

# **Living Messages of the Books of The Bible**

GENESIS TO MALACHI

G. Campbell Morgan, D. D.

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## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

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God, the Sufficiency of the Trusting.

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The Trusting; The Instruments of God.  
Boaz and Ruth.  
Obed.  
Jesse.  
David.

NEVER measure the value of a book by its bulk. This little brochure of a few pages is one of the rarest and most beautiful idylls in literature, even after translation. In seeking for its living message it is most necessary that we should have in mind a well-defined outline of the picture it represents.

The background is revealed in the opening words, “**And it came to pass in the days when the judges judged.**”

That places the story in that period in the history of the Hebrew people which we considered in our lecture on the book of Judges. The events chronicled transpired in troublous, stormy, and difficult times; in the midst of religious apostasy, political disorganization, and social chaos. That in itself is suggestive, reminding us that God has never left Himself without witness. In the darkest days, the light has never been totally extinguished.

The subsidiary foreground of the book presents the persons of Elimelech and Naomi, Mahlon and Chilion, and Orpah; and the events of famine, emigration, and the sorrows following; the return of only one of those who had departed, accompanied by a stranger to the land; and finally the story of the wooing and the wedding.

In the immediate foreground two figures stand out in bold relief, Ruth and Boaz. The picture is of the Rosa Bonheur type, only a few lines, strong, clear, definite; yet full of light and shade. To think of the book of Ruth is to think of Ruth and Boaz. Ultimately, observing the historic movement and the processes of God, it is seen that these two in their union constituted a highway for God, through perils, for the accomplishment of purpose.

Taking the book thus, there are two permanent values which I shall suggest.

- first, the book teaches the secrets of saintship; God is the sufficiency of trusting souls.
- secondly, it teaches the values of saintship; trusting souls are the instruments of God.

I must not be tempted into a long discussion of what is meant by saintship, but content myself with a simple yet inclusive definition. *A saint is a person separated to the will of God.* Ruth and Boaz lived the life of saintship in circumstances of the utmost difficulty, finding their sufficiency for such life in God.

Ruth was a Moabitess, of an accursed race, who according to the law of Moses was not allowed to enter the congregation of the covenant. While this story finally teaches that no such disability remains when faith in God is exercised, we must not forget the difficulty as it existed for Ruth; how the people would be likely to look at her, how she herself, as she came into contact with the religion of the Hebrew people, would realize the greatness of her distance.

Again, there was nothing calculated to allure her, from the standpoint of material prosperity. Those she had known of the people of the Lord had been compelled to leave their land on account of famine. From them she knew of the perils of those who had remained in the land, and all the sadness of their condition. She came back with Naomi into poverty, and to people who in all probability were hostile to them both. Thus the saintship of Ruth was in spite of difficulties, and flourished amid circumstances calculated to discourage her.

Boaz lived amid people of privilege in times of degeneracy.

Perhaps there are no circumstances in which it is harder to live the life of the saint.

It is to-day easier to live a godly life in the midst of worldly men and women, than in the midst of worldly Christians. Then again, he was a mighty man of wealth, and consequently able to procure whatever would contribute to the ease of his material existence. That condition is always perilous to the life of faith. It is to-day easier to live an out-and-out Christian life in circumstances of stress and strain, than in those of ease and luxury.

Once more notice carefully the legal difficulties threatening his love for Ruth. There was a nearer kinsman than he, who had first right; and appeal must be made to him ere Boaz could claim Ruth. There is a fine loyalty to principle manifested in this man's dealings in this particular. How easy it would have been for him to sacrifice principle in order to win. Thus both Ruth the Moabitess, and Boaz the man of Judah were saints, in spite of difficulties peculiar to each.

How full of beauty they were. Ruth was a woman capable of love, characterized by modesty, of fine gentleness, of splendid courage; a woman in all the grace and beauty of womanhood. Boaz was a man of integrity, of courtesy, of tender passion, of courage; a man in all the strength and glory of manhood.

The secret in each case was that of the sufficiency of God for such as trust Him.

In the case of Ruth three things are clearly manifest:

- first, she was a woman of an open mind, willing to receive the teaching of Naomi.
- secondly, she was a woman who at a crisis made her own choice against all the prejudices of her nationality, against the persuasion of Naomi, to whom she owed the very light of her religion; separating herself of her own free will from Moab, and transferring herself to Judah and to the Lord.
- finally, she was persistently, patiently, and definitely loyal to her choice.

She turned her back upon the land of her birth and childhood, with all its associations and acquaintances, and followed Naomi until she had put the waters of Jordan between herself and Moab. To this woman of open mind, God revealed Himself; and she, answering in obedient faith, found Him sufficient through all dangers and difficulties, and lived the life of a saint, full of beauty.

In the case of Boaz also three things are worthy of notice:

- First, his loyalty to God in the midst of difficulties. In the hour when men took the name of God upon their lips, while their lives were out of harmony with their profession, here was a man absolutely loyal; a man true in the midst of untruth; a man of faith in the midst of an age of faithlessness.
- Secondly, he was a man who made application of his relation to God in his relation to his fellow men. He greeted the men who worked for him in terms which disclosed his relation to God. Yet he was neither a slovenly nor a careless man. He saw immediately the stranger in his fields. He took personal oversight of all his affairs, yet he lived a life so godly as to be able to greet his workmen in terms which revealed his relationship to God.
- Finally, he was a man of caution and of courage. The two things are never far apart. Caution is the very soul of courage. Courage is the true expression of caution.

All these things reveal the fact that, trusting God, Boaz found Him sufficient to enable him to live a goodly life in circumstances of difficulty. Thus the secret of the grace and beauty of Ruth, and the strength and manliness of Boaz lie in the fact that in differing circumstances, *they both lived upon the same principle of simple yet sublime faith in God.*

Such souls as these are the instruments through which God is ever able to move towards the accomplishment of His purposes.

The story of the ultimate values of the faith of Ruth, and Boaz is told in the ending of this book. Boaz and Ruth, Obed, Jesse, David. So we see the very footsteps of Almighty God. Boaz the Hebrew, and Ruth the Moabitess in union, become the highway for God towards the ultimate realization of His purposes.

The living message may be stated in three propositions:

*First, circumstances neither make nor mar saints.* The difficulty of the life of saintship to the wealthy man is answered by the story of Boaz. The difficulty of the life of faith to a poor woman is answered by the story of Ruth.

The difficulty of living a godly life when the early training has been in the atmosphere of godliness is often affirmed, and that with a great amount of reason. There have been hours when I have envied the loyalty, the devotion, the splendour of the Christian life of some man whose conversion was a volcanic eruption, after which he left behind him forever the vulgarities of the old life, and entered into the graces of the new with surprising fullness of experience. It is possible to have been brought up in the atmosphere of Christianity and so to lack the reason for that ceaseless watchfulness which exists in the case of those who have lacked such training. How shall we answer those who urge this difficulty?

By telling the story of Boaz.

Some, on the other hand, urge quite another reason, that of irreligious training. They lack the advantages that others had. They were never sung to sleep in infancy with songs of the Christ.

After conversion they came into a strange atmosphere, and have to learn the way, and therefore so much cannot be expected from them as from others. How shall we answer those who thus speak?

By telling the story of Ruth.

The difficulties of privilege in the case of Boaz. The difficulties of limitation in the case of Ruth. Yet by faith they were non-existent, they were cancelled, they did not obtain. The privileged man shines with the luster of sainthood; the woman lacking all such privilege, flashes in the beauty and glory of saintship. Why? Because God is the mightiest environment of any human life. Because God is an inheritance, possessing which, all poverty is cancelled, and all other wealth is made as of no account.

So I repeat my first proposition.

Circumstances can neither make nor mar saints.

- If we cannot begin our saintship in the land of Moab, we shall never be saints in the land of Judah.
- If a man cannot be a saint as a wealthy man, though he lose all his wealth, poverty will not make a saint of him.
- If a man cannot be a saint as a poor man, wealth, if it comes to him, will in all probability damn him.

Therefore as a necessary sequence to the first proposition, I make the second.

*The principle of victory is faith. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."*

- Faith is the principle that takes hold upon God, and appropriates all His resources.
- Faith takes hold of that in God which man needs, and enables God to take hold of that in man which He needs.

From both of these people I learn something of the laws of faith. An open mind; a personal decision; direct application of the things believed to the details of every-day life; persistent courage in the face of all difficulty. Faith is not a sentiment about which we sing. It is an attitude of life, based upon the conviction of the soul.

*Finally the book teaches the value to God of that life, which makes the great surrender, and follows Him in faith.*

The value of such a life can never be known until we pass within the veil. Remember again the sequence with which this book closes; Obed, Jesse, David. Boaz and Ruth had passed into the light ere David came, the king for whom the nation was waiting, yet the sequence did not end with David.

A little later a prophet from some height of vision broke into a great song. “**But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel.**”

Far down the centuries there shone a light at midnight, and songs were heard, and in the direct line of the man of Judah and of privilege, and the woman of Moab and of limitation, to Bethlehem came the King. They did not see the issues. They did not live to reap the ultimate harvest of their fidelity, but God found foothold in the man and woman of faith, and in their united lives. That is the principle of which I think we need to be reminded, in order to encourage our hearts in the midst of work. We talk about results. If all the results of my ministry can be statistically stated, it is a dire failure.

Paul was a saint, cribbed, cabined and confined in prison. It is impossible to read his letters without being conscious of a certain amount of restlessness as he made appeal to his loved ones, “**remember my bonds.**”

A man whose motto was, *The Regions Beyond*, whose piercing eye saw the far distances, and who was profoundly conscious of the value of the evangel, who knew and wrote “**I am debtor . . . I am ready;**” was yet imprisoned, and had to content himself with writing letters. To-day those letters are of greater value than all his work. He did not know that presently they would be gathered together, and would constitute the great exposition of the evangelical faith for all the centuries.

Robert Morrison wrote in his diary, “This day I entered with Mr. Laidler to learn Latin. I paid ten shillings and sixpence, and am to pay one guinea per quarter. I know not what may be the end. God only knows.”

That ten shillings and sixpence was the beginning of that linguistic education which made Morrison the translator of the Bible, and opened the way for all the work which has been done in China during the past century.

These are but instances, yet take the comfort of them. May this be my last word. Remember that of the work you do to-day you cannot see the issue, if it is work wrought by faith in God. It may be in the great city of London, or in some hidden hamlet among the hills that your life will be lived, small, unknown, never published, never noticed either in the religious or irreligious press, and yet you may be God’s foothold for things of which you cannot dream, which if told you now you would not possibly believe. The one cry of my heart and of thy heart, comrade of faith, according to this book, should be a cry for out-and-out abandonment to Him, in order that by our loyalty He may win the victories of His royalty.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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