

From GUILT to GLORY through GRACE

(A study in the Book of Ruth)

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History is crowded with dramatic surprises. The future of America was decided when the Mayflower weighed its anchor and sailed across the Atlantic. The destiny of Europe was determined when Paul and his companions crossed the Hellespont. The British Empire was born when Roman soldiers fought their way through the surf and clamored up the chalk cliffs of England. A link in the ancestry of our Lord was formed when Ruth the Moabites made her momentous decision, “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God shall be my God”.

The Book of Ruth, which forms the basis for this study, has its setting in the time of the Judges, a time when it was said: “Every man did that which was right in his own eyes: (Judg. 21:25). It was also a time of famine in the land of Canaan which was God’s way of punishment for the waywardness of his people. Had not the Lord warned the people through His servant Moses: “But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I commanded thee this day” ... then “Thy heaven that is over thee shall be brass and the earth that is under thee shall be iron” Deut. 28:15,23).

It is in such a time as this that a man, Elimelech, his wife Naomi, their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, go to sojourn in the land of Moab. They leave the land of the true God and go to the land of Chemosh the idol. The play upon the meaning of their names is very enlightening and intensely interesting. The name Elimelech means: “My God is King”. He leaves Bethlehem Judah, “The House of Bread” and “Praise” and goes to Moab in a time of famine. Naomi means “Pleasantness”. Mahlon means “sick” or “infirmity;” Chilion means “pining” or “wasting;” Orpah means “fawn;” Ruth means “beauty” or “satisfaction” and Boaz means “In him is strength”.

There are two books in the Bible that are named after women, Ruth and Esther. In Ruth a Gentile marries a Hebrew and in Esther a Jewess marries a Gentile. The truth that God wants to set forth here is that the Gentiles are to be blessed with His people Israel. This fact can be seen from such passages as Genesis 12:3; 18:18; Psalm 72:17; and Acts 3:25.

It is to this short book of Ruth that we shall now give our attention and see how marvelously God has set forth the truth of our subject. The overruling providence of God is seen on every page of this book. It is one of the marvels of nature that an oak and ultimately a fleet may be contained in one acorn. It is the marvel of God’s providence that David and Solomon, the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ were all resident in the verdict of Ruth.

Almighty God, through the person of Jesus Christ, has made possible all the conditions necessary for our redemption. This truth is brought forth here in Old Testament times, in spite of man's hopeless condition. God's love and grace can overrule man's hopelessness.

We shall see, first of all,

THE ERADICATION OF PAST GUILT

Ruth says of herself, "I am a stranger." No truer words were ever spoken, for Ruth was helpless, hapless, and above all hopeless. First of all the law was against her, for God had said "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of the Lord, even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord for ever" (Deut. 23:3). Then also, her own condition was against her. What portion could she have in Israel with a forfeited inheritance? She was without husband and without children. The sun had already set over her life in the land of Moab.

The Bible is specific about sin and guilt. It says: "They are all under sin; as it is written, there is none righteous, no not one" (Rom. 3:9-10). And again: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Or again: "Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). The condemnation of guilt rested upon the whole human race because of Adam's sin. But God dealt with this gruesome fact of man's guilt by making Christ sin for us: "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Ruth was no exception to the fact of sin and guilt. She was a member of Adam's fallen race; but God's love and grace can overrule and overcome every obstacle that lay in her way. However, man has a responsibility to accept or reject God's way. For Ruth, God's way of salvation in that day lay in the fact that she make her way to Bethlehem, and there enter into God's way of redemption. This fact is most moving and momentous.

She begins by making a decision. And Ruth said: "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people and thy God shall be my God" (Ruth 1:16). It has been well said that there are no words in any language so beautiful and yet so far-reaching as these. They are so artless, so exalted, so sincere, and so decisive. Here is faith in operation. Orpah like Lot's wife turned back and we hear of her no more. Spiritual life, experientially, begins with a very important decision and Ruth made that decision. Two things are to be noted about this momentous decision: it was first of all immediate and secondly, it was immutable. There was no hesitation, no doubt expressed, no faltering. It was immediate and decisive. Such should be our decision. And this immediate decision was also immutable. Her name was written down in the book of life above, and forever emblazoned on the pages of the Bible

This decision is then followed by a departure. It says: "So they two went together until they came to Bethlehem." This departure brings them from the land of Moab, a land of curse, to Bethlehem, the land of bread and the Christ. It was said of Moab: "Woe to thee, Moab, thou are

undone” (Numbers 21:29). The believer today must leave this present age system and enter into a citizenship in the Heavens with Christ. While we are in this world, we should never be of it. Ours should be an experience of “strangers and pilgrims” in this present world.

And finally we see that her departure issued out in sincere devotion. “And she went and came and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.” Thus we see that firm decision for God and His people and willing departure from the old life led to the path of duty and devotion and blessing. Ruth’s experience was comparable to the Psalmist’s when he says: “My soul thirsteth for thee,” then “My soul shall be satisfied,” and finally, “My soul followeth hard after thee” (Psa. 63:1,5,8). Her devotion now leads her to work in the field of the only one who was both willing and able to redeem her, and restore unto her the lost inheritance.

But not only does the Book of Ruth present to us an Eradication of Past Guilt, it also presents the:

EXERCISE OF PRESENT GRACE

“Why have I found grace in thine eyes” (Ruth 2:10)? “Let me find favor” (Ruth 2:13).

Paul tells us that “Being justified freely by His grace” (Rom. 3:24). The word “freely” here is the same word in the original translated “cause” in John 15:25, “They hated me without a cause”. As there was no cause in Christ why the Jews should hate Him; so there is no cause in us, no merit, no desert that He should love us and bestow His grace upon us.

Wiclif’s prayer is as expressive as it is quaint: “Lord, save me gratis.”

As it was all of grace in Ruth’s case, so it is nothing but grace for you and for me. The hymn of the late Thomas Spurgeon comes to Mind:

“All of grace” – from base to summit,
Grace on every course and stone
Grace in planning, rearing, crowning,
Sovereign grace and grace alone!
“All of grace” – from keel to topmast,
Grace the hull and spars has wrought,
Grace designing, building, launching,
Grace unaided, grace unsought!
Grace primeval; Grace eternal;
Grace foreknows, and grace elects,
Grace provides a full salvation,
Grace the rebel heart affects.
“Grace for grace” and “grace sufficient”
“Grace abounding,” “Grace that reigns,”
Grace the guarantee of glory!
Grace! Grace! Grace! How sweet the strains!

As God's grace exercised on behalf of Ruth is connected with a person, Boaz; so our grace is always connected with the person, Jesus Christ.

The grace of God exercised on behalf of Ruth through Boaz is seen first of all through Relationship. "The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen." This Boaz was evidently the brother of Elimelech for it says: "And Naomi had a kinsman of her husbands, of the family of Elimelech (Ruth 2:1). This takes us back to the law of redemption of inheritance in Leviticus where we read: "one of his brethren may redeem him; either his uncle or his uncle's son may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him; or if he be able he may redeem himself" (Lev. 25:48-49). This is one of the most important truths in the matter of redemption, the Kinsman-redeemer. Therefore it became necessary for Christ to become our kinsman, "For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren" (Heb. 2:16-17). So the Lord Jesus Christ came down to earth to be born of the Virgin, to take upon Him bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh in order to effect that redemption through relationship that was necessary for us. Our Redeemer must, like Boaz, be a near Kinsman, and that we have in the person of Jesus Christ. To reject the true humanity of Jesus Christ is to reject the fundamental basis for our redemption.

Relationship is important and is the first requirement, but this relative must be a Redeemer, and so present grace is also exercised through Redemption. "I have bought all that was Elimelech's ... Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife" (Ruth 4:9-10). Naomi had lost all through her sojourn in Moab, and all because of the famine. Now only a near kinsman could redeem the forfeited inheritance; but he must also marry the widow and raise up seed unto the dead one. Thus in order to perfectly affect this redemption two things were necessary: (1) Wealth, and (2) Willingness. The nearest of kin had the wealth but did not have the willingness to marry Ruth. But Boaz comes forth and produces the wealth and says he is willing. We read of him: "A mighty man of wealth" (Ruth 2:1) and "I have bought all that was Elimelech's" (Ruth 4:9). Thus Boaz has the right to redeem because he has the ability to redeem and the willingness to redeem. Our Kinsman-Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ has both the ability and the willingness, "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him" (Heb. 7:25). And "Who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). Redemption through a Kinsman-Redeemer is redemption through a substitutionary sacrifice for vindication and deliverance.

Finally, grace is exercised through restoration. "I have bought all that was Elimelech's and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's of the hand of Naomi" (Ruth 4:9). Ruth not only received again a husband and a home, but she got a son and untold wealth. Deadness reigned over her home in Moab; while life reigns over her home in Bethlehem. Life is only in Christ, our Kinsman-Redeemer. He alone can restore. Grace brings through Christ far greater blessings than Adam ever had in Eden. It is a restoration to "all spiritual blessing in the Heavens in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). Grace is therefore love in action; it is unmerited favor to the meritless and unlovely. It is the gratuitous bestowal of God's goodness upon transgressors and rebels against His holy law. "But God who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us ... For by grace are ye saved through faith" (Eph. 2:4.8).

“Grace first contrived the way
To save rebellious man;
And all the steps that grace display
Which drew the wondrous plan.
Grace all the work shall crown,
Through everlasting days;
It lays in Heaven the topmost stone,
And well deserves the praise.”

But God has brought us from Guilt, through Grace for a real purpose, and that purpose is:

ELEVATION TO PERFECT GLORY

“The Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son ... that his name may be famous in Israel (Ruth 4:13-14). Little did Ruth know the far-reaching consequences of her union with Boaz – a glory that is still being felt whenever men come in contact with Jesus Christ as Saviour and Sovereign.

This glory is a protective glory. “To raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place” (Ruth 4:10). The glory of Ruth shall never pass away. Her name is written in the Book of Life and found on the pages of Holy Scripture. “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:35). “For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in Heaven” (Psa. 119:89). In Christ we have been raised from the dead, “dead in trespasses and sins,” to be raised into everlasting life and glory. “Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified” (Romans 8:30). Such a chain of eternal blessings can never be broken. Our glory is immortal life in Jesus Christ.

This glory was also productive glory. “She bare a son...and they called his name Obed” (Ruth 4:13,17). The glory of creation is fruitfulness. The grass, the shrubs, the trees, come to bloom, and blossom; and bear fruit. Fruitfulness is the glory of creation. It is only in union with God’s kinsman-redeemer that Ruth became fruitful. She was productively dead in Moab. Christ, our Kinsman-Redeemer is our Life, and in Him alone can we bear fruit, more fruit, and much fruit. Our worship to Him our walk with Him, and our witness for Him will make us co-laborers with Him to bring many sons to glory. We are His ambassadors to proclaim the message of reconciliation. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). This “new creation” is a fruitful creation. Where there is life there is production. In sin we were dead and hence fruitless in God’s sight.

Again it is a prophetic glory. “And they called his name Obed; He is the father of Jesse, the father of David” (Ruth 4:17). David’s greater Son is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Sam. Ch. 7). Ruth’s ultimate glory is seen in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our relationship to Christ here is prophetic of our relationship to Him on the day of His appearing; it is the hope of our glory with Him forever. “Christ in you the hope of glory” (Col.

1:27). “When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4). “That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:12). “Whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 2:14). This is the hope of all believers in Christ regardless of the dispensation they find themselves in.

Therefore as God brought Ruth from guilt, through grace, to glory, how much more shall he not bring us in this day to a far greater glory. Our inheritance in the heavenlies far surpasses anything Ruth ever knew.

We cannot help but feel that the range of God’s grace is ever wider than our conception of it. Who could have thought of a homeless, helpless, and hopeless woman from Moab redeemed and restored to the wealth, honor, and position that Boaz gave her!

The redemption through our Lord Jesus Christ can only save us by a deliberate choice. Man is a moral being, endowed with the power of choice. He is a free moral agent, and must come to a deliberate decision in the matter of his salvation.

Your salvation and mine can only be achieved through Jesus Christ, our Kinsman-Redeemer, who alone is able and willing to save us.

Can you say?

“I’ve found in Thee, Lord Jesus, the satisfying part,
That quiets every longing and stills my troubled heart;
No more in chains and bondage, Thy truth has made me free,
Once dead in sins and trespasses, I’m now alive in Thee.
I’ve found in Thee, Lord Jesus, the place of blessing sweet,
Not in my selfish doing, but sitting at Thy feet;
And resting in Thy finished work, I find such perfect peace,
That every care is ended and all my labors cease.
Thine arms are underneath me, my times are in thy hand,
Thy strength sustains my weakness and by Thy grace I stand;
Thy smile lights up my pathway, Thy voice dispels my fear,
And soon in clouds of glory, for me Thou shalt appear.
To Thee Lord Jesus, great Prophet, Priest and King.
We bow in adoration, accept the praise we bring;
Thy work has brought salvation. Thy word assurance given,
Thyself, Oh Perfect Person, shall bring us safe to Heaven.”

Author Unknown
