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Preface

This short history of the domestic affairs of one particular family fitly follows the book of Judges (the events related here happening in the days of the judges), and fitly goes before the books of Samuel, because in the close it introduces David; yet the Jews, in their Bibles, separate it from both, and make it one of the five *Megilloth*, or *Volumes*, which they put together towards the latter end, in this order: *Solomon's Song*, *Ruth*, *Lamentations*, *Ecclesiastes*, and *Esther*. It is probable that Samuel was the penman of it. It relates not miracles nor laws, wars nor victories, nor the revolutions of states, but the affliction first and afterwards the comfort of Naomi, the conversion first and afterwards the preferment of Ruth. Many such events have happened, which perhaps we may think as well worthy to be recorded; but these God saw fit to transmit the knowledge of to us; and even common historians think they have liberty to choose their subject. The design of this book is, I. To lead to providence, to show us how conversant it is about our private concerns, and to teach us in them all to have an eye to it, acknowledging God in all our ways and in all events that concern us. See 1 Sa. 2:7, 8; Ps. 113:7-9. II. To lead to Christ, who descended from Ruth, and part of whose genealogy concludes the book, whence it is fetched into Mt. 1. In the conversion of Ruth the Moabitess, and the bringing of her into the pedigree of the Messiah, we have a type of the calling of the Gentiles in due time into the fellowship of Christ Jesus our Lord. The afflictions of Naomi and Ruth we have an account of, ch. 1. Instances of their industry and humility, ch. 2. The bringing of them into an alliance with Boaz, ch. 3. And their happy settlement thereby, ch. 4. And let us remember the scene is laid in Bethlehem, the city where our Redeemer was born.

Chapter 1

In this chapter we have Naomi's afflictions. I. As a distressed housekeeper, forced by famine to remove into the land of Moab (v. 1, 2). II. As a mournful widow and mother, bewailing the death of her husband and her two sons (v. 3-5). III. As a careful mother-in-law, desirous to be kind to her two daughters, but at a loss how to be so when she returns to her own country (v. 6-13). Orpah she parts with in sorrow (v. 14). Ruth she takes with her in fear (v. 15-18). IV. As a poor woman sent back to the place of her first settlement, to be supported by the kindness of her friends (v. 19-22). All these things were melancholy and seemed against her, and yet all were working for good.

Verses 1-5

The first words give all the date we have of this story. It was *in the days when the judges ruled* (v. 1), not in those disorderly times when *there was no king in Israel*; but under which of the judges these things happened we are not told, and the conjectures of the learned are very uncertain. It must have been towards the beginning of the judges' time, for Boaz, who married Ruth, was born of Rahab, who received the spies in Joshua's time. Some think it was in the days of Ehud, others of Deborah; the learned bishop Patrick inclines to think it was in the days of Gideon, because in his days only we read of a famine by the Midianites' invasion, Judges 6:3, 4. While the judges were ruling, some one city and some another, Providence takes particular cognizance of Bethlehem, and has an eye to a King, to Messiah himself, who should descend from two Gentile mothers, Rahab and Ruth. Here is,

I. A famine in the land, in the land of Canaan, that land *flowing with milk and honey*. This was one of the judgments which God had threatened to bring upon them for their sins, Lev. 26:19, 20. He has many arrows in his quiver. In the days of the judges they were oppressed by their enemies; and, when by that judgment they were not reformed, God tried this, for when he *judges he will overcome*. When the land had rest, yet it had not plenty; even in Bethlehem, which signifies *the house of bread*, there was scarcity. *A fruitful land is turned into barrenness*, to correct and restrain the luxury and wantonness of those that dwell therein.

II. An account of one particular family distressed in the famine; it is that of *Elimelech*. His name signifies *my God a king*, agreeable to the state of Israel when the judges ruled, for the Lord was their King, and comfortable to him and his family in their affliction, that God was theirs and that he reigns for ever. His wife was *Naomi*, which signifies my *amiable* or *pleasant* one. But his sons' names were *Mahlon* and *Chilion*, *sickness* and *consumption*, perhaps because weakly children, and not likely to be long-lived. Such are the productions of our pleasant things, weak and infirm, fading and dying.

III. The removal of this family from Bethlehem into the country of Moab on the other side Jordan, for subsistence, because of the famine, v. 1, 2. It seems there was plenty in the country of Moab when there was scarcity of bread in the land of Israel. Common gifts of providence are often bestowed in greater plenty upon those that are strangers to God than upon those that know and worship him. *Moab is at ease from his youth*, while *Israel is emptied from vessel to vessel* (Jer. 48:11), not because God loves Moabites better, but because they have *their portion in this life*. Thither Elimelech goes, not to settle for ever, but to

sojourn for a time, during the dearth, as Abraham, on a similar occasion, went into Egypt, and Isaac into the land of the Philistines. Now here, 1. Elimelech's care to provide for his family, and his taking his wife and children with him, were without doubt commendable. *If any provide not for his own, he hath denied the faith*, 1 Tim. 5:8. When he was in his straits he did not forsake his house, go seek his fortune himself, and leave his wife and children to shift for their own maintenance; but, as became a tender husband and a loving father, where he went he took them with him, not as the ostrich, Job 39:16. But, 2. I see not how his removal into the country of Moab, upon this occasion, could be justified. Abraham and Isaac were only sojourners in Canaan, and it was agreeable to their condition to remove; but the seed of Israel were now fixed, and ought not to remove into the territories of the heathen. What reason had Elimelech to go more than any of his neighbours? If by any ill husbandry he had wasted his patrimony, and sold his land or mortgaged it (as it should seem, ch. 4:3, 4), which brought him into a more necessitous condition than others, the law of God would have obliged his neighbours to relieve him (Lev. 25:35); but that was not his case, for he went out full, v. 21. By those who tarried at home it appears that the famine was not so extreme but that there was sufficient to keep life and soul together; and his charge was but small, only two sons. But if he could not be content with the short allowance that his neighbours took up with, and *in the day of famine could not be satisfied* unless he kept as plentiful a table as he had done formerly, if he could not live in hope that there would come years of plenty again in due time, or could not with patience wait for those years, it was his fault, and he did by it dishonour God and the good land he had given them, *weaken the hands of his brethren*, with whom he should have been willing to take his lot, and set an ill example to others. If all should do as he did Canaan would be dispeopled. Note, It is an evidence of a discontented, distrustful, unstable spirit, to be weary of the place in which God hath set us, and to be for leaving it immediately whenever we meet with any uneasiness or inconvenience in it. It is folly to think of escaping that cross which, being laid in our way, we ought to take up. It is our wisdom to make the best of that which is, for it is seldom that changing our place is mending it. Or, if he would remove, why to the country of Moab? If he had made enquiry, it is probable he would have found plenty in some of the tribes of Israel, those, for instance, on the other side Jordan, that bordered on the land of Moab; if he had had that zeal for God and his worship, and that affection for his brethren which became an Israelite, he would not have persuaded himself so easily to go and sojourn among Moabites.

IV. The marriage of his two sons to two of the daughters of Moab after his death, v. 4. All agree that this was ill done. The Chaldee says, *They transgressed the decree of the word of the Lord in taking strange wives*. If they would not stay unmarried till their return to the land of Israel, they were not so far off but that they might have fetched themselves wives thence. Little did Elimelech think, when he went to sojourn in Moab, that ever his sons would thus join in affinity with Moabites. But those that bring young people into bad acquaintance, and take them out of the way of public ordinances, though they may think them well-principled and armed against temptation, know not what they do, nor *what will be the end thereof*. It does not appear that the women they married were proselyted to the Jewish religion, for Orpah is said to return to her gods (v. 15); the gods of Moab were hers still. It is a groundless tradition of the Jews that Ruth was the daughter of Eglon king of Moab, yet the Chaldee paraphrast inserts it; but this and their other tradition, which he inserts likewise, cannot agree, that Boaz who married Ruth was

the same with Ibzan, who judged Israel 200 years after Eglon's death, Jdg. 12.

V. The death of Elimelech and his two sons, and the disconsolate condition Naomi was thereby reduced to. Her husband died (v. 3) and her two sons (v. 5) soon after their marriage, and the Chaldee says, *Their days were shortened*, because they transgressed the law in marrying strange wives. See here, 1. That wherever we go we cannot out-run death, whose fatal arrows fly in all places. 2. That we cannot expect to prosper when we go out of the way of our duty. *He that will save his life by any indirect course shall lose it*. 3. That death, when it comes into a family, often makes breach upon breach. One is taken away to prepare another to follow soon after; one is taken away, and that affliction is not duly improved, and therefore God sends another of the same kind. When Naomi had lost her husband she took so much the more complacency and put so much the more confidence in her sons. Under the shadow of these surviving comforts she thinks she shall live among the heathen, and exceedingly glad she was of these gourds; but behold they wither presently, *green and growing up in the morning, cut down and dried up* before night, buried soon after they were married, for neither of them left any children. So uncertain and transient are all our enjoyments here. It is therefore our wisdom to make sure of those comforts that will be made sure and of which death cannot rob us. But how desolate was the condition, and how disconsolate the spirit, of poor Naomi, when the woman was *left of her two sons and her husband!* When *these two things, loss of children and widowhood, come upon her in a moment, come upon her in their perfection, by whom shall she be comforted?* Isa. 47:9; 51:19. It is God alone who has wherewithal to comfort those who are thus cast down.

Verses 6-18

See here, I. The good affection Naomi bore to the land of Israel, v. 6. Though she could not stay in it while the famine lasted, she would not stay out of it when the famine ceased. Though the country of Moab had afforded her shelter and supply in a time of need, yet she did not intend it should be her rest for ever; no land should be that but the holy land, in which the sanctuary of God was, of which he had said, *This is my rest for ever*. Observe,

1. God, at last, returned in mercy to his people; for, though he contend long, he will not contend always. As the judgment of oppression, under which they often groaned in the time of the judges, still came to an end, after a while, when God had raised them up a deliverer, so here the judgment of famine: At length God graciously *visited his people in giving them bread*. Plenty is God's gift, and it is his visitation which by bread, the staff of life, *holds our souls in life*. Though this mercy be the more striking when it comes after famine, yet if we have constantly enjoyed it, and never knew what famine meant, we are not to think it the less valuable.

2. Naomi then returned, in duty to her people. She had often enquired of their state, what harvests they had and how the markets went, and still the tidings were discouraging; but like the prophet's servant, who, having looked seven times and seen no sign of rain, at length discerned a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, which soon overspread the heavens, so Naomi at last has good news brought her of plenty in Bethlehem, and then she can think of no other than returning thither again. Hew new alliances in the country of Moab could not make her forget her relation to the land of Israel. Note, Though there be a reason for our being in bad places, yet, when the reason ceases, we must by no means continue in them. Forced absence from God's

ordinances, and forced presence with wicked people, are great afflictions; but when the force ceases, and such a situation is continued of choice, then it becomes a great sin. It should seem she began to think of returning immediately upon the death of her two sons, (1.) Because she looked upon that affliction to be a judgment upon her family for lingering in the country of Moab; and hearing this to be the *voice of the rod, and of him that appointed it*, she obeys and returns. Had she returned upon the death of her husband, perhaps she might have saved the life of her sons; but, *when God judgeth he will overcome*, and, if one affliction prevail not to awaken us to a sight and sense of sin and duty, another shall. When death comes into a family it ought to be improved for the reforming of what is amiss in the family: when relations are taken away from us we are put upon enquiry whether, in some instance or other, we are not out of the way of our duty, that we may return to it. God *calls our sins to remembrance*, when he *slays a son*, 1 Ki. 17:18. And, if he thus hedge up our way with thorns, it is that he may oblige us to say, *We will go and return to our first husband*, as Naomi here to her country, Hos. 2:7. (2.) Because the land of Moab had now become a melancholy place to her. It is with little pleasure that she can breathe in that air in which her husband and sons had expired, or go on that ground in which they lay buried out of her sight, but not out of her thoughts; now she will go to Canaan again. Thus God takes away from us the comforts we stay ourselves too much upon and solace ourselves too much in, here in the land of our sojourning, that we may think more of our home in the other world, and by faith and hope may hasten towards it. Earth is embittered to us, that heaven may be endeared.

II. The good affection which her daughters-in-law, and one of them especially, bore to her, and her generous return of their good affection.

1. They were both so kind as to accompany her, some part of the way at least, when she returned towards the land of Judah. Her two daughters-in-law did not go about to persuade her to continue in the land of Moab, but, if she was resolved to go home, would pay her all possible civility and respect at parting; and this was one instance of it: they would *bring her on her way*, at least to the utmost limits of their country, and help her to carry her luggage as far as they went, for it does not appear that she had any servant to attend her, v. 7. By this we see both that Naomi, as became an Israelite, had been very kind and obliging to them and had won their love, in which she is an example to all mothers-in-law, and that Orpah and Ruth had a just sense of her kindness, for they were willing to return it thus far. It was a sign they had dwelt together in unity, though *those* were dead by whom the relation between them came. Though they retained an affection for the gods of Moab (v. 15), and Naomi was still faithful to the God of Israel, yet that was no hindrance to either side from love and kindness, and all the good offices that the relation required. Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are too often at variance (Mt. 10:35), and therefore it is the more commendable if they live in love; let all who sustain this relation aim at the praise of doing so.

2. When they had gone a little way with her Naomi, with a great deal of affection, urged them to go back (v. 8, 9): *Return each to her mother's house*. When they were dislodged by a sad providence from the house of their husbands it was a mercy to them that they had their parents yet living, that they had their houses to go to, where they might be welcome and easy, and were not turned out to the wide world. Naomi suggests that their own mothers would be more agreeable to them than a mother-in-law, especially when their own mothers had houses and their mother-in-law was not sure she had a place to lay her head in which

she could call her own. She dismisses them,

(1.) With commendation. This is a debt owing to those who have conducted themselves well in any relation, they ought to have the praise of it: *You have dealt kindly with the dead and with me*, that is, "You were good wives to your husbands that are gone, and have been good daughters to me, and not wanting to your duty in either relation." Note, When we and our relations are parting, by death or otherwise, it is very comfortable if we have both their testimony and the testimony of our own consciences for us that while we were together we carefully endeavoured to do our duty in the relation. This will help to allay the bitterness of parting; and, while we are together, we should labour so to conduct ourselves as that when we part we may not have cause to reflect with regret upon our miscarriages in the relation.

(2.) With prayer. It is very proper for friends, when they part, to part with prayer. She sends them home with her blessing; and the blessing of a mother-in-law is not to be slighted. In this blessing she twice mentions the name *Jehovah*, Israel's God, and the only true God, that she might direct her daughters to look up to him as the only fountain of all good. To him she prays in general that he would recompense to them the kindness they had shown to her and hers. It may be expected and prayed for in faith that God will deal kindly with those that have dealt kindly with their relations. *He that watereth shall be watered also himself*. And, in particular, that they might be happy in marrying again: *The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband*. Note, [1.] It is very fit that, according to the apostle's direction (1 Tim. 5:14), the younger women, and he speaks there of young widows, should *marry, bear children, and guide the house*. And it is a pity that those who have approved themselves good wives should not again be blessed with good husbands, especially those that, like these widows, have no children. [2.] The married state is a state of rest, such rest as this world affords, rest in the house of a husband, more than can be expected in the house of a mother or a mother-in-law. [3.] This rest is God's gift. If any content and satisfaction be found in our outward condition, God must be acknowledged in it. There are those that are unequally yoked, that find little rest even in the house of a husband. Their affliction ought to make those the more thankful to whom the relation is comfortable. Yet let God be the rest of the soul, and no perfect rest thought of on this side heaven.

(3.) She dismissed them with great affection: *She kissed them*, wished she had somewhat better to give them, but silver and gold she had none. However, this parting kiss shall be the seal of such a true friendship as (though she never see them more) she will, while she lives, retain the pleasing remembrance of. If relations must part, let them thus part in love, that they may (if they never meet again in this world) meet in the world of everlasting love.

3. The two young widows could not think of parting with their good mother-in-law, so much had the good conversation of that pious Israelite won upon them. They not only lifted up their voice and wept, as loth to part, but they professed a resolution to adhere to her (v. 10): *"Surely we will return with thee unto thy people, and take our lot with thee."* It is a rare instance of affection to a mother-in-law and an evidence that they had, for her sake, conceived a good opinion of the people of Israel. Even Orpah, who afterwards went back to her gods, now seemed resolved to go forward with Naomi. The sad ceremony of parting, and the tears shed on that occasion, drew from her this protestation, but it did not hold. Strong passions, without a settled judgment, commonly produce weak resolutions.

4. Naomi sets herself to dissuade them from going along with her, v. 11–13.

(1.) Naomi urges her afflicted condition. If she had had any sons in Canaan, or any near kinsmen, whom she could have expected to marry the widows, to *raise up seed* to those that were gone, and to redeem the mortgaged estate of the family, it might have been some encouragement to them to hope for a comfortable settlement at Bethlehem. But she had no sons, nor could she think of any near kinsman likely to do the kinsman's part, and therefore argues that she was never likely to have any sons to be husbands for them, for she was too old to have a husband; it became here age to think of dying and going out of the world, not of marrying and beginning the world again. Or, if she had a husband, she could not expect to have children, nor, if she had sons, could she think that these young widows would stay unmarried till her sons that should yet be born would grow up to be marriageable. Yet this was not all: she could not only not propose to herself to marry them like themselves, but she knew not how to maintain them like themselves. The greatest grievance of that poor condition to which she was reduced was that she was not in a capacity to do for them as she would: *It grieveth me more for your sakes* than for my own *that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me*. Observe, [1.] She judges herself chiefly aimed at in the affliction, that God's quarrel was principally with her: "*The hand of the Lord has gone out against me*. I am the sinner; it is with me that God has a controversy; it is with me that he is contending; I take it to myself." This well becomes us when we are under affliction; though many others share in the trouble, yet we must hear the voice of the rod as if it spoke only against us and to us, not billeting the rebukes of it at other people's houses, but taking them to ourselves. [2.] She laments most the trouble that redounded to them from it. She was the sinner, but they were the sufferers: *It grieveth me much for your sakes*. A gracious generous spirit can better bear its own burden than it can bear to see it a grievance to others, or others in any way drawn into trouble by it. Naomi could more easily want herself than see her daughters want. "Therefore *turn again, my daughters*, for, alas! I am in no capacity to do you any kindness." But,

(2.) Did Naomi do well thus to discourage her daughters from going with her, when, by taking them with her, she might save them from the idolatry of Moab and bring them to the faith and worship of the God of Israel? Naomi, no doubt, desired to do so. But, [1.] If they did come with her, she would not have them to come upon her account. Those that take upon them a profession of religion only in complaisance to their relations, to oblige their friends, or for the sake of company, will be converts of small value and of short continuance. [2.] If they did come with her, she would have them to make it their deliberate choice, and to sit down first and count the cost, as it concerns those to do that may take up a profession of religion. It is good for us to be told the worst. Our Saviour took this course with him who, in the heat of zeal, spoke that bold word, *Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest*. "Come, come," says Christ, "canst thou fare as I fare? *The Son of man has not where to lay his head*; know this, and then consider whether thou canst find in thy heart to take thy lot with him," Mt. 8:19, 20. Thus Naomi deals with her daughters-in-law. Thoughts ripened into resolves by serious consideration are likely to be kept always in the imagination of the heart, whereas what is soon ripe is soon rotten.

5. Orpah was easily persuaded to yield to her own corrupt inclination, and to go back to her country, her kindred, and her father's house, now when she stood fair for an effectual call from it. They both *lifted up their voice and wept again* (v. 14),

being much affected with the tender things that Naomi had said. But it had a different effect upon them: to Orpah it was a savour of death unto death; the representation Naomi had made of the inconveniences they must count upon if they went forward to Canaan sent her back to the country of Moab, and served her as an excuse for her apostasy; but, on the contrary, it strengthened Ruth's resolution, and her good affection to Naomi, with whose wisdom and goodness she was never so charmed as she was upon this occasion; thus to her it was a savour of life unto life. (1.) *Orpah kissed her mother-in-law*, that is, took an affectionate leave of her, bade her farewell for ever, without any purpose to follow her hereafter, as he that said he would follow Christ when he had buried his father or bidden those farewell that were at home. Orpah's kiss showed she had an affection for Naomi and was loth to part from her; yet she did not love her well enough to leave her country for her sake. Thus many have a value and affection for Christ, and yet come short of salvation by him, because they cannot find in their hearts to forsake other things for him. They love him and yet leave him, because they do not love him enough, but love other things better. Thus the young man that went away from Christ went away sorrowful, Mt. 19:22. But, (2.) *Ruth clave unto her*. Whether, when she came from home, she was resolved to go forward with her or no does not appear; perhaps she was before determined what to do, out of a sincere affection for the God of Israel and to his law, of which, by the good instructions of Naomi, she had some knowledge.

6. Naomi persuades Ruth to go back, urging, as a further inducement, her sister's example (v. 15): *Thy sister-in-law has gone back to her people*, and therefore of course gone back to her gods; for, whatever she might do while she lived with her mother-in-law, it would be next to impossible for her to show any respect to the God of Israel when she went to live among the worshippers of Chemosh. Those that forsake the communion of saints, and return to the people of Moab, will certainly break off their communion with God, and embrace the idols of Moab. Now, *return thou after thy sister*, that is, "If ever thou wilt return, return now. This is the greatest trial of thy constancy; stand this trial, and thou art mine for ever." Such offences as that of Orpah's revolt must needs come, that those who are perfect and sincere may be made manifest, as Ruth was upon this occasion.

7. Ruth puts an end to the debate by a most solemn profession of her immovable resolution never to forsake her, nor to return to her own country and her old relations again, v. 16, 17.

(1.) Nothing could be said more fine, more brave, than this. She seems to have had another spirit, and another speech, now that her sister had gone, and it is an instance of the grace of God inclining the soul to the resolute choice of the better part. *Draw me thus, and we will run after thee*. Her mother's dissuasions made her the more resolute; as when Joshua said to the people, *You cannot serve the Lord*, they said it with the more vehemence, *Nay, but we will*. [1.] She begs of her mother-in-law to say no more against her going: *Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee*; for all thy entreaties now cannot shake that resolution which thy instructions formerly have wrought in me, and therefore let me hear no more of them." Note, It is a great vexation and uneasiness to those that are resolved for God and religion to be tempted and solicited to alter their resolution. Those that would not think of it would not hear of it. *Entreat me not*. The margin reads it, *Be not against me*. Note, We are to reckon those against us, and really our enemies, that would hinder us in our way to the heavenly Canaan. Our

relations they may be, but they cannot be our friends, that would dissuade us from and discourage us in the service of God and the work of religion. [2.] She is very particular in her resolution to cleave to her and never to forsake her; and she speaks the language of one resolved for God and heaven. She is so in love, not with her mother's beauty, or riches, or gaiety (all these were withered and gone), but with her wisdom, and virtue, and grace, which remained with her, even in her present poor and melancholy condition, that she resolves to cleave to her. *First*, She will travel with her: *Whither thou goest I will go*, though to a country I never saw and in a low and ill opinion of which I have been trained up; though far from my own country, yet with thee every road shall be pleasant. *Secondly*, She will dwell with her: *"Where thou lodgest I will lodge*, though it be in a cottage, nay, though it be no better a lodging than Jacob had when he had the stones for his pillow. Where thou settest up thy staff I will set up mine, be it where it may." *Thirdly*, She will twist interest with her: *Thy people shall be my people*. From Naomi's character she concludes certainly that the great nation was a wise and an understanding people. She judges of them all by her good mother, who, wherever she went, was a credit to her country (as all those should study to be who profess relation to the better country, that is, the heavenly), and therefore she will think herself happy if she may be reckoned one of them. "Thy people shall be mine to associate with, to be conformable to, and to be concerned for." *Fourthly*, She will join in religion with her. Thus she determined to be hers *usque ad aras—to the very altars*: *"Thy God shall be my God*, and farewell to all the gods of Moab, which are vanity and a lie. I will adore the God of Israel, the only living and true God, trust in him alone, serve him, and in every thing be ruled by him;" this is to take the Lord for our God. *Fifthly*, She will gladly die in the same bed: *Where thou diest will I die*. She takes it for granted they must both die, and that in all probability Naomi, as the elder, would die first, and resolves to continue in the same house, if it might be, till her days also were fulfilled, intimating likewise a desire to partake of her happiness in death; she wishes to die in the same place, in token of her dying after the same manner. "Let me die the death of righteous Naomi, and let my last end be like hers." *Sixthly*, She will desire to be buried in the same grave, and to lay her bones by hers: *There will I be buried*, not desiring to have so much as her dead body carried back to the country of Moab, in token of any remaining kindness for it; but, Naomi and she having joined souls, she desires they may mingle dust, in hopes of rising together, and being together for ever in the other world. [3.] She backs her resolution to adhere to Naomi with a solemn oath: *The Lord do so to me, and more also* (which was an ancient form of imprecation), *if aught but death part thee and me*. An oath for confirmation was an end of this strife, and would leave a lasting obligation upon her never to forsake that good way she was now making choice of. *First*, It is implied that death would separate between them for a time. She could promise to die and be buried in the same place, but not at the same time; it might so happen that she might die first, and this would part them. Note, Death parts those whom nothing else will part. A dying hour is a parting hour, and should be so thought of by us and prepared for. *Secondly*, It is resolved that nothing else should part them; not any kindness from her own family and people, nor any hope of preferment among them, not any unkindness from Israel, nor the fear of poverty and disgrace among them. "No, I will *never leave thee*." Now,

(2.) This is a pattern of a resolute convert to God and religion. Thus must we be at a point. [1.] We must take the Lord for our God. "This God is *my God for ever and ever*; I have avouched him for mine." [2.] When we take God for our God we must

take his people for our people in all conditions; though they be a poor despised people, yet, if they be his, they must be ours. [3.] Having cast in our lot among them, we must be willing to take our lot with them and to fare as they fare. We must submit to the same yoke and draw in it faithfully, take up the same cross and carry it cheerfully, go where God will have us to go, though it should be into banishment, and lodge where he will have us to lodge, though it be in a prison, die where he will have us die, and lay our bones in the graves of the upright, who enter into peace and rest in their beds, though they be but the *graves of the common people*. [4.] We must resolve to continue and persevere, and herein our adherence to Christ must be closer than that of Ruth to Naomi. She resolved that nothing but death should separate them; but we must resolve that death itself shall not separate us from our duty to Christ, and then we may be sure that death itself shall not separate us from our happiness in Christ. [5.] We must bind our souls with a bond never to break these pious resolutions, and swear unto the Lord that we will cleave to him. Fast bind, fast find. He that means honestly does not startle at assurances.

8. Naomi is hereby silenced (v. 18): *When she saw that Ruth was stedfastly minded to go with her* (which was the very thing she aimed at in all that she had said, to make her of a stedfast mind in going with her), when she saw that she had gained her point, she was well satisfied, and *left off speaking to her*. She could desire no more than that solemn protestation which Ruth had just now made. See the power of resolution, how it puts temptation to silence. Those that are unresolved, and go in religious ways without a stedfast mind, tempt the tempter, and stand like a door half open, which invites a thief; but resolution shuts and bolts the door, resists the devil, and forces him to flee.

The Chaldee paraphrase thus relates the debate between Naomi and Ruth:—Ruth said, *Entreat me not to leave thee, for I will be a proselyte*. Naomi said, *We are commanded to keep sabbaths and good days, on which we may not travel above 2000 cubits*—a sabbath-day's journey. *Well*, said Ruth, *whither thou goest I will go*. Naomi said, *We are commanded not to tarry all night with Gentiles*. *Well*, said Ruth, *where thou lodgest I will lodge*. Naomi said, *We are commanded to keep 613 precepts*. *Well*, said Ruth, *whatever thy people keep I will keep, for they shall be my people*. Naomi said, *We are forbidden to worship any strange god*. *Well*, said Ruth, *thy God shall be my God*. Naomi said, *We have four sorts of deaths for malefactors, stoning, burning, strangling, and slaying with the sword*. *Well*, said Ruth, *where thou diest I will die*. *We have*, said Naomi, *houses of sepulchre*. *And there*, said Ruth, *will I be buried*.

Verses 19-22

Naomi and Ruth, after many a weary step (the fatigue of the journey, we may suppose, being somewhat relieved by the good instructions Naomi gave to her proselyte and the good discourse they had together), came at last to Bethlehem. And they came very seasonably, *in the beginning of the barley-harvest*, which was the first of their harvests, that of wheat following after. Now Naomi's own eyes might convince her of the truth of what she had heard in the country of Moab, that *the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread*, and Ruth might see this good land in its best state; and now they had opportunity to provide for winter. Our *times are in God's hand*, both the events and the time of them. Notice is here taken,

I. Of the discomposure of the neighbours upon this occasion (v. 19): *All the city was moved about them*. Her old acquaintance gathered about her, to enquire concerning her state, and to bid her welcome to Bethlehem again. Or perhaps they were *moved*

about her, lest she should be a charge to the town, she looked so bare. By this it appears that she had formerly lived respectably, else there would not have been so much notice taken of her. If those that have been in a high and prosperous condition break, or fall into poverty or disgrace, their fall is the more remarkable. And they said, *Is this Naomi?* The women of the city said it, for the word is feminine. Those with whom she had formerly been intimate were surprised to see her in this condition; she was so much broken and altered with her afflictions that they could scarcely believe their own eyes, nor think that this was the same person whom they had formerly seen, so fresh, and fair, and gay: *Is this Naomi?* So unlike is the rose when it is withered to what it was when it was blooming. What a poor figure does Naomi make now, compared with what she made in her prosperity! If any asked this question in contempt, upbraiding her with her miseries ("is this she that could not be content to fare as her neighbours did, but must ramble to a strange country? see what she has got by it!"), their temper was very base and sordid. Nothing more barbarous than to triumph over those that are fallen. But we may suppose that the generality asked it in compassion and commiseration: "Is this she that lived so plentifully, and kept so good a house, and was so charitable to the poor? *How has the gold become dim!*" Those that had seen the magnificence of the first temple wept when they saw the meanness of the second; so these here. Note, Afflictions will make great and surprising changes in a little time. When we see how sickness and old age alter people, change their countenance and temper, we may think of what the Bethlehemites said: "*Is this Naomi?* One would not take it to be the same person." God, by his grace, fit us for all such changes, especially the great change!

II. Of the composure of Naomi's spirit. If some upbraided her with her poverty, she was not moved against them, as she would have been if she had been poor and proud; but, with a great deal of pious patience, bore that and all the other melancholy effects of her affliction (v. 20, 21): *Call me not Naomi, call me Mara*, etc. "*Naomi* signifies *pleasant* or *amiable*; but all my pleasant things are laid waste; call me *Mara*, *bitter* or *bitterness*, for I am now a woman of a sorrowful spirit." Thus does she bring her mind to her condition, which we all ought to do when our condition is not in every thing to our mind. Observe,

1. The change of her state, and how it is described, with a pious regard to the divine providence, and without any passionate murmurings or complaints. (1.) It was a very sad and melancholy change. She *went out full*; so she thought herself when she had her husband with her and two sons. Much of the fulness of our comfort in this world arises from agreeable relations. But she now *came home again empty*, a widow and childless, and probably had sold her goods, and of all the effects she took with her brought home no more than the clothes on her back. So uncertain is all that which we call fulness in the creature, 1 Sa. 2:5. Even in the fulness of that sufficiency we may be in straits. But there is a fulness, a spiritual and divine fulness, which we can never be emptied of, a good part which shall not be *taken from those that have it*. (2.) She acknowledges the hand of God, his mighty hand, in the affliction. "It is the Lord that has *brought me home again empty*; it is the Almighty that has afflicted me." Note, Nothing conduces more to satisfy a gracious soul under an affliction than the consideration of the hand of God in it. *It is the Lord*, 1 Sa. 3:18; Job 1:21. Especially to consider that he who afflicts us is *Shaddai*, the *Almighty*, with whom it is folly to contend and to whom it is our duty and interest to submit. It is that name of God by which he enters into covenant with his people: *I am God Almighty, God All-sufficient*, Gen. 17:1. He afflicts as a God in covenant, and his all-sufficiency may be our

support and supply under all our afflictions. He that empties us of the creature knows how to fill us with himself. (3.) She speaks very feelingly of the impression which the affliction had made upon her: He has *dealt very bitterly with me*. The cup of affliction is a bitter cup, and even that which afterwards *yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness*, yet, for the present, is *not joyous, but grievous*, Heb. 12:11. Job complains, *Thou writest bitter things against me*, Job 13:26. (4.) She owns the affliction to come from God as a controversy: *The Lord hath testified against me*. Note, When God corrects us he *testifies against us* and contends with us (Job 10:17), intimating that he is displeased with us. Every rod has a voice, the voice of a witness.

2. The compliance of her spirit with this change: "*Call me not Naomi*, for I am no more pleasant, either to myself or to my friends; *but call me Mara*, a name more agreeable to my present state." Many that are debased and impoverished yet affect to be called by the empty names and titles of honour they have formerly enjoyed. Naomi did not so. Her humility regards not a glorious name in a dejected state. If God deal bitterly with her, she will accommodate herself to the dispensation, and is willing to be called *Mara, bitter*. Note, It well becomes us to have our hearts humbled under humbling providences. When our condition is brought down our spirits should be brought down with it. And then our troubles are sanctified to us when we thus comport with them; for it is not an affliction itself, but an affliction rightly borne, that does us good. *Perdidisti tot mala, si nondum misera esse didicisti*—*So many calamities have been lost upon you if you have not yet learned how to suffer*. Sen. ad Helv. *Tribulation works patience*.

Chapter 2

There is scarcely any chapter in all the sacred history that stoops so low as this to take cognizance of so mean a person as Ruth, a poor Moabitish widow, so mean an action as her gleaning corn in a neighbour's field, and the minute circumstances thereof. But all this was in order to her being grafted into the line of Christ and taken in among his ancestors, that she might be a figure of the espousals of the Gentile church to Christ, Isa. 54:1. This makes the story remarkable; and many of the passages of it are instructive and very improvable. Here we have, I. Ruth's humility and industry in gleaming corn, Providence directing her to Boaz's field (v. 1-3). II. The great favour which Boaz showed to her in many instances (v. 4-16). III. The return of Ruth to her mother-in-law (v. 18-23).

Verses 1-3

Naomi had now gained a settlement in Bethlehem among her old friends; and here we have an account,

I. Of her rich kinsman, Boaz, *a mighty man of wealth*, v. 1. The Chaldee reads it, *mighty in the law*. If he was both, it was a most rare and excellent conjunction, to be mighty in wealth and mighty in the scriptures too; those that are so are mighty indeed. He was grandson of Nahshon, who was prince of the tribe of Judah in the wilderness, and son of Salmon, probably a younger son, by Rahab, the harlot of Jericho. He carries might in his name, *Boaz—in him is strength*; and he was of the family of Elimelech, that family which was now reduced and brought so low. Observe, 1. Boaz, though a rich and great man, had poor relations. Every branch of the tree is not a top-branch. Let not those that are great in the world be ashamed to own their kindred that are mean and despised, lest they be found therein proud, scornful, and unnatural. 2. Naomi, though a poor contemptible widow, had rich relations, whom yet she boasted not of, nor was burdensome to, nor expected any thing from when she returned to Bethlehem in distress. Those that have rich relations, while they themselves are poor, ought to know that it is the wise providence of God that makes the difference (in which we ought to acquiesce), and that to be proud of our relation to such is a great sin, and to trust to it is great folly.

II. Of her poor daughter-in-law, Ruth. 1. Her condition was very low and poor, which was a great trial to the faith and constancy of a young proselyte. The Bethlehemites would have done well if they had invited Naomi and her daughter-in-law first to one good house and then to another (it would have been a great support to an aged widow and a great encouragement to a new convert); but, instead of tasting the dainties of Canaan, they have no way of getting necessary food but by gleaning corn, and otherwise, for aught that appears, they might have starved. Note, *God has chosen the poor of this world*; and poor they are likely to be, for, though God has chosen them, commonly men overlook them. 2. Her character, in this condition, was very good (v. 2): *She said to Naomi*, not, "Let me now go to the land of Moab again, for there is no living here, here there is want, but *in my father's house there is bread enough*." No, she is *not mindful of the country from which she came out*, otherwise she had now a fair occasion to return. The God of Israel shall be her God, and, though he slay her, yet will she trust in him and never forsake him. But her request is, *Let me go to the field, and glean ears of corn*. Those that are well born, and have been well brought up, know not what straits they may be reduced to, nor what mean employments they may be obliged to get their

bread by, Lam. 4:5. When the case is thus melancholy, let Ruth be remembered, who is a great example, (1.) Of humility. When Providence had made her poor she did not say, "To glean, which is in effect to beg, I am ashamed," but cheerfully stoops to the meanness of her circumstances and accommodates herself to her lot. High spirits can more easily starve than stoop; Ruth was none of those. She does not tell her mother she was never brought up to live upon crumbs. Though she was not brought up to it, she is brought down to it, and is not uneasy at it. Nay, it is her own motion, not her mother's injunction. Humility is one of the brightest ornaments of youth, and one of the best omens. Before Ruth's honour was this humility. Observe how humbly she speaks of herself, in her expectation of leave to glean: Let me glean after him *in whose sight I shall find grace*. She does not say, "I will go and glean, and surely nobody will deny me the liberty," but, "I will go and glean, in the hope that somebody will allow me the liberty." Note, Poor people must not demand kindness as a debt, but humbly ask it, and take it as a favour, though in ever so small a matter. It becomes the poor to use entreaties. (2.) Of industry. She does not say to her mother-in-law, "Let me now go a visiting to the ladies of the town, or go a walking in the fields to take the air and be merry; I cannot sit all day moping with you." No, it is not sport, but business, that her heart is upon: "*Let me go and glean ears of corn*, which will turn to some good account." She was one of those virtuous women that love not to eat the bread of idleness, but love to take pains. This is an example to young people. Let them learn betimes to labour, and, *what their hand finds to do, do it with their might*. A disposition to diligence bodes well both for this world and the other. Love not sleep, love not sport, love not sauntering; but love business. It is also an example to poor people to work for their living, and not beg that which they are able to earn. We must not be shy of any honest employment, though it be mean, *ergon ouden oneidos*—*No labour is a reproach*. Sin is a thing below us, but we must not think any thing else so That Providence calls us to. (3.) Of regard to her mother. Though she was but her mother-in-law, and though, being loosed by death from the law of her husband, she might easily suppose herself thereby loosed from the law of her husband's mother, yet she is dutifully observant of her. She will not go out without letting her know and asking her leave. This respect young people ought to show to their parents and governors; it is part of the honour due to them. She did not say, "Mother, if you will go with me, I will go glean:" but, "Do you sit at home and take your ease, and I will go abroad, and take pains." *Juniores ad labores*—*Youth should work*. Let young people take advice from the aged, but not put them upon toil. (4.) Of dependence upon Providence, intimated in that, I will *glean after him in whose sight I shall find grace*. She knows not which way to go, nor whom to enquire for, but will trust Providence to raise her up some friend or other that will be kind to her. Let us always keep us good thoughts of the divine providence, and believe that while we do well it will do well for us. And it did well for Ruth; for when she went out alone, without guide or companion, to glean, *her hap was to light on the field of Boaz*, v. 3. To her it seemed casual. She knew not whose field it was, nor had she any reason for going to that more than any other, and therefore it is said to be *her hap*; but Providence directed her steps to this field. Note, God wisely orders small events; and those that seem altogether contingent serve his own glory and the good of his people. Many a great affair is brought about by a little turn, which seemed fortuitous to us, but was directed by Providence with design.

Verses 4-16

Now Boaz himself appears, and a great deal of decency there appears in his carriage both towards his own servants and

towards this poor stranger.

I. Towards his own servants, and those that were employed for him in reaping and gathering in his corn. Harvest-time is busy time, many hands must then be at work. Boaz that had much, being a mighty man of wealth, had much to do, and consequently many to work under him and to live upon him. *As goods are increased those are increased that eat them, and what good has the owner thereof save the beholding of them with his eyes?* Boaz is here an example of a good master.

1. He had a servant that was set over the reapers, v. 6. In great families it is requisite there should be one to oversee the rest of the servants, and appoint to each their portion both of work and meat. Ministers are such servants in God's house, and it is requisite that they be both wise and faithful, and *show their Lord all things*, as he here, v. 6.

2. Yet he came himself to his reapers, to see how the work went forward, if he found any thing amiss to rectify it, and to give further orders what should be done. This was both for his own interest (he that wholly leaves his business to others will have it done by the halves; the master's eye makes a fat horse) and it was also for the encouragement of his servants, who would go on the more cheerfully in their work when their master countenanced them so far as to make them a visit. Masters that live at ease should think with tenderness of those that toil for them and bear the burden and heat of the day.

3. Kind and pious salutations were interchanged between Boaz and his reapers.

(1.) He said to them, *The Lord be with you*; and they replied, *The Lord bless thee*, v. 4. Hereby they expressed, [1.] Their mutual respect to each other; he to them as good servants, and they to him as a good master. When he came to them he did not fall a chiding them, as if he came only to find fault and exercise his authority, but he prayed for them: *"The Lord be with you, prosper you, and give you health and strength, and preserve you from any disaster."* Nor did they, as soon as ever he was out of hearing, fall a cursing him, as some ill-natured servants that hate their master's eye, but they returned his courtesy: *"The Lord bless thee, and make our labours serviceable to thy prosperity."* Things are likely to go on well in a house where there is such good-will as this between master and servants. [2.] Their joint-dependence upon the divine providence. They express their kindness to each other by praying one for another. They show not only their courtesy, but their piety, and acknowledgement that all good comes from the presence and blessing of God, which therefore we should value and desire above any thing else both for ourselves and others.

(2.) Let us hence learn to use, [1.] Courteous salutations, as expressions of a sincere good-will to our friends. [2.] Pious ejaculations, lifting up our hearts to God for his favour, in such short prayers as these. Only we must take heed that they do not degenerate into formality, lest in them we *take the name of the Lord our God in vain*; but, if we be serious in them, we may in them keep up our communion with God, and fetch in mercy and grace from him. It appears to have been the usual custom thus to wish reapers good speed, Ps. 129:7, 8.

4. He took an account from his reapers concerning a stranger he met with in the field, and gave necessary orders concerning her, that they should not touch her (v. 9) nor reproach her, v. 15. Masters must take care, not only that they do no hurt themselves, but that they suffer not their servants and those under them to do hurt. He also ordered them to be kind to her, and *let fall some of the handfuls on purpose for her*. Though it is fit that masters should restrain and rebuke their servants'

wastefulness, yet they should not tie them up from being charitable, but give them allowance for that, with prudent directions.

II. Boaz was very kind to Ruth, and showed her a great deal of favour, induced to it by the account he had of her, and what he observed concerning her, God also inclining his heart to countenance her. Coming among his reapers, he observed this stranger among them, and got intelligence from his steward who she was, and here is a very particular account of what passed concerning her.

1. The steward gave to Boaz a very fair account of her, proper to recommend her to his favour, v. 6, 7. (1.) That she was a stranger, and therefore one of those that by the law of God were to *gather the gleanings of the harvest*, Lev. 19:9, 10. She is the Moabitish damsel. (2.) That she was allied to his family; she came back with Naomi, the wife of Elimelech, a kinsman of Boaz. (3.) That she was a proselyte, for she came out of the country of Moab to settle in the land of Israel. (4.) That she was very modest, and had not gleaned till she had asked leave. (5.) That she was very industrious, and had continued close to her work from morning even until now. And the poor that are industrious and willing to take pains are fit to be encouraged. Now, in the heat of the day, she tarried a little in the house or booth that was set up in the field for shelter from the weather to repose herself, and some suggest that it is probably she retired for her devotion. But she soon came back to her work, and, except that little intermission, kept close to it all day, though it was not what she had been used to. Servants should be just in the character and reports they give to their masters, and take heed they do not misrepresent any person, nor without cause discourage their master's charity.

2. Boaz was hereupon extremely civil to her in divers instances. (1.) He ordered her to attend his reapers in every field they gathered in and not to glean in the field of another, for she should not need to go any where else to better herself (v. 8): *Abide here fast by my maidens*; for those of her own sex were the fittest company for her. (2.) He charged all his servants to be very tender of her and respectful to her, and no doubt they would be so to one to whom they saw their master kind. She was a stranger, and it is probably her language, dress, and mien differed much from theirs; but he charged them that they should not in any thing affront her, or be abusive to her, as rude servants are too apt to be to strangers. (3.) He bade her welcome to the entertainment he had provided for his own servants. He ordered her, not only to drink of the water which was drawn for them (for that seems to be the liquor he means, v. 9, drawn from the famous well of Beth-lehem which was by the gate, the water of which David longed for, 2 Sa. 23:15), but *at meal-time to come and eat of their bread* (v. 14), yea, and she should be welcome to their sauce too: *Come, dip thy morsel in the vinegar*, to make it savoury; for God allows us not only nourishing but relishing food, not for necessity only, but for delight. And for encouragement o her, and direction to the servants, he himself, happening to be present when the reapers sat down to meat, *reached her parched corn* to eat. It is no disparagement to the finest hand to be *reached forth to the needy* (Prov. 31:20), and to be employed in serving the poor. Observe, Boaz was not scanty in his provision for his reapers, but sent them so much more than enough for themselves as would be entertainment for a stranger. Thus *there is that scattereth and yet increaseth*. (4.) He commended her for her dutiful respect to her mother-in-law, which, though he did not know her by sight, yet he had heard of (v. 11): *It has been fully shown me all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law*. Note, Those that do well ought to have the praise of it. But that which especially he commended her for was

that she had left her own country, and had become a proselyte to the Jewish religion; for so the Chaldee expounds it: "Thou hast come to be proselyted, and to dwell among *a people whom thou knowest not.*" Those that leave all, to embrace the true religion, are worthy of double honour. (5.) He prayed for her (v. 12): *The Lord recompense thy work.* Her strong affection to the commonwealth of Israel, to which she was by birth an alien, was such a work of the divine grace in her as would certainly be crowned with a full reward by him *under whose wings she had come to trust.* Note, Those that by faith come under the wings of the divine grace, and have a full complacency and confidence in that grace, may be sure of a full recompence of reward for their so doing. From this expression, the Jews describe a proselyte to be one that is *gathered under the wings of the divine majesty.* (6.) He encouraged her to go on in her gleaning, and did not offer to take her off from that; for the greatest kindness we can do our poor relations is to assist and encourage their industry. Boaz ordered his servants to let her glean among the sheaves, where other gleaners were not allowed to come, and not to reproach her, that is, not to call her *thief*, or to suspect her of taking more than was allowed her, v. 15. All this shows Boaz to have been a man of a generous spirit, and one that, according to the law, considered the heart of a stranger.

3. Ruth received his favours with a great deal of humility and gratitude, and conducted herself with as much propriety in her place as he did himself in his, but little thinking that she should shortly be the mistress of that field she was now gleaning in. (1.) She paid all possible respect to him, and gave him honour, according to the usage of the country (v. 10): *She fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground.* Note, Good breeding is a great ornament to religion; and we must render *honour to whom honour is due.* (2.) She humbly owned herself unworthy of his favours: *"I am a stranger* (v. 10) *and not like one of thy handmaids* (v. 13), not so well dressed nor so well taught, not so neat nor so handy." Note, It well becomes us all to think meanly of ourselves, and to take notice of that in ourselves which is diminishing, esteeming others better than ourselves. (3.) She gratefully acknowledged his kindness to her; though it was no great expense to him, nor much more than what he was obliged to by the divine law, yet she magnifies and admires it: *Why have I found grace in thy eyes?* v. 10. (4.) She begs the continuance of his good-will: *Let me find favour in thy sight* (v. 13), and owns that what he had said had been a cordial to her: *Thou hast comforted me, for that thou hast spoken friendly to me.* Those that are great, and in high places, know not how much good they may do to their inferiors with a kind look or by speaking friendly to them; and so small an expense, one would think, they should not grudge, when it shall be put upon the score of their charity. (5.) When Boaz gave her her dinner with his reapers she only ate so much as would suffice her, and left the rest, and immediately rose up to glean, v. 14, 15. She did not, under pretence either of her want or of her labour, eat more than was convenient for her, nor so much as to unfit her for work in the afternoon. Temperance is a friend to industry; and we must eat and drink to strengthen us for business, not to indispose us to it.

Verses 17-23

Here, I. Ruth finishes her day's work, v. 17. 1. She took care not to lose time, for she gleaned until evening. We must not be weary of well-doing, because in due season we shall reap. She did not make an excuse to sit still, or go home, till the evening. Let us *work the works of him that sent us, while it is day.* She scarcely used, much less did she abuse, the kindness of Boaz;

for, though he ordered his servants to leave handfuls for her, she continued to glean the scattered ears. 2. She took care not to lose what she had gathered, but threshed it herself, that she might the more easily carry it home, and might have it ready for use. *The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting*, and so loseth the benefit of it, *but the substance of a diligent man is precious*, Prov. 12:27. Ruth had gathered it ear by ear, but, when she had put it all together, it was an ephah of barley, about four pecks. Many a little makes a great deal. It is an encouragement to industry that in all labour, even that of gleaning, there is profit, but the *talk of the lips tendeth only to penury*. When she had got her corn into as little compass as she could, she took it up herself, and carried it into the city, though, had she asked them, it is likely some of Boaz's servants would have done that for her. We should study to be as little as possible troublesome to those that are kind to us. She did not think it either too hard or too mean a service to carry her corn herself into the city, but was rather pleased with what she had gotten by her own industry, and careful to secure it; and let us thus take care that we *lose not those things which we have wrought*, which we have gained, 2 Jn. 8.

II. She paid her respects to her mother-in-law, went straight home to her and did not go to converse with Boaz's servants, *showed her what she had gleaned*, that she might see she had not been idle.

1. She entertained her with what she had left of the good dinner Boaz had given her. She gave to her what she had reserved, after she was sufficed (v. 18), which refers to v. 14. If she had any thing better than another, her mother should have part with her. Thus, having shown industry abroad, she showed piety at home; so children's maintaining their parents is called (1 Tim. 5:4), and it is part of the honour due to them by the fifth commandment, Mt. 15:6.

2. She gave her an account of her day's work, and how a kind providence had favoured her in it, which made it very comfortable to her; for the gleanings that a righteous man hath are better than the harvests of many wicked, Ps. 37:16. (1.) Naomi asked her where she had been: *Where hast thou gleaned to-day?* Note, Parents should take care to enquire into the ways of their children, how, and where, and in what company they spend their time. This may prevent many extravagancies which children, left to themselves, run into, by which they bring both themselves and their parents to shame. If we are not our brethren's, yet surely we are our children's keepers: and we know what a son Adonijah proved, that had never been chidden. Parents should examine their children, not to frighten nor discourage them, not so as to make them hate home or tempt them to tell a lie, but to commend them if they have done well, and with mildness to reprove and caution them if they have done otherwise. It is a good question for us to ask ourselves in the close of every day, *"Where have I gleaned to-day? What improvements have I made in knowledge and grace? What have I done or obtained that will turn to a good account?"* (2.) Ruth gave her a particular account of the kindness she had received from Boaz (v. 19) and the hopes she had of further kindness from him, he having ordered her to attend his servants throughout all the harvest, v. 21. Note, Children should look upon themselves as accountable to their parents and to those that are over them, and not think it a disparagement to them to be examined; let them *do that which is good*, and they shall have praise of the same. Ruth told her mother what kindness Boaz had shown her, that she might take some occasion or another to acknowledge it and return him thanks; but she did not tell her how Boaz had commended her, v. 11. Humility teaches us, not only not to praise ourselves, but not to be forward to publish

others' praises of us. (3.) We are here told what Naomi said to it. [1.] She prayed heartily for him that had been her daughter's benefactor, even before she knew who it was (v. 19): *Blessed be he*, whoever he was, *that did take knowledge of thee*, shooting the arrow of prayer at a venture. But more particularly when she was told who it was (v. 20): *Blessed be he of the Lord*. Note, The poor must pray for those that are kind and liberal to them, and thus requite them, when they are not capable of making them any other requital. Let the loins of the poor bless those that refresh them, Job 29:13; 31:20. And he that hears the cries of the poor against their oppressors (Ex. 22:27), it may be hoped, will hear the prayers of the poor for their benefactors. She now remembered the former kindnesses Boaz had shown to her husband and sons, and joins those to this: he has not *left off his kindness to the living and to the dead*. If we generously show kindness even to those that seem to have forgotten our former favours, perhaps it may help to revive the remembrance even of those which seem buried. [2.] She acquainted Ruth with the relation their family was in to Boaz: *The man is near of kin to us*. It should seem she had been so long in Moab that she had forgotten her kindred in the land of Israel, till by this providence God brought it to her mind. At least she had not told Ruth of it, though it might have been some encouragement to a young proselyte. Unlike to humble Naomi are many, who, though fallen into decay themselves, are continually boasting of their great relations. Nay, Observe the chain of thought here, and in it a chain of providences, bringing about what was designed concerning Ruth. Ruth names Boaz as one that had been kind to her. Naomi bethinks herself who that should be, and presently recollects herself: *"The man is near of kin to us; now that I hear his name, I remember him very well."* This thought brings in another: "He is *our next kinsman*, our *goel*, that has the right to redeem our estate that was mortgaged, and therefore from him we may expect further kindness. He is the likeliest man in all Bethlehem to set us up." Thus God brings things to our mind, sometimes on a sudden, that prove to have a wonderful tendency to our good. [3.] She appointed Ruth to continue her attendance in the fields of Boaz (v. 22): *"Let them not meet thee in any other field*, for that will be construed a contempt of his courtesy." Our blessed Saviour is our *Goel*; it is he that has a right to redeem. If we expect to receive benefit by him, let us closely adhere to him, and his fields, and his family; let us not go to the world and its fields for that which is to be had with him only, and which he has encouraged us to expect from him. Has the Lord dealt bountifully with us? Let us not be found in any other field, nor seek for happiness and satisfaction in the creature. Tradesmen take it ill if those that are in their books go to another shop. We lose divine favours if we slight them. Some think Naomi gave her daughter-in-law a tacit rebuke; she had spoken (v. 21) of keeping fast by the young *men*. "Nay," said Naomi (v. 22), *"It is good that thou go out with his maidens; they are fitter company for thee than the young men."* But they are too critical. Ruth spoke of the young men because they were the principal labourers, and to them Boaz had given directions concerning her; and Naomi takes it for granted that, while she attended the young men, her society would be with the maidens, as was fit. Ruth dutifully observed her mother's directions; she continued to glean, to the end, not only of barley-harvest, but of the wheat-harvest, which followed it, that she might gather food in harvest to serve for winter, Prov. 6:6-8. She also kept fast by the maidens of Boaz, with whom she afterwards cultivated an acquaintance, which might do her service, v. 23. But she constantly came to her mother at night in due time, as became a virtuous woman, that was for working days, and not for merry nights. And when the harvest was ended (as bishop Patrick expounds it) she did not gad abroad, but kept her aged mother

company at home. Dinah went out to see the daughters of the land, and we know what a disgrace her vanity ended in. Ruth kept at home, and helped to maintain her mother, and went out on no other errand than to get provision for her, and we shall find afterwards what preferment her humility and industry ended in. *Seest thou a man diligent in his business?* Honour is before him.

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).

Verses 1-5

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, ch. 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, ch. 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, Deu. 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*, Tit. 2:5. The Israelites had indeed been once debauched by the daughters of Moab (Num. 25:1), but this Moabiteess 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?* 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.

Verses 6-13

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 (Mt. 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*, Gen. 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 (1 Sa. 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 (ch. 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 (Phil. 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* (Prov. 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!"

Verses 14-18

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, Ps. 37:4, 5; 138:8. *Your strength is to sit still*, Isa. 30:7.

Chapter 4

In this chapter we have the wedding between Boaz and Ruth, in the circumstances of which there was something uncommon, which is kept upon record for the illustration, not only of the law concerning the marrying of a brother's widow (Deu. 25:5, etc.), for cases help to expound laws, but of the gospel too, for from this marriage descended David, and the Son of David, whose espousals to the Gentile church were hereby typified. We are here told, I. How Boaz got clear of his rival, and fairly shook him off (v. 1-8). II. How his marriage with Ruth was publicly solemnized, and attended with the good wishes of his neighbours (v. 9-12). III. The happy issue that descended from this marriage, Obed, the grandfather of David (v. 13-17). And so the book concludes with the pedigree of David (v. 18-22). Perhaps it was to oblige him that the blessed Spirit directed the inserting of this story in the sacred canon, he being desirous that the virtues of his great-grandmother Ruth, together with her Gentile extraction and the singular providences that attended her, should be transmitted to posterity.

Verses 1-8

Here, 1. Boaz calls a court immediately. It is probable he was himself one of the elders (or aldermen) of the city; for he was a mighty man of wealth. Perhaps he was father of the city, and sat chief; for he seems here to have gone up to the gate as one having authority, and not as a common person; like Job, ch. 29:7, etc. We cannot suppose him less than a magistrate in his city who was grandson to Nahshon, prince of Judah; and his lying at the end of a heap of corn in the threshing-floor the night before was not at all inconsistent, in those days of plainness, with the honour of his sitting judge in the gate. But why was Boaz so hasty, why so fond of the match? Ruth was not rich, but lived upon alms; not honourable, but a poor stranger. She was never said to be beautiful; if ever she had been so, we may suppose that weeping, and travelling, and gleaning, had withered her lilies and roses. But that which made Boaz in love with her, and solicitous to expedite the affair, was that all her neighbours agreed she was a virtuous woman. This set her price with him *far above rubies* (Prov. 31:10); and therefore he thinks, if by marrying her he might do her a real kindness, he should also do himself a very great kindness. He will therefore bring it to a conclusion immediately. It was not court-day, but he got ten men of the elders of the city to meet him in the town-hall over the gate, where public business used to be transacted, v. 2. So many, it is probable, by the custom of the city, made a full court. Boaz, though a judge, would not be judge in his own cause, but desired the concurrence of other elders. Honest intentions dread not a public cognizance. 2. He summons his rival to come and hear the matter that was to be proposed to him (v. 1): "*Ho, such a one, sit down here.*" He called him by his name, no doubt, but the divine historian thought not fit to record it, for, because he refused to raise up the name of the dead, he deserved not to have his name preserved to future ages in this history. Providence favoured Boaz in ordering it so that this kinsman should come by thus opportunely, just when the matter was ready to be proposed to him. Great affairs are sometimes much furthered by small circumstances, which facilitate and expedite them. 3. He proposes to the other kinsman the redemption of Naomi's land, which, it is probable, had been mortgaged for money to buy bread with when the famine was in the land (v. 3): "*Naomi has a parcel of land to sell, namely, the equity of the redemption of it out of the hands of the mortgagee, which she is willing to part with;*" or, as some think, it was her jointure for her life, and, wanting

money, for a small matter she would sell her interest to the heir at law, who was fittest to be the purchaser. This he gives the kinsman legal notice of (v. 4), that he might have the refusal of it. Whoever had it must pay for it, and Boaz might have said, "My money is as good as my kinsman's; if I have a mind to it, why may not I buy it privately, since I had the first proffer of it, and say nothing to my kinsman?" No, Boaz, though fond enough of the purchase, would not do so mean a thing as to take a bargain over another man's head that was nearer a-kin to it; and we are taught by his example to be not only just and honest, but fair and honourable, in all our dealings, and to do nothing which we are unwilling should see the light, but be above-board.

4. The kinsman seemed forward to redeem the land till he was told that, if he did that, he must marry the widow, and then he flew off. He liked the land well enough, and probably caught at that the more greedily because he hoped that the poor widow being under a necessity of selling he have so much the better bargain: "*I will redeem it*" (said he) "with all my heart," thinking it would be a fine addition to his estate, v. 4. But Boaz told him there was a young widow in the case, and, if he have the land, he must take her with it, *Terra transit cum onere*—*The estate passes with this incumbrance*; either the divine law or the usage of the country would oblige him to it, or Naomi insisted upon it that she would not sell the land but upon this condition, v. 5. Some think this does not relate to the law of marrying the brother's widow (for that seems to oblige only the children of the same father, Deu. 25:5, unless by custom it was afterwards made to extend to the next of kin), but to the law of redemption of inheritances (Lev. 25:24, 25), for it is a *goel*, a *redeemer*, that is here enquired for; and if so it was not by the law, but by Naomi's own resolution, that the purchaser was to marry the widow. However it was, this kinsman, when he heard the conditions of the bargain, refused it (v. 6): "*I cannot redeem it for myself*. I will not meddle with it upon these terms, lest I mar my own inheritance." The land, he thought, would be an improvement of his inheritance, but not the land with the woman; that would mar it. Perhaps he thought it would be a disparagement to him to marry such a poor widow that had come from a strange country, and almost lived upon alms. He fancied it would be a blemish to his family, it would mar his blood, and disgrace his posterity. Her eminent virtues were not sufficient in his eye to counterbalance this. The Chaldee paraphrase makes his reason for this refusal to be that he had another wife, and, if he should take Ruth, it might occasion strife and contention in his family, which would mar the comfort of his inheritance. Or he thought she might bring him a great many children, and they would all expect shares out of his estate, which would scatter it into too many hands, so that the family would make the less figure. This makes many shy of the great redemption: they are not willing to espouse religion. They have heard well of it, and have nothing to say against it; they will give it their good word, but at the same time they will give their good word with it; they are willing to part with it, and cannot be bound to it, for fear of marring their own inheritance in this world. Heaven they could be glad of, but holiness they can dispense with; it will not agree with the lusts they have already espoused, and therefore, let who will purchase heaven at that rate, they cannot.

5. The right of redemption is fairly resigned to Boaz. If this nameless kinsman lost a good bargain, a good estate, and a good wife too, he may thank himself for not considering it better, and Boaz will thank him for making his way clear to that which he valued and desired above any thing. In those ancient times it was not the usage to pass estates by writings, as afterwards (Jer. 32:10, etc.), but by some sign or ceremony, as with us by livery and seisin, as we commonly call it, that is, the delivery of seisin, seisin of a house by giving the key, of land by giving turf and a

twig. The ceremony here used was, he that surrendered *plucked off his shoe* (the Chaldee says it was *the glove of his right hand*) and gave it to him to whom he made the surrender, intimating thereby that, whatever right he had to tread or go upon the land, he conveyed and transferred it, upon a valuable consideration, to the purchaser: this was a *testimony in Israel*, v. 7. And it was done in this case, v. 8. If this kinsman had been bound by the law to marry Ruth, and his refusal had been a contempt of that law, Ruth must have *plucked off his shoe* and *spit in his face*, Deu. 25:9. But, though his relation should in some measure oblige him to the duty, yet the distance of his relation might serve to excuse him from the penalty, or Ruth might very well dispense with it, since his refusal was all she desired from him. But bishop Patrick, and the best interpreters, think this had no relation to that law, and that the drawing off of the shoe was not any disgrace as there, but a confirmation of the surrender, and an evidence that it was not fraudulently nor surreptitiously obtained. Note, Fair and open dealing in all matters of contract and commerce is what all those must make conscience of that would approve themselves Israelites indeed, without guile. How much more honourably and honestly does Boaz come by this purchase than if he had secretly undermined his kinsman, and privately struck up a bargain with Naomi, unknown to him. Honesty will be found the best policy.

Verses 9-12

Boaz now sees his way clear, and therefore delays not to perform his promise made to Ruth that he would do the kinsman's part, but in the gate of the city, before the elders and all the people, publishes a marriage-contract between himself and Ruth the Moabitess, and therewith the purchase of all the estate that belonged to the family of Elimelech. If he had not been (ch. 2:1) *a mighty man of wealth*, he could not have compassed this redemption, nor done this service to his kinsman's family. What is a great estate good for, but that it enables a man to do so much the more good in his generation, and especially to those of his own household, if he have but a heart to use it so! Now concerning this marriage it appears,

I. That it was solemnized, or at least published, before many witnesses, v. 9, 10. "You are witnesses," 1. "That I have bought the estate. Whoever has it, or any part of it, mortgaged to him, let him come to me and he shall have his money, according to the value of the land," which was computed by the number of years to the year of jubilee (Lev. 25:15), when it would have returned of course to Elimelech's family. The more public the sales of estates are the better they are guarded against frauds. 2. "That I have purchased the widow to be my wife." He had no portion with her; what jointure she had was encumbered, and he could not have it without giving as much for it as it was worth, and therefore he might well say he purchased her; and yet, being a virtuous woman, he reckoned he had a good bargain. *House and riches are the inheritance of fathers*, but a prudent wife is more valuable, is from the Lord as a special gift. He designed, in marrying her, to preserve the memory of the dead, that the name of Mahlon, though he left no son to bear it up, might not be cut off from the gate of his place, but by this means might be preserved, that it should be inserted in the public register that Boaz married Ruth the widow of Mahlon, the son of Elimelech, which posterity, whenever they had occasion to consult the register, would take particular notice of. And this history, being preserved for the sake of that marriage and the issue of it, proved an effectual means to perpetuate the name of Mahlon, even beyond the thought or intention of Boaz, to the world's end. And observe that because Boaz did this honour to the dead, as well as this kindness to the living, God did him the honour to bring him into the genealogy of the Messiah, by

which his family was dignified above all the families of Israel; while the other kinsman, that was so much afraid of diminishing himself, and marring his inheritance, by marrying the widow, has his name, family, and inheritance, buried in oblivion and disgrace. A tender and generous concern for the honour of the dead and the comfort of poor widows and strangers, neither of which can return the kindness (Lu. 14:14), is sure what God will be well pleased with and will surely recompense. Our Lord Jesus is our *Goel*, our *Redeemer*, our everlasting Redeemer. He looked, like Boaz, with compassion on the deplorable state of fallen mankind. At a vast expense he redeemed the heavenly inheritance for us, which by sin was mortgaged, and forfeited into the hands of divine justice, and which we should never have been able to redeem. He likewise purchased a peculiar people, whom he would espouse to himself, though strangers and foreigners, like Ruth, poor and despised, that the name of that dead and buried race might not be cut off for ever. He ventured the marring of his own inheritance, to do this, for, *though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor*; but he was abundantly recompensed for it by his Father, who, because he thus humbled himself, hath *highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name*. Let us own our obligations to him, make sure our contract with him, and study all our days how to do him honour. Boaz, by making a public declaration of this marriage and purchase, not only secured his title against all pretenders, as it were by a fine with proclamations, but put honour upon Ruth, showed that he was not ashamed of her, and her parentage and poverty, and left a testimony against clandestine marriages. It is only that which is evil that hates the light and comes not to it. Boaz called witnesses to what he did, for it was what he could justify, and would never disown; and such regard was then had, even to the contemned crowd, that not only the elders, but all the people that were in the gate, passing and re-passing, were appealed to (v. 9), and hearkened to (v. 11) when they said, *We are witnesses*.

II. That it was attended with many prayers. The elders and all the people, when they witnessed to it, wished well to it, and blessed it, v. 11, 12. Ruth, it should seem, was now sent for; for they speak of her (v. 12) as present: *This young woman*; and, he having taken her to wife, they look upon her as already come into his house. And very heartily they pray for the new-married couple.

1. The senior elder, it is likely, made this prayer, and the rest of the elders, with the people, joined in it, and therefore it is spoken of as made by them all; for in public prayers, though but one speaks, we must all pray. Observe, (1.) Marriages ought to be blessed, and accompanied with prayer, because every creature and every condition are that to us, and no more, that God makes them to be. It is civil and friendly to wish all happiness to those who enter into that condition; and what good we desire we should pray for from the fountain of all good. The minister who gives himself to the word and prayer, as he is the fittest person to exhort, so he is the fittest to bless and pray for those that enter into this relation. (2.) We ought to desire and pray for the welfare and prosperity one of another, so far from envying or grieving at it.

2. Now here, (1.) They prayed for Ruth: *The Lord make the woman that has come into thy house like Rachel and Leah*, that is, "God make her a good wife and a fruitful mother." Ruth was a virtuous woman, and yet needed the prayers of her friends, that by the grace of God she might be made a blessing to the family she had come into. They prayed that she might be like Rachel and Leah, rather than like Sarah and Rebekah, for Sarah had but one son, and Rebekah but one that was in covenant, the other

was Esau, who was rejected; but Rachel and Leah did *build up the house of Israel*: all their children were in the church, and their offspring was numerous. "May she be a flourishing, fruitful, faithful *vine by thy house side*." (2.) They prayed for Boaz, that he might continue to do worthily in the city to which he was an ornament, and might there be more and more famous. They desired that the wife might be a blessing in the private affairs of the house, and the husband a blessing in the public business of the town, that she in her place, and he in his, might be wise, virtuous, and successful. Observe, The way to be famous is to do worthily. Great reputation must be obtained by great merits. It is not enough not to do unworthily, to be harmless and inoffensive, but we must do worthily, be useful and serviceable to our generation. Those that would be truly illustrious must in their places shine as lights. (3.) They prayed for the family: "*Let thy house be like the house of Pharez*," that is, "let it be very numerous, let it greatly increase and multiply, as the house of Pharez did." The Bethlehemites were of the house of Pharez, and knew very well how numerous it was; in the distribution of the tribes, that grandson of Jacob had the honour which none of the rest had but Manasseh and Ephraim, that his posterity was subdivided into two distinct families, Hezron and Hamul, Num. 26:21. Now they prayed that the family of Boaz, which was one branch of that stock, might in process of time become as numerous and great as the whole stock now was.

Verses 13-22

Here is, I. Ruth a wife. Boaz took her, with the usual solemnities, to his house, and *she became his wife* (v. 13), all the city, no doubt, congratulating the preferment of a virtuous woman, purely for her virtues. We have reason to think that Orpah, who returned from Naomi to her people and her gods, was never half so well preferred as Ruth was. He that forsakes all for Christ shall find more than all with him; it shall be recompensed a hundred-fold in this present time. Now Orpah wished she had gone with Naomi too; but she, like the other kinsman, stood in her own light. Boaz had prayed that this pious proselyte might receive a full reward of her courage and constancy from the God of Israel, *under whose wings she had come to trust*; and now he became an instrument of that kindness, which was an answer to his prayer, and helped to make his own words good. Now she had the command of those servants with whom she had associated and of those fields in which she had gleaned. Thus sometimes *God raiseth up the poor out of the dust, to set them with princes*, Ps. 113:7, 8.

II. Ruth a mother: *The Lord gave her conception; for the fruit of the womb is his reward*, Ps. 127:3. It is one of the keys he hath in his hand; and he sometimes makes the barren woman that had been long so to be *a joyful mother of children*, Ps. 113:9; Isa. 54:1.

III. Ruth still a daughter-in-law, and the same that she always was, to Naomi, who was so far from being forgotten that she was a principal sharer in these new joys. The good women that were at the labour when this child was born congratulated Naomi upon it more than either Boaz or Ruth, because she was the match-maker, and it was the family of her husband that was hereby built up. See here, as before, what an air of devotion there was then even in the common expressions of civility among the Israelites. Prayer to God attended the birth of the child. What a pity it is that such pious language should either be disused among Christians or degenerate into a formality. "*Blessed be the Lord that has sent thee this grandson*," v. 14, 15. 1. Who was the preserver of the name of her family, and who, they hoped, would be famous, because his father was so. 2. Who would be

hereafter dutiful and kind to her, so they hoped, because his mother was so. If he would but take after her, he would be a comfort to his aged grandmother, a restorer of her life, and, if there should be occasion, would have wherewithal to be the nourisher of her old age. It is a great comfort to those that are going into years to see any of those that descend from them growing up, that are likely, by the blessing of God, to be a stay and support to them, when the years come wherein they will need such, and of which they will say they have no pleasure in them. Observe, They say of Ruth that she loved Naomi, and therefore was better to her than seven sons. See how God in his providence sometimes makes up the want and loss of those relations from whom we expected most comfort in those from whom we expected least. The bonds of love prove stronger than those of nature, and there is a *friend that sticks closer than a brother*; so here there was a daughter-in-law better than an own child. See what wisdom and grace will do. Now here, (1.) The child is named by the neighbours, v. 17. The good women would have it called *Obed, a servant*, either in remembrance of the meanness and poverty of the mother or in prospect of his being hereafter a servant, and very serviceable, to his grandmother. It is no dishonour to those that are ever so well born to be servants to God, their friends, and their generation. The motto of the princes of Wales is *Ich dien—I serve*. (2.) The child is nursed by the grandmother, that is, dry-nursed, when the mother had weaned him from the breast, v. 16. She laid it in her bosom, in token of her tender affection to it and care of it. Grandmothers are often the most fond.

IV. Ruth is hereby brought in among the ancestors of David and Christ, which was the greatest honour. The genealogy is here drawn from Pharez, through Boaz and Obed, to David, and so leads towards the Messiah, and therefore it is not an endless genealogy.