

Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer", Clapham, on Wednesday
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Text: Ruth 1, verse 16.

GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

"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 my God.

This little book records the circumstances that took place in this particular family; of the Lord's dealings with them, of their trouble and distress, how eventually, Naomi, returning to her native country with Ruth, was much blessed, and the happy issue in the union of Boaz and Ruth, of which line of genealogy the Lord Jesus Christ Himself came after the flesh.

Doubtless the record has been much blessed to many of the Lord's people, particularly under some circumstances in their lives. There is much instruction to be gathered from it, and it may perhaps move us to watch the hand of God in His providences, for although indeed, Naomi and Elimelech and their sons going down to Moab may have appeared, in itself, questionable, yet still the hand of the Lord overruled matters to work for their good. Not without a path of severe trial and affliction - so much so that when Naomi returned to Bethlehem, "They said, Is this Naomi?" And she said unto them. Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me."

It would not appear then, according to this, that Naomi had much comfort in her heart all those ten years that she dwelt in Moab, for it is said, "And they dwelled there about ten years" presumably mingled with much trouble. This was occasioned by the loss of her husband and her two sons, so it would seem to have been ten years of bondage and trouble circumstantially. It appears they made up their minds to go down there - how far that could be justified we must leave, but it does not seem to have been a very justifiable procedure, for although there was a famine, there would seem a lack of faith in waiting upon God in the trial and the chastening that was upon the land.

However they went down into Moab and continued there; it probably was not an easy matter to return after they settled there; but Naomi "heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread." So that probably, after all, they were far better in the country she had left behind than where she was. Besides this she had left her country and kindred, and the worship of God as conducted by the people in that place, to go among idolaters. What trouble followed it!

What distress and what affliction! For truly the Almighty dealt very bitterly with them. It may be that often Naomi felt that these things were a chastening and correction for the course they had previously taken.

However the time came when Naomi resolved to return unto her own land and her kindred. Here were these two daughters-in-law who went with her. There was something uncommon, so to speak, in the first place with respect to these daughters-in-law; they were both naturally warmly attached to their mother-in-law and possibly to each other, and they both accompanied their mother-in-law without any persuasion on her part, evidently. They both accompanied her to a certain point, and then Naomi advised them to return to their own country. This may seem somewhat strange, but that was their native land. Here we see that natural affection moved them both, so that there was much weeping; yet, even so, there was something that held Ruth, that did not hold Orpah, and there came to be this difference between them - one clave to Naomi and the other left her and went back to her country and her kindred, and her gods too.

But of Ruth it is said, "She clave unto her mother-in-law." So this brings us to two points as thus far illustrated in the cases of these two - they are leaving and cleaving. They seemed to have much in common superficially, and were both closely attached to their mother-in-law, yet there was something that held the one that did not hold the other. So it proved to be! Doubtless in the case of Ruth there was something deeper that held her to her mother-in-law than could be found in Orpah, or else how could Orpah go back to her people and to her gods? When she departed, Naomi still pressed it upon Ruth - so she did not go with her mother-in-law by persuasion.

It is a poor business when one is moved in religion by persuasion - it seldom stands! It is true, persuasion may be used to a good purpose if the Lord so dispose, but here it would seem there was no persuasion - in fact, it was the reverse; Naomi pressed Ruth to go back also, saying, "Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law." She did not say, Orpah is gone back, I hope you will not leave me; if you go too that will break my heart; I hope you will come with me, do not take her example as a pattern, I hope you will not leave me. No, nothing of this, but "Return thou after thy sister-in-law."

Was this through lack of affection? Not by any means, for the affection even naturally, was evidently very real. But in the case of Orpah natural affection did not hold her; it needed something deeper than

that, which according to circumstances, she did not appear to possess. By this we may gather that some people can go to a certain point in a profession of religion, may be very fond naturally of some of the Lord's people and, in fact, may be very closely attached to one particular person and in natural things have much in common: but even where that is the case, usually the time comes when there has to be a parting. If there is no spiritual union, there cannot be a true walking together, for "How can two walk together except they be agreed?"

Here I am disposed to say that when Naomi tried to persuade Ruth to go back after her sister-in-law, it was not because she really wanted her to go back at all, but she did not want her to accompany her by mere persuasion; she wanted her to be fully convinced in her own mind. Indeed Ruth was so, for it is said, "When she (Naomi) saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, when she left speaking unto her." Not another word was said about going back after that, feeling persuaded that Ruth's mind was fully made up and that she was fully convinced in her mind that she would not leave her mother-in-law.

After this the circumstances following in the chapters and the order and working of the Lord's providences in Ruth's going to reap in the field of Boaz, his kindness to her and the resulting union between them, are most confirming to read. So, after all, Naomi was a witness of far greater blessings after she returned to her own land and people, than ever she had known before - in fact according to the reading, it was loss, death, trouble and affliction in Moab, but after her return the hand of the Lord went before her, though she had said, "The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." It is true that in the experience of some of the Lord's people the hand of the Lord does seem to go out against them and the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with them; and this is not always by reason of taking some particular step. It ill behoves us definitely to judge the cases of others by circumstances, for we can be mistaken. Yet as to circumstantial things, it is obvious that some very godly people have taken steps which the Lord has frowned upon and which have affected them for years after.

This was the case with a good man I knew well from my boyhood; he was doing well in his sphere of business, but he became dissatisfied, sold it and took up something else where he thought he might do better. But the hand of the Lord went out against him in it, and he lost all, and even now, although that was years ago, he has not recovered his former status. Even so, this good man had some remarkable things in the providence of God

towards him.

There is much we have to leave, but each one is before the Lord with his own particular case. In Job's case, his sufferings and losses were not for any particular step he had taken, or sin he had committed, yet it was a bitter cup he had to drink, was it not? But eventually "The Lord gave him twice as much as he had before" and "blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning".

Now to refer here to two particular points - leaving and cleaving. I have not much to say about Orpah except that she left her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law and went back to her people and her gods. She went back to that land of idolatry and wickedness and that is all we hear of her. Perhaps by this we may gather some instruction as to the fact that some may be naturally moved in religious circles without possessing "the root of the matter" in them, and may so continue in the company of the Lord's people, and may even join themselves to them, yet in the course of time fall away, and go back even into the world again, as it has been with some who have made even an open profession of religion. O, how we need to be kept and to realise our own inherent weakness and to pray for grace to be held up, preserved, kept. In John 6. we read of the multitudes spoken of as being disciples who followed the Lord for a time, but some became offended.

There is no evidence of offence here over any particular matter but when things came to a pass, it seemed as though Orpah's people and her gods had the hardest pull with her after all - the world had the hardest pull. So it has been many, many times; even in some promising cases, eventually time has proved that the world has won the heart - and the world would win all our hearts but for the grace of God! What a mercy if it is not so with us, or does not eventually so prove to be!

In the case of Ruth we have what may be termed a holy, gracious resolve, which seems to have come from the bottom of her heart. She does not say, I do not know what to do; I do not like leaving you and yet sometimes I think I would like to go back to my own land. No, nothing of that kind. Ruth was stedfastly minded. Her mind was fully made up; there was no uncertainty in her case at all. "Intreat me not to leave thee." Do not ask me again to go back; it pains me when you mention it. "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee" and then this is particularly sweet, "for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

Here it must be remembered that Ruth did not know much about the place Naomi was going to, for she had never been there; neither did she know what trials and afflictions would attend her there; but there was a real pleading; it was not a matter of leaving, or considering the question of leaving, or what might work for the best advantage to her - her heart's resolve was to cleave to her mother-in-law. "Intreat me not to leave thee". Naturally speaking, if there had been a good prospect of something held out before her, the hope of getting a good husband, someone in a good position where she might be a lady of some influence in Bethlehem or somewhere else, that might have put a different face on the whole problem; but no, she knew nothing of that, nothing about Boaz, when she said, "Intreat me not to leave thee;" she had not the faintest conception of the happy issue, or the union that would eventually be made - but, as we say in the marriage service, 'for better or for worse' whichever way, her mind was fully resolved to cleave to her mother-in-law and to her people.

"Where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried." O, her mind was fully convinced; whatever kind of a place it might prove to be, if only she could have the privilege of the company and affection of her mother-in-law, for there was something about her people - and not only her people but something about her God, different from all other people and different from all other gods. So she said, "The Lord do so to me, and more also" - that was an ancient phrase - as though she would say, I will not part with thee on any account, whatever may happen as a consequence. "The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

The point I would like to consider is this - "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." Does there not appear to be in this instance, a conviction in the heart of Ruth that Naomi's God was the true God - the God of Israel? I suggest there had been a breaking in of light into her heart, in some measure, for she knew they were a different kind of people from the Moabites, and that their God was a different God from the gods of silver and gold and material gods. So they are! The people here were indeed the Lord's ancient people who are a typical people. Has there ever been a time with you when you have felt your heart drawn to the Lord's people? There is one Scripture, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." I know that is often quoted and sometimes may be used to make things easy, but still,

it is a precious truth! The love there is must be a spiritual union felt in the heart, which is distinct from a natural affection, although both may be together and often are; so that here I feel it may be right to say that Orpah had a natural affection to her mother-in-law but Ruth had a spiritual affection, so that, feeling persuaded that her God was the true God, she would not leave her. Beside that, the one desire in the heart of Ruth was to know that same God and to have that God for her God, therefore she said, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

If we look at this in its spiritual aspect, what can we say about these people? Well, in the first place, spiritually viewed, they are an adopted people, the seed whom the Lord has blessed and whom He has "predestinated unto adoption of sons". It is not in our power, of course, to place ourselves among them of our own purpose, but the point here is to show that where there is a true, warm, real, spiritual desire in the heart, where the safety and security of the Lord's people is seen a warm desire to be one of them, and a gracious resolve saying, "This people shall be my people", there is in that an evidence of divine life and of the fact that they are indeed our people and their God our God.

Has there ever been a time with you in your life when perhaps you may have gone to this or that place, or mingled with some godly company which you have enjoyed - enjoyed hearing what they have had to say of what the Lord has done for them? Have you felt your heart knit to them so that you have said "this people shall be my people?" As though you might say, Somehow I feel a union to them, there seems something real about them, different from the mere formalist or the ritualist, or those who can depend on something of their own. But what is it makes you say, "This people shall be my people"? Is it not because you feel a chord struck in your heart toward them and a union to them? But why do you feel this chord in your heart and this union to them? Is it not because there is something, at least in the desire thereof, of a similar nature in your own heart? If there were no spiritual life in your own heart what would there be to make you say, "This people shall be my people and their God my God?" Instead of that you would be the more inclined to say, I do not care for this sort of people, I cannot get on with them I do not like their religion, I shall not continue to keep company with them; but if there is something in your heart that touches a chord, there must be the same life there, although it may not be so fully developed or so clearly revealed - there must be the same life there or there would not be the touching of the same chord in your heart. I believe

I know what it is to say "This people shall be my people"-but that is not always just at first sight; sometimes there has to be a growing into things. I remember the day when I walked across a field with a friend and felt for the first time I could open my heart to him and he opened his to me; we felt a knitting together; and then I felt I could say of this friend, "This people shall be my people and their God my God", I felt such a union to him. O, it is a mercy to be brought to a gracious resolve in your own heart in this way.

But perhaps you may have to feel as I have, and perhaps all of us have felt, as Ruth did later when she said she was "not like unto one of thine handmaidens." She did not feel to be like unto the daughters of Jerusalem; she was of a different nationality and appeared to be so too - of a different cast of features; but even though she was not like unto one of the handmaidens of that land, and though you may feel not to be like unto one of the Lord's handmaidens, it makes it all the sweeter when the Lord condescends to show His mercy to you - all the sweeter! In this case it was all divinely ordered; the heart and affection of Boaz were moved toward Ruth or else how could it ever have been? and although she felt not to be as one of them, "Boaz said unto her, At meal-time come thou hither", (even though you do not feel to be one of them, come hither) "and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar." What is there you would desire more than that - to eat of the bread, and dip your morsel in the vinegar - which in those days was a particular privilege shown to one and another? So she received kindness at the hand of Boaz, "These people shall be my people."

The Lord's people are not only His own predestinated and adopted people, but an enlightened people. The apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesians that the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened, and truly it was so. The promise concerning the Lord's children is "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of Thy children." What is this illumination or enlightenment? Is it not the light of truth and grace shining into the heart and the discovering there of one's need of mercy, one's sin and lost condition, and then some discovery of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Way to heaven, the Way, the Truth and the Life? Well, have there not been times when you have said of this or that one, there is something real in that person, those people, I believe they know the things of God, I believe their religion is a real religion and they walk it out. O, you feel you can say they walk their religion, although they may not profess or say great things; but there

is a tenderness and something about them which convinces you that they know real things and have spiritual dealings with God. And what does that do for you? Well, it makes you say, "This people shall be my people." Truly it is a mercy when it is so!

These people are not only an enlightened people, but they are an afflicted people. It is said of such in the prophecy of Zephaniah "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the Name of the Lord". Truly it is so, for bonds and afflictions abide them" and their lot here is one of tribulation. But even so, does that tend to separate you from them? Have there not been times when you have visited one and another, or had some little communion with a child of God in his or her affliction, trouble or distress, that has touched your heart, so that even in the furnace of affliction you have seen in them a real religion that has borne the furnace and has brought forth, to some point, at least, the peaceable fruit of righteousness? What has that done? Why, it has made you say in your heart, "This people shall be my people." Is not that good? Because you see if you have the life of God in your own heart, although you may feel to be very ignorant and dark and unlike the Lord's people, yet when the fruits of grace are seen in them, that can be so confirming in your heart as to cause you to say, "This people shall be my people."

It is said of them too, that they are a peculiar people; "A chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people;" and indeed they are a peculiar people! A peculiar people in the eyes of the world, a peculiar people often in their own eyes too, and as we know, it must not be assumed that the Lord's people are perfection in the flesh - far from it, for many sinful infirmities attend them, sad to say, at least in looking at a page in my own book. But still, here it is. they are a peculiar people, and according to the ideas of some, they hold most peculiar tenets, they have peculiar convictions, peculiar faith, peculiar exercises. So have you, so have I, if we are the Lord's children. Perhaps many of the Lord's people have not the best of dispositions, naturally speaking; yet even that has to fall away when a spiritual union is felt, and, with all their peculiarities, after all you find yourself saying, "This people shall be my people, and their God my God."

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