered his servants to let her glean among the sheaves, where other gleaners were not allowed to come, and not to reproach her, that is, not to call her *thief*, or to suspect her of taking more than was allowed her, v. 15. All this shows Boaz to have been a man of a generous spirit, and one that, according to the law, considered the heart of a stranger.

3. Ruth received his favours with a great deal of humility and gratitude, and conducted herself with as much propriety in her place as he did himself in his, but little thinking that she should shortly be the mistress of that field she was now gleaning in.

(1.) She paid all possible respect to him, and gave him honour, according to the usage of the country (v. 10): *She fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground*. Note, Good breeding is a great ornament to religion; and we must render *honour to whom honour is due*.

(2.) She humbly owned herself unworthy of his favours: *“I am a stranger (v. 10) and not like one of thy handmaids (v. 13), not so well dressed nor so well taught, not so neat nor so handy.”* Note, It well becomes us all to think meanly of ourselves, and to take notice of that in ourselves which is diminishing, esteeming others better than ourselves.

(3.) She gratefully acknowledged his kindness to her; though it was no great expense to him, nor much more than what he was obliged to by the divine law, yet she magnifies and admires it: *Why have I found grace in thy eyes?* v. 10.

(4.) She begs the continuance of his good-will: *Let me find favour in thy sight* (v. 13), and owns that what he had said had been a cordial to her: *Thou hast comforted me, for that thou hast spoken friendly to me*. Those

that are great, and in high places, know not how much good they may do to their inferiors with a kind look or by speaking friendly to them; and so small an expense, one would think, they should not grudge, when it shall be put upon the score of their charity.

(5.) When Boaz gave her her dinner with his reapers she only ate so much as would suffice her, and left the rest, and immediately rose up to glean, v. 14, 15. She did not, under pretence either of her want or of her labour, eat more than was convenient for her, nor so much as to unfit her for work in the afternoon. Temperance is a friend to industry; and we must eat and drink to strengthen us for business, not to indispose us to it.

<1827> RUTH 2:17-23

RUTH'S REPORT TO NAOMI

Here,

I. Ruth finishes her day's work, v. 17.

1. She took care not to lose time, for she gleaned until evening. We must not be weary of well-doing, because in due season we shall reap. She did not make an excuse to sit still, or go home, till the evening. Let us *work the works of him that sent us, while it is day*. She scarcely used, much less did she abuse, the kindness of Boaz; for, though he ordered his servants to leave handfuls for her, she continued to glean the scattered ears.

2. She took care not to lose what she had gathered, but threshed it herself, that she might the more easily carry it home, and might have it ready for use. *The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting, and so loseth the benefit of it, but the substance of a diligent man is precious,* <1827>Proverbs 12:27. Ruth had gathered it ear by ear, but, when she had put it all together, it was an ephah of barley, about four pecks. Many a little makes a great deal. It is an encouragement to industry that in all labour, even that of gleaning, there is profit, but the *talk of the lips tendeth only to penury*. When she had got her corn into as little compass as she could, she took it up herself, and carried it into the city, though, had she asked them, it is likely some of Boaz's servants would have done that for her. We should study to be as little as possible troublesome to those that are kind to

us. She did not think it either too hard or too mean a service to carry her corn herself into the city, but was rather pleased with what she had gotten by her own industry, and careful to secure it; and let us thus take care that *we lose not those things which we have wrought*, which we have gained, ~~6008~~2 John 1:8.

II. She paid her respects to her mother-in-law, went straight home to her and did not go to converse with Boaz's servants, *showed her what she had gleaned*, that she might see she had not been idle.

1. She entertained her with what she had left of the good dinner Boaz had given her. She gave to her what she had reserved, after she was sufficed (v. 18), which refers to v. 14. If she had any thing better than another, her mother should have part with her. Thus, having shown industry abroad, she showed piety at home; so children's maintaining their parents is called (~~5108~~1 Timothy 5:4), and it is part of the honour due to them by the fifth commandment, ~~4156~~Matthew 15:6.

2. She gave her an account of her day's work, and how a kind providence had favoured her in it, which made it very comfortable to her; for the gleanings that a righteous man hath are better than the harvests of many wicked, ~~1576~~Psalms 37:16.

(1.) Naomi asked her where she had been: *Where hast thou gleaned to-day?* Note, Parents should take care to enquire into the ways of their children, how, and where, and in what company they spend their time. This may prevent many extravagancies which children, left to themselves, run into, by which they bring both themselves and their parents to shame. If we are not our brethren's, yet surely we are our children's keepers: and we know what a son Adonijah proved, that had never been chidden. Parents should examine their children, not to frighten nor discourage them, not so as to make them hate home or tempt them to tell a lie, but to commend them if they have done well, and with mildness to reprove and caution them if they have done otherwise. It is a good question for us to ask ourselves in the close of every day, "*Where have I gleaned to-day? What improvements have I made in knowledge and grace? What have I done or obtained that will turn to a good account?*"

(2.) Ruth gave her a particular account of the kindness she had received from Boaz (v. 19) and the hopes she had of further kindness from him, he having ordered her to attend his servants throughout all the harvest, v. 21.

Note, Children should look upon themselves as accountable to their parents and to those that are over them, and not think it a disparagement to them to be examined; let them *do that which is good*, and they shall have praise of the same. Ruth told her mother what kindness Boaz had shown her, that she might take some occasion or another to acknowledge it and return him thanks; but she did not tell her how Boaz had commended her, v. 11. Humility teaches us, not only not to praise ourselves, but not to be forward to publish others' praises of us.

(3.) We are here told what Naomi said to it.

[1.] She prayed heartily for him that had been her daughter's benefactor, even before she knew who it was (v. 19): *Blessed be he*, whoever he was, *that did take knowledge of thee*, shooting the arrow of prayer at a venture. But more particularly when she was told who it was (v. 20): *Blessed be he of the Lord*. Note, The poor must pray for those that are kind and liberal to them, and thus requite them, when they are not capable of making them any other requital. Let the loins of the poor bless those that refresh them, ^{<18913>}Job 29:13; 31:20. And he that hears the cries of the poor against their oppressors (^{<1227>}Exodus 22:27), it may be hoped, will hear the prayers of the poor for their benefactors. She now remembered the former kindnesses Boaz had shown to her husband and sons, and joins those to this: he has not *left off his kindness to the living and to the dead*. If we generously show kindness even to those that seem to have forgotten our former favours, perhaps it may help to revive the remembrance even of those which seem buried.

[2.] She acquainted Ruth with the relation their family was in to Boaz: *The man is near of kin to us*. It should seem she had been so long in Moab that she had forgotten her kindred in the land of Israel, till by this providence God brought it to her mind. At least she had not told Ruth of it, though it might have been some encouragement to a young proselyte. Unlike to humble Naomi are many, who, though fallen into decay themselves, are continually boasting of their great relations. Nay, Observe the chain of thought here, and in it a chain of providences, bringing about what was designed concerning Ruth. Ruth names Boaz as one that had been kind to her. Naomi bethinks herself who that should be, and presently recollects herself: *“The man is near of kin to us; now that I hear his name, I remember him very well.”* This thought brings in another: *“He is our next kinsman, our goel, that has the right to redeem our estate that was*

mortgaged, and therefore from him we may expect further kindness. He is the likeliest man in all Bethlehem to set us up.” Thus God brings things to our mind, sometimes on a sudden, that prove to have a wonderful tendency to our good.

[3.] She appointed Ruth to continue her attendance in the fields of Boaz (v. 22): “*Let them not meet thee in any other field*, for that will be construed a contempt of his courtesy.” Our blessed Saviour is our *Goel*; it is he that has a right to redeem. If we expect to receive benefit by him, let us closely adhere to him, and his fields, and his family; let us not go to the world and its fields for that which is to be had with him only, and which he has encouraged us to expect from him. Has the Lord dealt bountifully with us? Let us not be found in any other field, nor seek for happiness and satisfaction in the creature. Tradesmen take it ill if those that are in their books go to another shop. We lose divine favours if we slight them. Some think Naomi gave her daughter-in-law a tacit rebuke; she had spoken (v. 21) of keeping fast by the young *men*. “Nay,” said Naomi (v. 22), “*It is good that thou go out with his maidens; they are fitter company for thee than the young men.*” But they are too critical. Ruth spoke of the young men because they were the principal labourers, and to them Boaz had given directions concerning her; and Naomi takes it for granted that, while she attended the young men, her society would be with the maidens, as was fit. Ruth dutifully observed her mother's directions; she continued to glean, to the end, not only of barley-harvest, but of the wheat-harvest, which followed it, that she might gather food in harvest to serve for winter, ^{<106>}Proverbs 6:6-8. She also kept fast by the maidens of Boaz, with whom she afterwards cultivated an acquaintance, which might do her service, v. 23. But she constantly came to her mother at night in due time, as became a virtuous woman, that was for working days, and not for merry nights. And when the harvest was ended (as bishop Patrick expounds it) she did not gad abroad, but kept her aged mother company at home. Dinah went out to see the daughters of the land, and we know what a disgrace her vanity ended in. Ruth kept at home, and helped to maintain her mother, and went out on no other errand than to get provision for her, and we shall find afterwards what preferment her humility and industry ended in. *Seest thou a man diligent in his business?* Honour is before him.