

CHAPTER 3

We found it very easy, in the former chapter, to applaud the decency of Ruth's behaviour, and to show what good use we may make of the account given us of it; but in this chapter we shall have much ado to vindicate it from the imputation of indecency, and to save it from having an ill use made of it; but the goodness of those times was such as saved what is recorded here from being ill done, and yet the badness of these times is such as that it will not justify any now in doing the like. Here is,

- I.** The directions Naomi gave to her daughter-in-law how to claim Boaz for her husband (v. 1-5).
- II.** Ruth's punctual observance of those directions (v. 6, 7).
- III.** The kind and honourable treatment Boaz gave her (v. 8-15).
- IV.** Her return to her mother-in-law (v. 16-18).

~~<RTH>~~ RUTH 3:1-5

RUTH'S VISIT TO BOAZ

Here is,

I. Naomi's care for her daughter's comfort is without doubt very commendable, and is recorded for imitation. She had no thoughts of marrying herself, ~~<RTH>~~Ruth 1:12. But, though she that was old had resolved upon a perpetual widowhood, yet she was far from the thoughts of confining her daughter-in-law to it, that was young. Age must not make itself a standard to youth. On the contrary, she is full of contrivance how to get her well married. Her wisdom projected that for her daughter which her daughter's modesty forbade her to project for herself, v. 1. This she did

- 1.** In justice to the dead, to raise up seed to those that were gone, and so to preserve the family from being extinct.
- 2.** In kindness and gratitude to her daughter-in-law, who had conducted herself very dutifully and respectfully to her. "*My daughter*" (said she,

looking upon her in all respects as her own), “*shall I not seek rest for thee,*” that is, a settlement in the married state; “*shall I not get thee a good husband, that it may be well with thee,*” that is, “that thou mayest live plentifully and pleasantly, and not spend all thy days in the mean and melancholy condition we now live in?” Note,

(1.) A married state is, or should be, a state of rest to young people. Wandering affections are then fixed, and the heart must be at rest. It is at rest in the house of a husband, and in his heart, ~~(8009)~~ Ruth 1:9. Those are giddy indeed that marriage does not compose.

(2.) That which should be desired and designed by those that enter into the married state is *that it may be well with them*, in order to which it is necessary that they choose well; otherwise, instead of being a rest to them, it may prove the greatest uneasiness. Parents, in disposing of their children, must have this in their eye, *that it may be well with them*. And be it always remembered *that is best for us which is best for our souls*.

(3.) It is the duty of parents to seek this rest for their children, and to do all that is fit for them to do, in due time, in order to it. And the more dutiful and respectful they are to them, though they can the worse spare them, yet they should the rather prefer them, and the better.

II. The course she took in order to her daughter's preferment was very extraordinary and looks suspicious. If there was any thing improper in it, the fault must lie upon Naomi, who put her daughter upon it, and who knew, or should know, the laws and usages of Israel better than Ruth.

1. It was true that Boaz, being near of kin to the deceased, and (for aught that Naomi knew to the contrary) the nearest of all now alive, was obliged by the divine law to marry the widow of Mahlon, who was the eldest son of Elimelech, and was dead without issue (v. 2): “*Is not Boaz of our kindred, and therefore bound in conscience to take care of our affairs?*” This may encourage us to lay ourselves by faith at the feet of Christ, that he is our near kinsman; having taken our nature upon him, he is *bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh*.

2. It was a convenient time to remind him of it, now that he had got so much acquaintance with Ruth by her constant attendance on his reapers during the whole harvest, which was now ended; and he also, by the kindness he had shown to Ruth in smaller matters, had encouraged Naomi

to hope that he would not be unkind, much less unjust, in this greater. And she thought it was a good opportunity to apply to him when he made a winnowing-feast at his threshing-floor (v. 2), then and there completing the joy of the harvest, and treating his workmen like a kind master: *He winnoweth barley to-night*, that is, he makes his entertainment to-night. As Nabal and Absalom had feasts at their sheep-shearing, so Boaz at his winnowing.

3. Naomi thought Ruth the most proper person to do it herself; and perhaps it was the usage in that country that in this case the woman should make the demand; so much is intimated by the law, ^{<4807>}Deuteronomy 25:7-9. Naomi therefore orders her daughter-in-law to make herself clean and neat, not to make herself fine (v. 3): “*Wash thyself and anoint thee*, not paint thee (as Jezebel), put on thy raiment, but not the attire of a harlot, and go down to the floor,” whither, it is probable, she was invited to the supper there made; but she must not make herself known, that it, not make her errand known (she herself could not but be very well known among Boaz's reapers) till the company had dispersed and Boaz had retired. And upon this occasion she would have an easier access to him in private than she could have at his own house. And thus far was well enough. But, 4. Her coming to lie down at his feet, when he was asleep in his bed, had such an appearance of evil, was such an approach towards it, and might have been such an occasion of it, that we know not well how to justify it. Many expositors think it unjustifiable, particularly the excellent Mr. Poole. We must not to evil that good may come. It is dangerous to bring the spark and the tinder together; for how great a matter may a little fire kindle! All agree that it is not to be drawn into a precedent; neither our laws nor our times are the same that were then; yet I am willing to make the best of it. If Boaz was, as they presumed, the next kinsman, she was his wife before God (as we say), and there needed but little ceremony to complete the nuptials; and Naomi did not intend that Ruth should approach to him any otherwise than as his wife. She knew Boaz to be not only an old man (she would not have trusted to that alone in venturing her daughter-in-law so near him), but a grave sober man, a virtuous and religious man, and one that feared God. She knew Ruth to be a modest woman, *chaste, and a keeper at home*, ^{<4808>}Titus 2:5. The Israelites had indeed been once debauched by the daughters of Moab (^{<4809>}Numbers 25:1), but this Moabitess was none of those daughters. Naomi herself designed nothing but what was honest and honourable, and her charity (which *believeth all*

things and hopeth all things) banished and forbade all suspicion that either Boaz or Ruth would attempt any thing but what was likewise honest and honourable. If what she advised had been then as indecent and immodest (according to the usage of the country) as it seems now to us, we cannot think that if Naomi had had so little virtue (which yet we have no reason to suspect) she would also have had so little wisdom as to put her daughter upon it, since that alone might have marred the match, and have alienated the affections of so grave and good a man as Boaz from her. We must therefore think that the thing did not look so ill then as it does now. Naomi referred her daughter-in-law to Boaz for further directions. When she had thus made her claim, Boaz, who was more learned in the laws, would *tell her what she must do*. Thus must we lay ourselves at the feet of our Redeemer, to receive from him our doom. *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* ~~<4006>~~ Acts 9:6. We may be sure, if Ruth had apprehended any evil in that which her mother advised her to, she was a woman of too much virtue and too much sense to promise as she did (v. 5): *All that thou sayest unto me I will do*. Thus must *the younger submit to the elder*, and to their grave and prudent counsels, when they have nothing worth speaking of to object against it.

~~<4006>~~ RUTH 3:6-13

RUTH'S RECEPTION BY BOAZ

Here is,

I. Boaz's good management of his common affairs. It is probable, according to the common usage,

1. When his servants winnowed, he was with them, and had his eye upon them, to prevent, not their stealing any of his corn (he had no reason to fear that), but their waste of it through carelessness in the winnowing of it. Masters may sustain great losses by servants that are heedless, though they be honest, which is a reason why men should be diligent to *know the state of their own flocks*, and look well to them.

2. When he had more than ordinary work to be done, he treated his servants with extraordinary entertainments, and, for their encouragement, did *eat and drink with them*. It well becomes those that are rich and great

to be generous to, and also to be familiar with, those that are under them, and employed for them.

3. When Boaz had supped with his workmen, and been awhile pleasant with them, he *went to bed in due time*, so early that by midnight he had his first sleep (v. 8), and thus he would be fit for his business betimes next morning. All that are good husbands will keep good hours, and not indulge themselves nor their families in unseasonable mirth. The Chaldee paraphrase tell us (v. 7) that *Boaz ate and drank and his heart was good* (and so the Hebrew word is), *and he blessed the name of the Lord, who had heard his prayers, and taken away the famine from the land of Israel*. So that he went sober to bed, his heart was in a good frame, and not overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness. And he did not go to bed without prayer. Now that he had eaten and was full he blessed the Lord, and now that he was going to rest he committed himself to the divine protection; it was well he did, for he had an unusual temptation before him, though he knew not of it.

4. He had his bed or couch laid *at the end of the heap of corn*; not because he had set his heart upon it, nor only that he might watch and keep it safe from thieves, but it was too late to go home to the city, and here he would be near his work, and ready for it next morning, and he would show that he was not nice or curious in his lodging, neither took state nor consulted his ease, but was, like his father Jacob, a plain man, that, when there was occasion, could make his bed in a barn, and, if need were, sleep contentedly in the straw.

II. Ruth's good assurance in the management of her affair. She observed her mother's orders, went and laid herself down, not by his side, but overcross his bed's feet, in her clothes, and kept awake, waiting for an opportunity to tell her errand. When he awaked in the night, and perceived there was somebody at his feet, and enquired who it was, she told him her name and then her errand (v. 9), that she came to put herself under his protection, as the person appointed by the divine law to be her protector: "*Thou art he that has a right to redeem* a family and an estate from perishing, and therefore *let this ruin be under thy hand: and spread thy skirt over me* — be pleased to espouse me and my cause." Thus must we by faith apply ourselves to Jesus Christ as our next kinsman, that is able to redeem us, come under his wings, as we are invited (⁴²³⁷Matthew 23:37),

and beg of him to *spread his skirt over us*. “Lord Jesus, take me into thy covenant and under thy care. *I am oppressed, undertake for me.*”

III. The good acceptance Ruth gained with Boaz. What she did had no ill-effect, either one way or other, so that Naomi was not mistaken in her good opinion of her kinsman. He knew her demand was just and honourable, and treated her accordingly, and did not *deal with his sister as with a harlot*, ^{<0138>}Genesis 34:31. For,

1. He did not offer to violate her chastity, though he had all the opportunity that could be. The Chaldee paraphrase thus descants upon it: — He *subdued his concupiscence, and did not approach to her, but did as Joseph the Just, who would not come near to his Egyptian mistress, and as Phaltiel the Pious, who, when Saul had given him Michal, David's wife* (^{<0254>}1 Samuel 25:44), *put a sword between himself and her, that he might not touch her*. Boaz knew it was not any sinful lust that brought her thither, and therefore bravely maintained both his own honour and hers.

2. He did not put any ill construction upon what she did, did not reproach her as an impudent woman and unfit to make an honest man a wife. She having approved herself well in the fields, and all her conduct having been modest and decent, he would not, from this instance, entertain the least suspicion of her character nor seem to do so, perhaps blaming himself that he had not offered the service of a kinsman to these distressed widows, and saved her this trouble, and ready to say as Judah concerning his daughter-in-law, *She is more righteous than I*. But on the contrary,

(1.) He commended her, spoke kindly to her, called her his *daughter*, and spoke honourably of her, as a woman of eminent virtue. She had shown in this instance more kindness to her mother-in-law, and to the family into which she had matched, than in any instance yet. It was very kind to leave her own country and come along with her mother to the land of Israel, to dwell with her, and help to maintain her. For this he had blessed her (^{<0122>}Ruth 2:12); but now he says, Thou hast *shown more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning* (v. 10), in that she consulted not her own fancy, but her husband's family, in marrying again. She received not the addresses of *young men* (much less did she seek them) *whether poor or rich*, but was willing to marry as the divine law directed, though it was to an old man, because it was for the honour and interest of the family into which she had matched, and for which she had an entire kindness. Young

people must aim, in disposing of themselves, not so much to please their own eye as to please God and their parents.

(2.) He promised her marriage (v. 11): “*Fear not* that I will slight thee, or expose thee; no, *I will do all that thou requirest*, for it is the same that the law requires, from the next of kin, and I have no reason to decline it, *for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman*,” v. 11. Note,

[1.] Exemplary virtue ought to have its due praise (~~scribes~~ Philippians 4:8), and it will recommend both men and women to the esteem of the wisest and best. Ruth was a poor woman, and poverty often obscures the lustre of virtue; yet Ruth's virtues, even in a mean condition, were generally taken notice of and could not be hid; nay, her virtues took away the reproach of her poverty. If poor people be but good people, they shall have honour from God and man. Ruth had been remarkable for her humility, which paved the way to this honour. The less she proclaimed her own goodness the more did her neighbours take notice of it.

[2.] In the choice of yoke-fellows, virtue should especially be regarded, known approved virtue. Let religion determine the choice, and it will certainly crown the choice and make it comfortable. *Wisdom is better than gold*, and, when it is said to be *good with an inheritance*, the meaning is that an inheritance is worth little without it.

(3.) He made his promise conditional, and could not do otherwise, for it seems there was a kinsman that was nearer than he, to whom the right of redemption did belong, v. 12. This he knew, but we may reasonably suppose Naomi (who had been long abroad, and could not be exact in the pedigree of her husband's family) was ignorant of it, otherwise she would never have sent her daughter to make her claim of Boaz. Yet he does not bid her go herself to this other kinsman; this would have been to put too great a hardship upon her: but he promises,

[1.] That he would himself propose it to the other kinsman, and know his mind. The Hebrew word for a widow signifies *one that is dumb*. Boaz will therefore *open his mouth for the dumb* (~~scribes~~ Proverbs 31:8), and will say that for this widow which she knew not how to say for herself.

[2.] That, if the other kinsman refused to do the kinsman's part, he would do it, would marry the widow, redeem the land, and so repair the family.

This promise he backs with a solemn oath, for it was a conditional contract of marriage (v. 13): *As the Lord liveth*. Thus keeping the matter in suspense, he bade her wait till morning. Bishop Hall thus sums up this matter in his contemplations: — “Boaz, instead of touching her as a wanton, blesseth her as a father, encourageth her as a friend, promiseth her as a kinsman, rewards her as a patron, and sends her away laden with hopes and gifts, no less chaste, more happy, than she came. O admirable temperance, worthy the progenitor of him in whose lips and heart there was no guile!”

~~OXB4~~ RUTH 3:14-18

RUTH SENT BACK IN PEACE TO NAOMI

We are here told,

I. How Ruth was dismissed by Boaz. It would not have been safe for her to go home in the dead of the night; therefore *she lay at his feet* (not by his side) *until morning*. But as soon as ever the day broke, that she had light to go home by, she got away, *before one could know another*, that, if she were seen, yet she might not be known to be abroad so unseasonably. She was not shy of being known to be a gleaner in the field, nor ashamed of that mark of her poverty. But she would not willingly be known to be a night-walker, for her virtue was her greatest honour, and that which she most valued. Boaz dismissed her,

1. With a charge to keep counsel (v. 14): *Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor*, and lay all night so near to Boaz; for, though they needed not to care much what people said of them while they were both conscious to themselves of an unspotted purity, yet, because few could have come so near the fire as they did and not have been scorched, had it been known it would have occasioned suspicions in some and reflections from others. Good people would have been troubled, and bad people would have triumphed, and therefore *let it not be known*. Note, We must always take care, not only to keep a good conscience, but to keep a good name: either we must not do that which, though innocent, is liable to be misinterpreted, or, if we do, we must not *let it be known*. We must avoid not only sin, but scandal. There was likewise a particular reason for concealment here. If this matter should take wind, it might prejudice the

freedom of the other kinsman's choice, and he would make this his reason for refusing Ruth, that Boaz and she had been together.

2. He dismissed her with a good present of corn, which would be very acceptable to her poor mother at home, and an evidence for her that he had not sent her away in dislike, which Naomi might have suspected if he had sent her away empty. He gave it to her in her *veil*, or *apron*, or *mantle*, gave it to her by measure. Like a prudent corn-master, he kept an account of all he delivered out. It was *six measures*, that is six omers as is supposed, ten of which made an ephah; whatever the measure was, it is probable he gave her as much as she could well carry, v. 15. And the Chaldee says, *Strength was given her from the Lord to carry it*; and adds that now *it was told her by the spirit of prophecy that from her should descend six of the most righteous men of their age, namely, David, Daniel, his three companions, and the king Messiah.*

II. How she was welcomed by her mother-in-law. She asked her, “*Who art thou, my daughter? Art thou a bride or no? Must I give thee joy?*” So Ruth told her how the matter stood (v. 17), whereupon her mother,

1. Advised her to be satisfied in what was done: *Sit still, my daughter, till thou know how the matter will fall* (v. 18) — *how it is decreed in heaven*, so the Chaldee reads it, for marriages are made there. She had done all that was fit for her to do, and now she must patiently wait the issue and not be perplexed about it. Let us learn hence to cast our care upon providence, to follow that and attend the motions of it, composing ourselves into an expectation of the event, with a resolution to acquiesce in it, whatever it be. Sometimes that proves best done for us that is least our own doing. “*Sit still, therefore, and see how the matter will fall*, and say, Let it fall how it will, I am ready for it.”

2. She assured her that Boaz, having undertaken this matter, would approve himself a faithful careful friend: *He will not be at rest till he have finished the matter.* Though it was a busy time with him in his fields and his floor, yet, having undertaken to serve his friend, he would not neglect the business. Naomi believes that Ruth has won his heart, and that therefore he will not be easy till he knows whether she be his or no. This she gives as a reason why Ruth should sit still and not perplex herself about it, that Boaz had undertaken it, and he would be sure to manage it well. Much more reason have good Christians to be *careful for nothing*, but *cast*

their care on God, because he has promised to care for them: and what need have we to care if he do? Sit still, and see how the matter will fall, for the Lord will perfect that which concerns thee, and will make it to work for good to thee, ^{<13704>}Psalm 37:4, 5; 138:8. *Your strength is to sit still,* ^{<2310>}Isaiah 30:7.