

823
LaD389

J. DELVES

823

Sermon preached at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Wednesday evening 16.8.72

Hymns 958, 519, 259

Reading Ruth 2

72/R

Text Ruth 3.18

"Then said she, 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."

This remarkably sweet account in the Book of Ruth has evidently conveyed a gracious unction to many of the Lord's people. The account that we have is full of instruction, but I am not attempting to dilate upon the details, save to say that their going into the country of Moab is recorded because a famine came upon the land where they were residing. They do not appear to have sought the Lord in the matter as far as we can observe, they went to sojourn in the country of Moab, into a heathen idolatrous land, and continued there for about ten years; ten years of trouble more or less all the time. Naomi's husband died, her sons died; death upon death, bereavement upon bereavement, sorrow upon sorrow must have been Naomi's experience there during those ten years. Eventually news came that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread, so Naomi resolved to return to her own land, and the two daughters in law went with her. In the case of these two daughters in law we can see the power of nature in one, and the power of grace in the other. There appears to have been a strong natural affection in them both, but in one there was only a natural affection, she embraced her mother in law and returned to her native country, and to her gods.

As you know Naomi said to Ruth, "Return thou after thy sister in law", but 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". How sweet this is. It appears as though her native land had no weight with her whatever. In Ruth there was a spiritual affection, something that sunk far deeper than external things, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where

LIBRARY OF THE
GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTIST

thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried". We have read this evening in the second chapter what striking developments followed after they returned to Bethlehem. Ruth went gleaning in the field of Boaz. What a remarkable providence this was; and when Boaz realise who she was he gave her protection; she was not to be molested; she was to glean, and more than that some handfuls of purpose were to be left for her. So she gleaned in the field belonging to Boaz. We have read in the second chapter about Boaz speaking friendly unto her, and of Ruth saying, "I am not like unto one of thine handmaidens"; but that made no difference to Boaz, and eventually she went home to her mother in law with six measures of barley, and she said to her mother in law, "These six measures of barley gave he me; for he said to me, "Go not empty unto thy mother in law". Then Naomi said to her, "Sit still, my daughter", you have done all that is timely or proper, (so far as may be according to those ancient customs); now you must sit still. You sit here in the house and wait future developments, do not touch anything, "Sit still my daughter"; and she did not leave it just like that she gave Ruth some sweet encouragement "for the man will not be in rest until he have finished the thing this day", which appears to indicate the closer union that developed of which we read in the 4th. chapter, when eventually Ruth became his wife. Some may feel in their heart a little like the hymn writer says,

"Lord make the union closer yet,
Make the marriage quite complete".

that is in an experimental sense in being married to Christ.

But what I would desire to speak of particularly is this matter of sitting still. It seems to have impressed me rather; for it was very timely counsel that Naomi gave to Ruth in this matter. She did not set her daughter in law upon doing something further or putting her hand to the matter again; no, "Sit still my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall". Wait and see, sit still; indicating a quiet passive attitude of mind. In the Scriptures we read of standing still as in the case of the children of Israel when they came to the Red Sea, they were to fear not, to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord; and the Lord appeared for

them in their deliverance in bringing them through the Red Sea. They had to stand still and see the Lord fight for them, perhaps you know something about this. I do not know, of course, but it does come into the providences of the Lord's people sometimes, to have to stand still. There is nothing more they can do. You may have felt like those poor Israelites at some time in your life, the Red Sea before you, and the Egyptians pursuing behind; not an easy condition in which to stand still, but it is not often that the Lord tells His people to stand still under easy conditions; but the Lord appeared for and delivered them. "Be still and know that I am God". The point here then is to sit still, do nothing more about the matter, but see what the Lord will do, "Sit still".

I would like to speak about this matter of sitting still in two aspects, first in regard to providential things, and secondly in relation to a gracious exercise. One may sit still and rest bodily and yet be in a great turmoil of mind, but at other times there can be such quietness of mind that you feel you can sit still. This is not a careless attitude, or a backsliding condition, it appears to me to involve three things; and there is something very sweet about it. First of all it indicates watching the Lord's hand and not attempting to tamper with the matter ourselves. Ruth had been doing things as recorded in this chapter, things which may seem strange to us, though they were not so strange according to ancient customs in that land, but the time had come now when nothing more was to be done but to sit still and watch how the matter would fall. I wonder if you know anything about this. Perhaps you have been in some circumstances in which you have done all you could, and yet there is this matter, and you do not know how the matter will fall, in this case it is not easy to sit still. But even so this was wise counsel. Now this sitting still may consist in casting your care upon Him. The Apostle Peter enjoins this, "Casting all your care upon Him for He careth for you". There was some encouragement in the case of Ruth that might help her to sit still, she came home with six measures of barley, what an encouragement this must have been! Was it not a token for good? It may have helped her at this particular crisis to sit still. Has

this ever been in some providence with you? I do not know if it has, of course, but it has with many of the Lord's people, when they have come into difficulty, trouble, and affliction, as we read in Isaiah, so that they know not what to do, what course to take, or where to turn, that a voice is heard behind them saying, "This is the way walk ye in it". "Sit still my daughter". This appears to be a quiet, passive frame of mind, "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength". Sit still - but one may be saying, I must be doing this or that, you have your six measures of barley, so to speak, and the time has come not to do anything more. "Sit still my daughter".

This matter of sitting still, you see, involves casting all our care upon Him; perhaps under some trying providences, harassing providences, irritating providences, or in some trial of faith, yet even so, after all, the wisest course to take is to sit still "until thou know how the matter will fall". This sitting still then is a waiting posture until the matter does fall, waiting to see how it falls too. It is in fact to realise that our times are in His hand, all our "matters", "He performeth the thing that is appointed for me". "Sit still". How much better at times it has been to sit still, to see the Lord go before us than to attempt to accomplish something of ourselves. In this sitting still has often been a great trial of faith. It was so in the case of Abraham. Ruth had got her six measures of barley; Abraham had received the blessed promise concerning Isaac; but in his case there was a great trial of faith before the promise was fulfilled. So in the case of Jacob, he walked in a path of heavy trial, so much so that he said "All these things are against me; then shall ye bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. But there is such a thing as sitting still even in and under a trial of faith. Is there a certain matter that naturally speaking you feel you must do something about? Yet at the same time faith is saying, "Sit still"; be still, until thou know how the matter will fall. In this matter then there is a quiet waiting upon the Lord. The Psalmist felt like this. To sit still is not a prayerless attitude, it is a prayerful exercise. "I waited patiently for the Lord and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry". There is a time then to sit still, to

watch, wait and pray. At times there are what we may term delayed answers to prayer in providence and in grace. How strange and mysterious are some things.

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm" (320 Gadsby)

Not in this case upon a calm sea, although He can make the storm a calm, as He did when He was in the ship, the ship where the poor distressed disciples were, He arose and rebuked the wind and the sea and there was a great calm.

I wonder if there has ever been a storm in your life when the Lord has come to you in it, a time when you have been distracted, distressed, burdened, almost at the end of all things and the Lord has come into it, He has come it may be into some providence, He has come into your circumstances, He has come into a trial and an affliction, and whispered a quieting word, although you were full of trouble, yet He has come, and there was a great calm. The circumstances may have remained the same, but it makes all the difference when the Lord comes. I know how true this is because I have proved it myself. So it is then that, without drawing a specified line, it may often be wise counsel to sit still until the Lord appears then you will see how the matter will fall.

The second matter consists in sitting still in a gracious sense in some exercise of soul, not merely or only in matters of providence, although they are linked together, it is true; but to sit still in a gracious sense can sometimes have a far sweeter effect than any providential matter. This may apply to any of the Lord's people who are walking in darkness, that is soul darkness, as undoubtedly many do, and in a spiritual sense it is only the Lord's people that do walk in this darkness. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light", but how can such sit still, when walking in darkness? What are they to do? It is said "Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God". This is like to sitting still in a spiritual sense. It is casting your care upon Him, casting your bondage upon Him, casting your darkness upon Him, casting your sins upon Him. "Let him

trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God", trust in His Word, promise, faithfulness, power, wisdom and love. Sometimes the Lord's people pass through sore temptations, probably all of them do that possess grace, because they are attacked by the devil. All who pursue the narrow path will be hard pressed to turn into the wide one; but even so - under sore temptations, hard pressed, assaulted by Satan - sit still. This indicates a quiet attitude of soul, even in sore temptations, looking up unto the Lord, not seeing how best you can tackle the matter yourself, but looking unto the Lord, praying, waiting upon Him. He can deliver you from the temptation in a moment. After all your vain efforts of yourself to fight against it, when the Lord comes He can deliver your soul from this state of confusion, darkness, distress and temptation, and enable you to be still, He can bring a quietness - "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength".

Some things that try the Lord's dear people are unanswered prayers. They are not really unanswered prayers, but sometimes the Lord may delay, from our point of view, an answer to a particular prayer. Beside this there may be matters in providence when we do not know what may be the best thing for us, and this can involve a trial of faith in the soul, even after you may have known something of the Lord's sweet mercy. I was reading about John Grace of Brighton, a very eminent, godly minister. He records how, after the Lord had in some measure favoured him, he went for five years in soul darkness with hardly any relief at all. He said, Perhaps you think this hardly possible, surely you must have got some relief. But he states that it was very little I did have for five years. Then one day he saw two men conversing together, and he thought he knew the voice of one, so he went to him and said, "Is that you John?" and he said, "Yes", Mr. Grace said, "I thought it was; I knew your voice before I saw your face", and he came away a little softened thinking like this, I have known His voice and I shall know it again. In due time deliverance came, but it was a long bondage. Perhaps some of you feel you can say, I believe I know His voice, but it was a long time ago since I heard it, but when He comes again, when He does, you will know

the voice because you have heard it before. It brought to John Grace a little softening, perhaps in this matter he stood still.

There is at times a waiting upon the Lord for this or that matter in your soul's exercises. Is there a waiting on the Lord to reveal Himself? Do you feel something like the hymnwriter who said, "No gleam of comfort can I see, till Jesus is revealed to me". What encouragements there are then to wait quietly upon Him. He understands your case better than your best friend can. He never misunderstands anything and he knows the end from the beginning. Are there any here like this, sitting still, not in a careless, indifferent way, but waiting and watching and praying for the Lord to come? "O when wilt Thou come unto me?" may be the cry of your heart. Sometimes there can be a very sweet stillness, it was so with Ruth, she was able to sit still, and see how the matter would fall, for the man, that is Boaz, was not in rest until he had finished the thing. It says here "this day" so there was not a very long period to be sitting still; but it was for Ruth to sit still until the union was made "closer yet", which it was, and she became His bride as it is in the hymn we have been singing,

"When Ruth a-gleaning went,
Jehovah was her guide;
To Boaz' field he led her straight,
And she became his bride". (Gadsby 519)

He guided her into the fields of Boaz, for a purpose known at first only to Himself, Good William Gadsby says "Jesus my Boaz is", He is my heavenly Boaz.

"Jesus my Boaz is;
My strength and portion too;
His word of grace the precious field,
Where I a-gleaning go."

She went into the right field, she had some handfuls of purpose left for her; it was a very sweet earnest; and eventually, and before long, she became his bride. So it is that "The women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel", and it came about that Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David.

If you have a matter, Sit still unto you know how the matter will fall. It is in the Lord's hands. He is too wise to err, He understands the matter from the beginning and you will lose nothing by sitting

still even for a space of time, "Then said she, 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". Sit still with your barley, so to speak, with your six measures of barley, you have a sweet earnest there, you have every encouragement, do not attempt anything more, "Sit still my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall." Amen.
