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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at Ebenezer, Clapham on Wednesday evening 10th. August, 1938

Text: Ruth 2.13

"Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens."

This chapter, as you well know, contains the remarkable and interesting account of the providential dealings of God with Naomi and Ruth, and the Lord's servant Boaz, and it illustrates and sets forth the wonderful chain of providence which brought these things to pass in the Lord's time and way. Doubtless there is in this short book very much spiritual instruction to the living family of God, especially on the subject of discipline, comfort and encouragement to those who are really and truly seeking God and the blessings of grace and of salvation. We may observe the over ruling providence of One who is -

"Too wise to err, Too good to be unkind"

May we not infer here, too, that

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm."

God, and He only, can make trials, losses, afflictions, bereavements and sufferings work for His people's good. We are liable to changes in our circumstances at any time, unlooked-for changes too. At this particular time there appears to have been a famine in the land which was the occasion of Elimelech taking his wife Naomi and their two sons down into the country of Moab. We may question the wisdom of such a step as this, even under those trying circumstances. We cannot but admire Elimelech's desire to provide for his family in the best possible way, but in considering this case, it looks as though there may have been a desire to escape the cross, more than to take it up. The Lord's afflicting hand was upon the country in those times of the Judges. There had been several famines which was one way whereby the Lord brought His people away from their idolatries, and whether this step that was taken by Elimelech was a wise one may be greatly questioned, because

we may perceive that trouble and loss and death, and the wasting of his family attended it. They went down into the land of Moab. There was no true worship of the Lord there. The ordinances of the Lord's house were not kept in that idolatrous country, and very soon we find that alliances were formed with the people of the land. The two sons married two of the daughters of Moab, and there is no real evidence in the first instance that they were proselytes to the Jewish religion. How easy it is to be carried away by environment, associations or relations from those narrow ways and paths wherein we may have been brought up!

But the hand of the Lord was in all this. In the course of time Naomi lost her husband Elimelech and both her sons, and was therefore plunged into yet deeper trouble. When she heard that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread she resolved to return to her own land; but to return probably was not so easy as in the first instance it was to leave. Many difficulties attended her return. She had not her husband now. She had not her sons to assist her. It appears that her two daughters in law resolved to go with her. They were both of the same mind in the first instance; they were very unwilling to leave her to whom they were evidently deeply attached; but Naomi tried to dissuade them from accompanying her on her journey to her own land. It may seem strange to us that she did this, but doubtless there was a good motive. In the case of one we read that after much weeping, and affectionate embraces, she left and went back to her own land, and we read "To her gods". Whatever she may have professed, it seems that the things of this world were stronger with her. There was not that firm resolution or resolve in her mind that was in the heart of Ruth. No - she went back to her own people and her gods. Unless the real root of the matter be found in us, the things of this life and the ties of this world will have the stronger pull. What a mercy if grace is given to hold fast. There is a danger with us of apostatising from a profession and going back. Nothing but the saving grace of God can keep us and hold us fast in His ways and truth. But Ruth was determined, resolute. She would not leave her mother-in-law. Her language was, "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; Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried." I believe that Naomi, in her heart really desired her to go with her, but she was anxious that it should not be on her account or by her persuasion, therefore she tried to dissuade her from going with her. You go back, she said; your sister-in-law has gone back; you go back too. But Ruth clave unto her, she would not leave her; and this was what Naomi really desired. If a profession is taken up simply to please relatives or friends, alas, all such will be of little use unless the Lord Himself works, and it is a mercy that He does work. Where He does, there will be a gracious resolve, and the language of Ruth will be the language of all who really and truly seek for that heavenly inheritance. "Thy people shall be my people, thy God, my God."

In course of time, we find they return to Bethlehem, the place of particular interest, where these remarkable things took place, and where many, many years later, more wonderful events took place in the birth of the Messiah. It being at the time of barley harvest, Ruth went forth to glean, into the fields of Boaz, a near kinsman of her mother-in-law, and while she was gleaning there, Boaz came into the field and, perceiving a stranger made enquiries about her. They told him that she was a Moabitish damsel and had come back with Naomi from the land of Moab, and he spake kindly unto her and encouraged her. Whereupon Ruth, in the words we have read for a text made a request of him, "Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens."

I would like to notice then, in the first place, the request. "Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord." Favour had already been shown unto her, whereupon she felt encouraged and emboldened to ask greater favours, "Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord." Here we trace her humility. She acknowledges his position and

authority and does not intrude herself upon the ground of any relationship. "Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord." What a mercy to be brought thus before the Lord and to entreat Him for those favours of divine grace which are essential to our life and salvation. Boaz is a type of Christ. He had taken knowledge of Ruth. "Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" Why should Christ take knowledge of any of His people, seeing that by nature we are all strangers and foreigners, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenant of promise? Why should He take knowledge of us - if indeed He has - why of you? It is entirely within Himself. We love Him because He first loved us. There is no outside cause. The cause is in God Himself. "Why shouldst thou take knowledge of me? I am so unworthy; I am such an insignificant creature, unworthy, Lord, of the least of Thy mercies. Why take knowledge of a stranger? I am not like unto one of Thine handmaidens, I come from another land. Yet it was in the heart of Boaz to show her great kindness. The union that was later formed is a type of the calling of the Gentile Church, of the union of that Church to the Lord Jesus Christ, for Ruth was a Gentile: and it is remarkable too, to notice that in this very line we have the genealogy of David, and later, of Christ Himself.

Why should the Lord take knowledge of us? If He has condescended to regard us, what an infinite mercy. Naturally, we are not only strangers to God, but we are enemies to Him, and to His ways too; but what a change grace makes; it reverses things. Instead of saying "We desire not the knowledge of thy ways", our language becomes, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee." It is a great thing to have the heart prepared to seek God. He takes knowledge of His people, shows great favours unto them, unspeakable favours. This is the Psalmist's desire that He would remember him with the favour that He bears unto His people. "Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord". The favour of Christ to His people is free favour, absolutely. It is not upon any condition of preference in creatures, it is absolutely free in Himself. Every

intimation made, or communication given to a poor sinner is free, in God, not merited, not purchased, not deserved: it is free favour. How wonderful this is. "Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord". This may answer to the language of some here whose desire is towards the Lord God of Israel and to some who may be gleaning in the fields of our heavenly Boaz, gleaning in His Word and ordinances, seeking Him in the appointed means of His grace. "Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord". I do not deserve it, Lord - if Thou shouldst deal with me according to my deserts I should be cut off; I have no good works to plead. Ruth was a real worker, but the favour that was shown her was free favour. She makes no claim upon Boaz, and we may gather that favour had already been shown, as she says, "I have found favour". Lord continue those favours. Grant me an increase of them. Give to me a deeper, closer, clearer knowledge of Thyself. "Let me find favour in thy sight, my Lord". This is to be brought in experience, in a gracious way, to a knowledge of the mercy of the Lord Jesus, to receive those undeserved blessings that flow to us through His mercy, wounds and blood; to be brought by favour to Calvary, and to see there the unspeakably rich mercy, the free, holy mercy of a triune Jehovah and to feel a little of that mercy flowing into our hearts. To find favour of the Lord is to find life, "For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD". He is the pearl of great price. Nothing can compare with Him on this earth -

"Compared with Christ, in all beside,
 No comeliness I see;
 The one thing needful, dearest Lord,
 Is to be one with thee."

Ruth by reason of what she had heard and received was encouraged to press her case. Not only was there here, a sweet humility in her bearing, but there was an importunity too - she urged her case. "Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord"; and the reason she should so press her case is given, "For thou hast comforted me" therefore, she was emboldened thus to petition him, "And for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid." Boaz had given her special consideration which had been a comfort to her. In the context we may perceive the

ways wherein he had comforted her. He had given her special direction: told her to continue there where she was. "Go not to glean" he said, "in another field, neither go from hence but abide here fast by my maidens", as though he would say to her, "you are in just the right place for gleaning, and I will see to it that your labours are not fruitless, you will be well rewarded if you take my counsel. He gave her special direction; he spake comfortably to her, "Thou hast comforted me". What a mercy it is to hear the voice of the Lord Jesus comfortably! The Lord says to His church, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." When the Lord graciously condescends thus to speak to His people, what comforting words they are! There is such a thing, and some of the Lord's people know it, we hope we know it, some of us; there is such a thing as hearing the sweet, encouraging, comforting directing voice of the Lord Jesus. Ruth could say "Thou hast comforted me, and the direction that he gave her was in itself comforting; it was a promise that she should be successful in her endeavours. "Abide fast here, go not to glean in another field." But not only did he give to her special direction, which in itself was comforting, but he gave her special protection. "I have charged the young men that they shall not touch thee". She was not to be molested because she was not like the rest of the handmaidens. She was what we might term a speckled bird here, she was not like the others, and yet, though this was the case, special protection was given her. I will see to it that you are protected. He gave instructions in this direction. How kind the Lord is to His poor defenceless people in this particular. His word to them is their strength and their protection too; and we need His divine protection and His providence. Thus, His spiritual Ruths will be watched over in their times of need and danger. We have in Jesus a sovereign protector, one who not only mercifully directs His people in providence, in the ways of life and grace, but Who also protects them in their defenceless condition. What hope should we have were

it not for the protecting hand of God? The world has ever been against the Church, and the devil and his wicked agents, the powers of antichrist, would destroy the Church of God if they could; but the hand of the Lord is over His people; and often He has been seen to appear on their behalf in times of danger and need. What a mercy to be under the shadow of His wings.

Boaz said to Ruth, "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust". She had passed through much affliction. It had been a very, very trying path for her, and Boaz had been informed of this. He tells her he had been previously acquainted with her history; and the Lord's people have nothing but what their Lord is fully acquainted with. He knows every circumstance of their life; every trial they have passed through is fully known to Him.

"Thou hast comforted me", but not only did Boaz comfort Ruth in a way of making protection for her, but special consideration was given to her. "When thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn". This was a particular privilege that was granted unto her. The Lord favours His people with special consideration seeing that they are in themselves poor and needy. He supplies them with that living water: water from salvation's wells to quench their spiritual thirst, and causes them to come to that fountain which is ever open. They are invited to come. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Special provision then was made for her in these things: she had reason to be comforted and this gave her greater courage, it enabled her to importune her case. So it is, is it not in experience. If favour is received from the Lord, how confirming, encouraging it is to press our case upon Him for greater things.

"Thou art coming to a king;
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much."

"Thou hast comforted me, and thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid." "Spoken friendly" that is, as in the margin "Spoken to the heart of thine handmaiden". When the Lord speaks to His people, He does not speak simply to their judgment, mind or head. His voice enters the heart if it is accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit. Many people may hear the words of Gospel truth in their heads but never hear them in their hearts. Ruth had received a word that had entered her heart. Boaz had spoken friendly unto her. What a mercy it is that the Lord can make His Word effective. Thus the apostle writing to the Thessalonians says, "Of Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance"; a profession of religion will do us no good as pertaining to our eternal happiness, unless the love of Christ is in the heart by the Holy Spirit. We need the seed to be sown there. A heart religion is the religion that will take a soul to heaven, and to hear the voice of Christ in the heart too, breaking the rocky, flinty heart to pieces; nothing but the voice of Jesus can effect this. A person may have many legal terrors and fears of hell and perdition, but the voice of Christ in the Gospel enters effectively into the heart, and it does just what the Lord designs it should. "Thou hast spoken friendly to thine handmaiden", and the Lord does speak friendly unto His people when His voice is heard. Ruth was in a fitting condition to receive comfort, she was in need because she had a case, and a personal one, and her case was regarded. The Lord "will regard the prayer of the destitute and not despise their prayer". It is a great thing to have a real case for God. "Thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid".

Then she said, "Though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens". 'There is a difference in me' she said, 'from the others here; I am not like unto your handmaidens'. She was from another country; she was a Gentile, and she was aware of it. This makes the favour all the more conspicuous; and some of the Lord's seeking ones have to go to Him like that, and when the Lord shows

them favour they say 'Lord who am I? what am I? that favour should be shown unto me? I am not like unto one of thine hand-maidens, that Thou shouldst take knowledge of me', and yet that is the desire in the heart, is it not? 'I am not like unto one of them'. You may look at others and see the marks of grace; you can see the marks on the back of another sheep and not discern the marks on your own back. You may feel to be very unlike the Lord's children, and yet you would be one of them. Ruth's language, prior to this was "Intreat me not to leave thee", and you would say the same, you would say, 'Lord I would be with thy people, I would be one of them, I would glean in the same field, I would have Thee to be my God; I want the same God, the same Truth, the same Gospel, and I want to be with Thee in time and eternity. "Thy God, my God", and yet, she says, 'I am not like any one of thine hand-maidens! I do not feel to possess what they possess'. We do not well to measure our experience by others, but we do well to say 'Lord I pray for those blessings that thou art pleased to bestow upon Thy people, I want the same things, though I feel to lack likeness; I am not like one of Thy hand-maidens.' This reminds us of the language in one of the Canticles "Why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions? Why should I be as one that is veiled?" as though the Church would say, I am near them, as it were, and yet a little distant from them; I am not in the place where I would be. Why should I be as one that turneth aside? We may sometimes see where the Lord's people are, and we may not feel to be there ourselves: we are not like them. You can see, and you know that they are the Lord's people, their prospects are good, their standing is safe, but you are so different. 'I am not like them' and yet her request was granted, her petition overcame; the blessing was granted unto her; she could dip her morsel in the vinegar; she received parched corn - special preparation- and provision, so made for her. Thus the Lord mercifully and graciously provides for His people in this wilderness. If we have her God for our God we have all that we can have. An infinite fulness resides in Jesus our Head. He is the Truth and the Life to His people, and they thus partake of Him, by favour receive Him and live upon Him. Though we may seem to be so unlike His people, yet that is the desire of the heart, 'I would be with them now, I would be with them in eternity'. The Lord grant these favours to us, to know Him and one day be with Him in eternal peace and glory. Amen.

