

BOAZ

Boaz is one of the most beautiful characters in the Bible, and he is an unmistakable type of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was the great-grandfather of king David, and his story is told in the book of Ruth-where he is seen as the great redeemer, and then as the loving husband of Ruth. In our present study we shall trace a number of ways in which Boaz depicts our Lord, and we trust we shall be led into a fuller understanding of our own Great Saviour, and a fuller love for Him.

We are first introduced to Boaz in Ruth chapter two, where he is described as A MIGHTY MAN OF WEALTH (Ruth 2:1) That is a very suggestive title, and no doubt many Bethlehemites would have held him in very high esteem on that account. While we do not know the exact extent of his holdings, there is much in the story that shows how considerable they were. He evidently employed many reapers to gather in his harvests, and later it seemed no problem to him to purchase the threatened fields of his late relative Elimelech. It is evident also that he loved to share his abundance with others, and many around would have testified, "Of his fullness have all we received" (Cp. John 1: 16).

Having said all that, however, we only need to ask, how much more worthy of that title is our Lord Jesus! He is THE "Mighty Man of Wealth", and "the cattle upon a thousand hills" belong to Him (Psa. 50:10, 11). The whole universe is actually His estate. He made it; He maintains it; and certainly He holds the title-deeds (See Psa. 89:11; John 1:1-3; Col.1: 16, etc.). What is more important is the fact that all those hidden treasures; -"treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3), are likewise His, and "in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). Here is wealth that can never be counted, and here are riches compared with which all the so-called "assets" of earth's millionaires are as nothing. Yes, -Christ is THE "Mighty Man of Wealth", and Boaz is just a faint reflection of Him. How amazing that HE has called us His "friends" (John 15:15), -and how wonderful when we can sing with the hymn-writer: "Why should I charge my soul with care, The wealth in every mine Belongs to Christ; -God's Son and Heir, AND HE'S A FRIEND OF MINE".

The next glimpse we have of Boaz is of one who is A BELOVED MASTER TO HIS WILLING SERVANTS This, we would say, is particularly beautiful. When Boaz went out to his fields he greeted his happy reapers with, "The Lord be with you", and they answered him, "The Lord bless thee" (Ruth 2:4). The verses that then follow illuminate still further the loving "relationship binding them together. Those reapers had a loving master, and they loved him in return. Here, most certainly, was a master-servant relationship seldom seen in our days, and the very thought of something like this existing in the fields of Boaz is itself elevating, and also challenging. Boaz certainly loved his reapers, and they loved him.

And how true is this again of our own Far Greater Boaz, -the Lord Jesus Christ! We read, "...one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren", -truly a love-relationship! (Matt23:8). Those who labor in Christ's fields do so for love of Christ, and with the ever-deepening assurance that He loves them! We well remember a large missionary gathering in Central London where, amongst many others, a bent and Grey haired missionary-lady was being commissioned for yet another term of service in China.

When asked before the whole throng why he was going again, she rose to her feet, and in a feeble voice (but what a heavenly smile!), declared to the thousands present "I love, I love my Master; I will not go out free" (see Exo. 21: 5). Personal devotion to her Heavenly Master was her compelling secret, -stemming from many years of proving His love to her!

The early apostles of Christ gave similar testimonies in relation to the service they rendered. Paul said, "For the love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Cor. 5:14), and that, surely, was the secret behind all those labors described in such passages as 2 Cor. 6:4-10 and 2 Cor. 11: 23-31. And Peter was just the same. Behind his labors would have lain his avowed confession of John 21: 15-17, -"Lord, thou knowest that I love thee". As for John, he revealed his motivations when he wrote, "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). All those labored for Christ because they loved Christ; -and having learned His great love for them! And this has been the story of all Christ's reapers down through the centuries; it has been a service rooted in a love-relationship. While the picture of Boaz and his reapers is captivatingly beautiful, -all will agree that it was but a faint fore view of the love-relationship that exists between Christ and all who are sent to gather in His sheaves. The love of the Master constrains them all! Boaz was a much-beloved master to his servants, and so is Christ to those who serve Him.

The next picture we have of Boaz is actually central and basic to the whole story we are now considering. It begins to appear in chapter two where Boaz is seen as: ONE WHO HAS COMPASSION ON THESTRANGER (Ruth 2:5-17). The scene here is extremely beautiful. Boaz, coming out to his fields, sees the stranger who is gleaning behind his reapers, and he enquires as to who she is (v.5). He is told, she is "the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab"(v.6); -in other words, one who would normally be a very despised foreigner!

Perhaps we need to pause here and recall some of the early history of the Moabites, for it is a particularly dark one; -so much so that Moabites were permanently banned from entering into the congregation of the Lord, -"even to the tenth generation" (See Deut.23: 3; Neh.13: 1 etc.).

Boaz would certainly have known this history, and yet we hear him addressing the timid outcast as "My daughter" (v. 8), and then proceeding further to make every provision for her welfare! He even offered her a place among his own chosen reapers (v.14); -something deeply significant in itself! Ruth herself was quite taken aback by this wholly unexpected favor, and could only fall on her face and say, "Why have I found grace in thine eyes that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger" (v.10). This surely touches deep chords within us all, and takes our thoughts back immediately to our Greater Boaz, the Lord Jesus, of Whom it is written that He "can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way" (Heb.5: 2). Here, very clearly is Christ our Lord, Who reaches out even to us! We feel we should say here that this particular aspect of our story is one that goes right to the heart of ALL Biblical revelation. All through the Bible we are being shown a Living God Whose inmost nature is one of compassion on "strangers"; -strangers in every sense! The God Who made us is a God Who is spontaneously and inexplicably gracious to the totally disqualified and undeserving; -a God Whose heart and hands (literally) are stretched out to rescue and restore.

This, we say, is the God of the whole Bible, and we are, moreover, explicitly told that the matter of strangers like ourselves being brought into His favor, and being lifted into fellowship with Him, is His ordained method of the manifestation eternally of His own/ incomparable character (See Eph.2: 4-7).

How we should thank God that He and His Christ (our Greater Boaz) do have compassion on "strangers"! On the day of Pentecost, Peter declared, "For the promise is to you, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). And it was because of that great fact that Paul could later write to the Gentile converts at Ephesus and say, "at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: BUT NOW, in Christ Jesus ye who some times were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. ...Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (See Eph.2: 12, 13, 19).

All this was clearly prefigured in Boaz, and in his gracious dealings with Ruth. And how appropriate to our story is the word in Deut. 10:18, "He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and LOVETH THE STRANGER, in giving him (her) food and raiment".

Thank God, the Gospel invitation is for "all who labor and are heavy laden" (Matt.11: 28). How we should rejoice that throughout Christ's public ministry, Gentile strangers, as well as privileged Jews, were welcomed into His embrace, and ALL could be renewed and be made part of God's eternal purpose! Even Peter could not, at first, understand this greatness of God's heart, and the wideness of this embrace (Acts 10:14,28). He might have known something of the depth of Christ's love, but he did not yet know its BREADTH! (See Eph.3: 18,19). To such matters he himself was but a "stranger"! But later, Peter, too, was enlarged, and began to love as God loves, and to welcome "strangers" as God welcomes them (See Acts 10:34,43; 15:7-11). Thank God, then, for our own Great Boaz Who still welcomes "strangers"!

We now approach a further development in our story, -depicting Boaz as THE QUALIFIED REDEEMER This new phase is introduced to us by what Naomi said to Ruth, when Ruth returned home from her time of gleaning in the fields of Boaz. Ruth told her mother- in -law of her happy experiences amongst the reapers and of the kindness of Boaz himself. It was at that point that Naomi said to Ruth, "The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen", or, as the margin renders it, "He is one that hath the right to redeem" (Ruth 2:20). Now; to realize the significance of what Naomi said, we need to be reminded of certain legal procedures, which operated within Israel at that time. We read about these procedures in Leviticus 25, and they had to do, basically, with the retention of properties within the families to which they had been originally allocated. We read "If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem (buy back) that which his brother sold" (Lev.25: 25). Also, in verse 49, "Either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him". All this throws light on what Naomi had in mind when she said to Ruth, "He is near of kin to us". The inference was that Boaz was legally qualified to act as their "redeemer", and secure to the family that which it seemed they must lose. It is interesting to note that, in the Hebrew language, the single word "GAAL" signifies both a relation (kinsman) (eg.Num.5:8) and a Redeemer (e.g. Job 19:25). The reason is that God wanted to keep before His

human creatures the important fact that only a true "relation" of men could ever bring "redemption" to men!

All this, of course, carries over to our need of "redemption", or, shall we say, our need of spiritual rescue or release. Because we are sinners ("sold under sin" - Rom.7: 14), there is so much that has been lost by us, and so much that needs to be restored to us. In fact, we ourselves are lost to our Original Divine Owner, and we need to be "bought back". But who can do that for us? Only a "close relation" can qualify. And, thank God, a Close Relation Indeed HAS DONE IT! -"The Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim.2: 5).

Here, we would say, lies the importance of all those references to Christ as "Son of Man", -a title which our Lord Jesus loved to use of Himself, as, for instance, in Luke 19: 10, "the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost". And, how meaningful that word in Hebrews, -"...as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy...the devil, And deliver them who...were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb.2: 14,15). Wonderful it is indeed that our Almighty Lord Jesus, Son of God, should humble Himself to be "made in the likeness of men", and all in order that He might be man's Qualified Redeemer (See Phil.2: 6-8). We suggest that when Pilate exclaimed, "Behold THE MAN" (John 19:5), he was touching on one of the greatest marvels and mysteries of the ages, -"God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim.3: 16), -in order to redeem! If only Pilate himself had realized that truth!

We have to realize that neither angels nor archangels could ever have wrought redemption for us, -they are not our "relatives". But Christ can, AND CHRIST HAS, in view of His embraced humanity. We could go further and say that, at Calvary, that Blessed One, in yet another sense, became our kinsman indeed, for we read He was "made sin for us" (2 Cor.5:21). How we should thank God, then, for our Complete "Relative - Redeemer", far greater than Boaz, Who, "by his own blood...obtained eternal redemption for us" (Heb.9: 12).

The next thought that is emphasized about Boaz is similar to what we have just been saying, but by no means identical. The narrative goes on to show (and very carefully) that Boaz was not only a qualified redeemer, but also A WILLING REDEEMER

We note that Boaz says to Ruth, "Fear not; I WILL do to thee all that thou requirest; ...then WILL I do the part of a kinsman (redeemer) to thee" (Ruth 3:11, 13). And it is clear he spoke with a studied and full understanding of the great personal cost that would be involved (See ch. 4:5). Already qualified, he was also WILLING. It is very important for us to notice the great difference between "qualified" and "willing", -something carefully brought out in the unfolding events of our story. We are told that, in this particular case, there was another "kinsman" who was equally qualified, and who was, in fact, given the first option to exercise his right. For certain reasons, however, he declined the opportunity, and left the door open to Boaz. His words were, "I CANNOT redeem... lest I mar mine own inheritance" (Ruth 4:6). Much, perhaps, might be said about that (and Rom. 8:3, 4 might give us a safe clue!), but our simple point, for the moment, is to show that there is a world of difference between "qualified redeemer" and "willing redeemer"; - and only Boaz was both qualified AND willing. We read how he stood before the elders of the city and formally declared this; -stating, in fact, his complete readiness to fulfill all the associated responsibilities. He was prepared to proceed whatever might be the cost.

This, surely, brings our own Glorious Redeemer into clearest light. As Perfect Man He was qualified to redeem, but the marvel is, HE WAS ALSO WILLING! Boaz took a costly way, no doubt, (involving marriage to a despised daughter of Moab!), but what was that compared with the costly way which OUR Redeemer took for us? With awe and gratitude, we recall the words of Peter, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, ...But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1Pet.1: 18,19). O, thank God for Christ our WILLING Redeemer! When fallen men so desperately needed a Redeemer, and when God in Heaven was saying "Who will go for us", the ready answer of our Saviour was, "Here am I; send me" (Isa.6:8)! The Scriptures make it so plain that our Lord went willingly to the Cross-for our sakes. He Himself said, "I lay down my life... No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself" (John 10:17,18). We read in Isaiah, "He... is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Isa.53: 7). Indeed, each one of us can say, He "loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal.2: 20). It all reminds us of that old familiar song:

"There was one who was willing to die in my stead
That a soul so unworthy might live;
And the path to the Cross He was willing to tread
All the sins of my life to forgive". O, thank God for that Willing Redeemer

We now move on to what must be the most precious thought concerning Boaz, and where we see him as THE LOVING BRIDEGROOM

The text reads very simply; -"So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife" (Ruth 4:13). We have no details of any special celebrations that would have marked the occasion, but, in one way or another, it would have been a memorable time indeed for the whole Bethlehem community. Even back in verse 11, where but a few of the citizens were witnessing Boaz give his legal consent to the union, there was an outburst of happiness, and we read, " And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thy house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel". That was perhaps an indication of the rejoicing that later marked the marriage day itself. Be that as it may, it was certainly a marriage made in heaven-God had planned it, and God had done it, and that is always the secret of highest happiness. It was all a part of God's ongoing purpose. Boaz the redeemer was now Boaz the bridegroom.

Here, without a doubt, we have a beautiful picture of Christ and His Church; - a "great mystery" (Eph. 5:25-27, 32) woven deep into the texture of both Old and New Testaments. It is God's eternal purpose that His Son should be both the Redeemer and the Husband of His people, unfathomable mystery indeed! The final pages of our Bibles are taken up with what is called "the marriage-supper of the Lamb" (Rev.. 19:9), and we read, "Let us be glad and rejoice,... for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7). The language there is necessarily pictorial, and only the Holy Spirit can unfold the glorious meaning to us. We only know that God's redeemed people are destined for splendor unimaginable, and satisfactions beyond all telling.

Much of that, no doubt, belongs to the future and we gladly wait for it. We dare to say, however, that there are blessed foretastes of it, which we may know inwardly, as Christ becomes everything to us in spiritual experience. Already He is prepared to share with us all He has and all He is. This is holy ground, indeed, but at least we can begin to love Him as He deserves, and to show that love without restraint. Once we have tasted redemption, we shall find ourselves led on into an

ever-increasing adoration of our Dear Redeemer. Our Maker will be our Husband,- even now! Our Boaz will marry us! (See Isa. 54:5).

We now come to our final thought concerning Boaz. In Ruth 4:15 we have the words, "He shall be unto thee "A RESTORER OF THY LIFE AND A NOURISHER OF THINE OLD AGE"

Those words, we know, referred primarily to Obed, who was later born to Boaz and Ruth, but we suggest they can apply equally to Boaz himself. After all, the little baby Obed was but anew expression of Boaz his father, and, what is more, Boaz had already shown himself to be a "restorer" and a "nourisher" to many, -not least to Naomi and Ruth, when they returned in their sorrow from the land of Moab. And, most certainly, he would continue to do so, right till the end.

All this reflects the continuing and never ending care which our Lord Jesus bestows on those who are His own. Having loved them, He loves them "to the end" (John 13: 1). And He has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). We remember how the Lord promised. His disciples that He would NOT leave them comfortless, but would come to them, and be in them; and be in them forever(John 14:18,16). He is our Greater than Boaz, and He is prepared to be the Nourisher of our Old Age! As we read in Isaiah, "Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you" {Isa. 46:4}. We would say it is one of the glories of the Christian Gospel that believers may not only know Christ as their personal Saviour, but also as their perpetual Strength. He is the Real Manna, and He sustains us till the end.

That phrase, "Nourisher of thine old age" (Ruth 4:15), has always been a comfort to those who have served long in the battles of the Lord. "Paul the aged" (Philem.9) was one such, and we recall that, when he was in prison in Rome, and when he knew that his earthly "course" was finished, and the time of his "departure" was at hand, he was able to say to Timothy, "the Lord stood with me and strengthened me" (2 Tim. 4:6, 17. Earlier in the chapter (vs. 10' 16), he had told with sorrow how human helpers had failed him; -but not so his faithful Risen Lord!

Some who read these lines may not be old in years but we have learned that, in one way or another, our Dear Lord sees to it that all His people are brought to some kind of weakness, or, shall we say, some form of dependence upon Himself.

This, we are sure, is the ordained way for real Christian living;-we have to "learn to lean", and to trust Jesus for everything (See Rom. 1 :17 etc.). It is God's own plan that Christ's strength be made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). No wonder the Psalmist says, "He weakened my strength in the way" (Psa. 102:23). One of the strangest principles of heaven is that it is "the lame" who "take the prey"! (See Isa. 33:23). But we may be sure that our GREATER THAN BOAZ will always see us through, and in all our personal helplessness, He will "nourish" us.

As the hymn-writer puts it, Every need so fully met in Jesus, Not a longing that He will not fill, Not a burden but His grace will lighten, Not a storm but His own peace will still.

Praise God, then, for our own Far Greater Boaz;- Mighty Man of Wealth; Glorious Redeemer; Heavenly Husband! He will surely nourish us RIGHT TILL THE END!