

The Sunday School Lesson

by Bessie Wilbon

LESSON BACKGROUND:

Naomi decided to return to her homeland in Judah. Ruth, her daughter-in-law could not be talked out of coming with her. Ruth was willing to leave Moab, the land of her birth, to go to a land strange to her and share the life of her widowed mother-in-law. So, the two of them set out for Bethlehem and they arrived there "in the beginning of barley harvest." Their arrival at this time was indeed fortunate, for hunger was imminent. The Biblical record suggests that without delay Ruth asked permission of her mother-in-law to join those who were gleaning in the fields, following after those who were reaping the barley harvest. The work was humbling but honest. Because of their need, Naomi granted permission. Making her way out of the city to the surrounding fields that were ripe with golden grain and alive with reapers, binders, and gleaners, Ruth asked the overseer of the reapers in a certain part of the field if she might glean there. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field owned by Boaz. Later, Boaz himself came from town to see how the harvesting was progressing. It is at this point that our text begins.

INTRODUCTION:

Our lesson includes the harvesting scenes of Israel in the time of Ruth and Boaz. In Judah the grain harvesting period was in the spring. The reaping was done with sickles. Handfuls of grain stalks were bound together into bunches, which were then gathered together and carried on the backs of donkeys or camels to the place where the threshing was done.

When the fields were being harvested, poor or disadvantaged people followed behind the reapers, picking up any sheaves of grain that were dropped and cutting any that were missed. This was called gleaning. Special instructions were given in the Hebrew legal codes to allow this practice of providing for the needy. The regulations regarding gleaning involved the harvest of fruit and grain.

THE LESSON:

Boaz asked the man in charge, "This is that young woman?" The man answered, "She is the foreign girl who came back from Moab with Naomi. She asked me to let her follow the workers and gather grain. She has been working since early morning, and has just now stopped to rest for a while under the shelter." Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Let me give you some advice. Don't gather grain anywhere except in the field. Work with the women here; watch them to see where they are reaping and stay with them. I have ordered my men not to molest you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and drink from the water jars that they have filled." Ruth bowed down with her face touching the ground and said to Boaz, "Why should you be so concerned about me? Why should you be so kind to a foreigner?" Boaz answered, "I have heard about everything that you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband died. I know how you left your father and mother and your own country and how you came to live among a people you had never known before. May the Lord reward you for what you have done. May you have a full reward from the Lord God of Israel, to whom you have come for protection!" (Ruth 2:5-12)

If Ruth's deep bow before Boaz seems extreme, we must remember the vast differences between their social, economic, and national status. Boaz was a mighty man: a member of what would be called the power structure of that society. Ruth was trying to eke out an existence from the wisps and bits of grain that could be salvaged from what was left over or missed in harvest. Boaz was a leading citizen of Israel: she (Ruth) was a poor widow. Boaz was an Israelite, one of the chosen people of God: Ruth was a foreign girl, a Moabitess, one of a tribal group that frequently had warred with the Hebrews. The special consideration she was being shown puzzled Ruth for as yet she apparently did not know that Boaz was a kinsman of her husband's family.

It may seem strange that Naomi had not told Ruth about their kinsman Boaz before she happened to glean in his fields. It may be she had been back in Bethlehem such a short time that the position of Boaz had not become clear to her. We must remember that Naomi had been away from Judah for more than a decade. Getting settled in a new home and reestablishing associations must have required all of her attention.

In her excitement at the good fortune of Ruth's meeting with Boaz, Naomi did not forget to offer a quick expression of thanks to God. Earlier Naomi felt that God had dealt with her in a very bitter way. (Ruth 1:19,20) Now, however, she could see that God had not forgotten her after all.

The future must have seemed bleak for Ruth as she made her decision to go to Bethlehem with Naomi. Naomi herself did not seem to be a person who could help assure Ruth any stable future. Furthermore, several may have resented Naomi's bringing "that strange foreign girl" among them.

It truly was providential that Boaz was harvesting his fields near Bethlehem, that it was possible for Ruth to join gleaners that she unwittingly chose to work in one of Boaz' fields, that he noticed her, and that she was a kinsman of Naomi. It was fortunate that he was unmarried and that their age difference was not a hindrance to thoughts of marriage. That Ruth's faithfulness and fortitude had come to Boaz's attention could perhaps be expected. But that he should have been in the area where she was gleaning and had a chance to see and talk with her was unusual. His later desire to exercise his kinsman's right that every impediment could be cleared away so they could be married, was most remarkable.

So it was that Ruth, loyal to Naomi, diligent in service, non-assertive in behavior, but alert and self-respecting, progressed from dependent gleaner to wife of the "mighty man of wealth." From being a stranger and a foreigner, she became "a mother in Israel."

Father, help us to remember the compassion Boaz showed to the foreign woman, Ruth. May we too be sensitive to the emotional, economic, and spiritual needs of the strangers who are in our midst. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Are You Saved By Works?

By J. M. Little

"But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumble stone; As it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and Rock of Offense: and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed." (Romans 9:31 - 33).

The Apostle Paul is pointing out very clearly here the tragedy of trying to be saved by works. Practically every church member you meet, including preachers, is trying to be saved by works. The News of old tried to be saved by works, they missed the spiritual intent altogether.

Salvation in Christ cannot be attained by works, but by faith in the Crucified, Buried, and Risen Christ, the Stumbling Stone. Christ is the Stumbling Stone. The reason you are not saved is because you are stumbling over the Stumbling Stone, Christ. You will not submit to Him. But you will submit to Him or go to Hell for your trouble.

That's the reason your church members are hard-boiled and cussed. You will not surrender your will to Christ! You are determined to have your religious works. Just listen to the testimony given in the churches today, the Person and Work of Christ are missing. The testimony in our churches today give no evidence whatsoever of having been awakened to the sinner's lost, guilty and hell-deserving condition. You have never been made to see that you are totally depraved and do not deserve the least of God's mercies. You have never known that salvation is all of the grace of God apart from any creature works. You have never seen that you hate God. But you will see all these things under the convicting and revealing work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11) long before you are saved.

If you have never seen them, you are not saved! I'll stake the destiny of my soul on the truth I'm stating. I know how God saves a lost sinner, and you will agree with me if the Lord ever opens your blinded mind and heart to see your lost condition. The greatest thing that could happen to you now is to be awakened to your lost condition.

I have wept for so many of you, going on in rebellion not knowing your lost condition and the danger you are in. You cannot know the danger you are in until the blessed Holy Spirit opens your eyes to see the danger you are in, that the blessed Holy Spirit opens your eyes to see the danger you are in, that you are lost and on the road to Hell. Have you ever seen that? When my Lord walked this earth in His human body, the Jews stumbled over Him. They refused to believe He was the Son of God. Today, every believer is a stumbling stone. I have become a stumbling stone here. I'll keep many of you out of Heaven, because you think you cannot live without hating J. M. Little. You have to hate me because you hate my Lord. I look at those in the working world, you'd give ten thousand worlds just to be in my place. I would not be in your place for ten thousand worlds. Your money, position and the air-conditioning you have there will be the only comfort you will ever know. Just think, the comforts of this world are all you will ever know. You have no idea of the destruction that awaits your poor, blinded soul one minute after death.

Continue to listen to our late pastor, L. R. Shelton, with THE VOICE OF TRUTH BROADCAST each Sunday morning at 7:30 over WAGI-FM, 105.3 Mc. and 10:30 over WGHM-AM, 1250 Mc.

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Obituaries

LONG & SON
Mr. Charles Davis of 6112 Spring Garden Lane, Charlotte, died August 10, 1989 at University Memorial Hospital.
 He is survived by his wife: Mrs. Ruby W. Davis, Charlotte; sons: Rickey Platts and Rodney Davis, both of Charlotte; 3 daughters: Miss Charlynn Davis, Durham, NC, Mrs. Lellie Platts Smith and Mrs. Linda Freeman, both of Charlotte; 2 sisters: Mrs. Evelina Johnson, Clover, SC, and Mrs. Maggie White of Charlotte; 4 grandchildren.
Mr. Terrance Miquel Crenshaw of 1151 Woodside Dr., Charlotte, died August 7, 1989.
 He is survived by his father: Mr. Bobby Crenshaw of Charlotte; mother: Mrs. Linda Cren-

shaw Murphy of Charlotte; brother: Sanchez Crenshaw of Charlotte; grandparents: Rev. and Mrs. J. C. Robinson of Charlotte, and Mr. and Mrs. Leon Crenshaw of Charlotte; great grandmother: Mrs. Nell Mungo of South Carolina.
Mr. Samuel Dekaron Davis of 426 Meridian Dr., Charlotte, died August 11, 1989 at Charlotte Memorial Hospital.
 He is survived by father: Samuel Craig Davis, Charlotte; mother: Mrs. Maxine Davis, Charlotte; sister: Mrs. Kawinla Davis, Charlotte; grandmother: Mrs. Susie Nuby of Dania, Florida.
GRIER
Mrs. Helen Montgomery of 325 Fannie Circle, Charlotte,

NC, died August 12, 1989.
 She is survived by a son: Sanders R. Knighton, Inkster, Michigan; daughter: Mrs. Vivian M. Wright, Charlotte, NC; brothers: Carl J. Knighton and Robert Knighton, both of Baltimore, Md., and Lewis J. Knighton, Clinton, SC; sister: Virginia K. Wallace, Charlotte, NC.
Mr. Willie M. Newby of 3401-C Wheatley Avenue, Charlotte, NC, died August 13, 1989 at Charlotte Memorial Hospital.
 He is survived by sons: Bobby Jackson, Charlotte, and Ronald Humphrey, Baltimore, Md.; daughters: Miss Gwendolyn Jackson, Charlotte, Mrs. Charlie M. Biggs, Rocky Mount, NC; brother: Charles Humphrey, See Obituaries On Page 6B.

YOU'RE GOING TO SEE THE DIFFERENCE