

A SERMON FOR GLEANERS

ALL the world depends upon the labor of the field and the king himself is served of the plow and of the sickle. The dwellers in the country who watch the springing up of the blade through all its perils, who mark the ear as it bursts from its sheath, and who anxiously observe it until it hangs downward through ripeness and becomes yellow in the sun—these, being brought constantly into contact with clods and crops—are not able to forget their entire dependence upon the staff of life. One can hardly live where the operations of farming are carried on without often looking up to the God of Providence in anxious prayer and later, tilting up the heart in grateful praise.

But the most of us are condemned to live in this huge wilderness of bricks, where scarcely a green thing salutes our eyes. If we try to rear a plant, it is but a sickly thing, neither tempting for beauty, nor fragrant with perfume. In the absence of the bright-eyed flowers, it is small wonder if we grow a little blind towards our mother earth. We are too apt to think that we are independent of the operations of the country. That our trade, our commerce, our manufactures, are sufficient to support us. We forget, all the while, that in vain is yonder forest of masts unless the earth shall yield her fruit. In vain the emporium, the exchange, and the place of merchandise, unless the land is plowed and harrowed, and at last yields to the farmer his reward.

I would that I could recall to your memories, O you dwellers in the city, how much you depend upon the Lord God of the earth for your daily bread. Does your food fall like manna from the skies? Do you create it at the forge, or fashion it in the loom or on the wheel? Comes it not of the earth, and is it not the Lord who gives to the fertile womb of earth the power to yield its harvests? Comes not the dew from Heaven, and the sunshine from above? And do not these bring to us our bread as well as to those who abide in the midst of the fields?

Let us not forget this time of the harvest, nor be unthankful for the bounty of the wheat. Let us not forget to plead with God that He would be pleased to give us suitable weather for the ingathering of the precious grain. And when it shall be ingathered, let us not sullenly keep silence, but with the toiling workers who, well-pleased, behold the waving yellow crop, let us lift up the shout of “Harvest Home,” and thank the God who covers the valleys with corn and crowns the year with His goodness.

I would order my speech, this morning, so as to act in your ears as the Harvest bell in our midland counties. I have there noticed a bell ringing early in the morning, and again towards the evening, which, I am told, is intended to tell the people the hour when they may go into the fields to glean, and when they must leave the field and go back to their homes. My sermon shall be as simple as the ringing of a bell. If it suffices to remind you of the sheaves and of the harvest, if it shall but make you thank our God who gives us the fruit of the earth, I shall be well content.

Tell me not that this is not a proper theme for the Sunday. I know you know not what you say. Did not the disciples of Jesus walk through the corn fields on the Sunday and did not the Master make the fields themselves the subjects of His sermons? I fear not His disapprobation when I say, on this hallowed day, “Lift up now your eyes and behold the fields are ripe already unto the harvest.” Do you think that the outward creation is sinful and that God would be worshipped on Sundays with closed eyes and vacant faces, which must not look on flowers and fields? There is no impurity in green grass, or flowers, or sailing clouds, or rippling waves, or ripening corn.

To the believing ear, the footsteps of the Bountiful Father are everywhere audible and the revolving seasons do but reveal the varied attributes of God. We may gather from every rustling ear a song, and listen in every harvest field to a sermon which angels might stoop to hear. It is no unhallowed theme. Come with me to the harvest field—may the Master come with us—and let us

talk awhile of other things than harvests, though the harvest shall be the metaphor on which we will fashion our speech.

A word or two about the gleaning. Under the Jewish dispensation, gleaning was one of the rights of the people. The farmer was forbidden to reap the corners of the field, and if he should have left a sheaf by oversight in the field, he must not go back for it. It was to be left for the widow, and the fatherless, and the poor that dwelt in the land. No, the rights of gleaning went further than wheat and barley—the olive tree was to be beaten but once, and they were to leave the gleanings to the poor. So with the vintage. When they gathered the grapes they were not utterly to clean the branches of the vines, but leave sufficient to give a taste of the delicious fruit to the poorest of the land.

I would not have our Christian farmers less liberal under the Gospel dispensation than the farmers were under the Mosaic Law. As Boaz, in his generosity gave to Ruth more than she could legally claim, so let no possessor of the soil be questioning about the legal rights of the poor to gleaning. Let him open his gates sooner than the Jewish farmer would have done, and let him sometimes bid his men leave handfuls on purpose for the poor. Grieved am I to observe that the custom grows with many farmers nowadays to rake their fields and get all they can from the poor of the village. And I believe some would rake the stubble seven times if they could but get one ear more and leave less for gleaning.

I would not gather into my barn, were I a farmer, a sheaf, every ear of which rustled with the cries of the poor. I would not have the poor man's curse for all the rich man's field, nor make the poor dwellers in the village dissatisfied the whole year round because of a paltry handful of corn which I had added to the stock of my bursting barns. Especially you who are Christian men, I repeat it in your hearing—be not less liberal than was the Jew. And if of old, when there were types and shadows, they left good gleanings for the poor, scatter with a liberal hand now that we have come to the substance and the fullness of the Gospel. Rob not the poor man of his little, but earn his blessing by your abundant generosity in the time of reaping your fields.

I have now to invite you to other fields than these. I would bring you to the field of Gospel Truth. My Master is the Boaz. See here, in this precious Book is a field full of truthful promises, of blessings rich and ripe. The Master stands at the gate and affords us welcome. Strong men, full of faith, like reapers, reap their sheaves, and gather in their armfuls. Would you were all reapers, for the harvest truly is plenteous. But if not reapers, may you be as the maidens of Boaz. I see some servants who do not so much reap themselves as partake of that which others have reaped. I know we have many in this Church who are glad to eat the sweets, and feed upon the fat things of the kingdom, when they are brought forth each Sunday in the ministry of the Word.

But I see trembling yonder, outside the gate, a little company to whom I am to address myself today. They are not reapers, they have not strength enough of faith to take the bin sheaves. They are not as yet like household servants. They are not peaceful enough in their consciences to sit down and eat and dip their morsel in the vinegar and be satisfied. But they are gleaners, and they are saying, as they stand at the gate, "Would that I might find favor in the sight of my Lord, that I might even glean in this field, for I should then be content if I might gather here and there an ear of Gospel Grace." I am sent to you. My Master sends me as one of His young men, and thus He bids me say to you, "Come into the field and glean wherever you will, and if in the gleaning you should grow strong and become reapers, reap and carry home the sheaves for yourselves."

1. First then, like Boaz, I shall ask the question, "WHO IS THIS DAMSEL?" in order that I may find out who these gleaners are who are invited into the fields of Christ, that they may glean the handfuls that are let fall on purpose for them.

"Who is this damsel?" The first answer is, she is a Moabitess and a stranger. Ah, I know you, poor timid Heart. You say, "I am sprung of an evil stock, an heir of wrath even as others. My nature is depraved and vile. How can I hope, such an one as I am, that I should ever be allowed to go into the Master's field and glean of His good corn of Divine Grace? Oh, Sir, if you knew how I feel of my lost and helpless state! Could you but perceive how base I am in my own eyes because I have

been so long a stranger to God, and an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, I think you would not invite me to glean in the field at all." Verily, my Sister, you are the very person to whom I am sent, for it was a Moabite damsel upon whom Boaz set his heart, and it was to her that he sent his message, "Abide you fast by my maidens; go not in any other field."

But I ask again, who this damsel is and she answers, "I am not only by nature a stranger but I must confess that I am now in my condition miserable and poor. I cannot buy Christ's Grace. I can do nothing to win His love. Once I thought I had some good works, but now I have none. Once I relied upon ceremonies but I have given them up, for I find no comfort in them. I am utterly poor—so poor, that I despair of ever in the future being richer than I am now. I am helpless. I am hopeless. I am nothing. Yes, I am less than nothing. Alas, I am such a miserable beggar that I am not worthy of the least of all His mercies."

Do you say this? Right glad am I, then, to hear you use such language, for unto you, again, am I sent, and unto you am I bid to give the gracious invitation—"Come into the field and glean even among the sheaves."

Now the gleaner whom I describe is not only in her own experience an alien, and a stranger—and in her own present condition naked and poor and miserable—but she has, despite all this, a decision for the Lord God of Israel. I think I hear her say, "If I perish, I will perish looking to the Cross of Christ. I have nothing of my own to bring, but I come just as I am. The Lord knows I have no other dependence but upon the blood and the finished righteousness of Jesus Christ. I forswear the gods of Moab in whom I once trusted. The world is now nothing to me. The pomp and vanities thereof have lost all their glory. As to myself, I abhor myself in dust and ashes. I would be Christ's, and if He will not have me, if I may not glean in His fields, I will never go elsewhere—

*'If I perish I will pray,
And perish only there.'* "

It is marvelous, the tenacity with which some of these timid souls will hold to Christ. Just as a man, the more fearful he is of sinking, clutches the plank with a more terrible earnestness, so have I seen some of these fearful souls lay hold on Jesus with a grip which neither death nor Hell could unloose. Were the times of burning to come back again, many a wavering soul that can scarcely say, "I know that my Redeemer lives," would go singing to the stake! Many of those who are bold in words would prove cowardly in acts, and withdraw from Christ when it came to burning for Him. Well, it is to you that I am sent, poor timid Gleaner. Come in, come into the field, and we will see if we cannot let fall some handfuls on purpose for you.

Our description, however, is far from being complete. This gleaner is one who is exceedingly humble and self-emptied. Just observe what she says when Boaz takes notice of her—"Who am I, that I should find grace in your sight, seeing that I am a stranger?" Ah, and the woman to whom I would speak this morning has such a low estimate of herself, that when she gets a grain of hope she thinks, "Ah, it is too good for me." When, sometimes, you half hope that Christ has loved you, and given Himself for you, a sight of your unworthiness comes in and you say, "No, this can hardly be, that such an one so mean and so despicable as I, should ever be regarded by the lovely eyes of Christ my Lord."

I know you think yourself not to be pure, or fair, or lovely. And when you read such a passage as that, where Christ says of His spouse, "You are all fair, My love, there is no spot in you," tears come in your eyes, for you say, "Alas, He will never say that of me, for I am all defiled with sin, all unholy and unclean. Should He search the world through, He would not find a more worthless one than I. And should He turn the heap over again and again, he could not find one that less deserved to be the object of His pity than I, poor unworthy I."

Yes, but you are just the person to whom I am sent! Your Lord Jesus has heard of you, and He loves such as you are, for when you are little in your own eyes, then are you great in His. When

you talk thus bashfully of yourself, then He loves to hear your words, for they are words of truth. In very deed, you are what you say you are, nothing but loathsomeness and corruption and depravity. And yet He who has loved you, notwithstanding all this, will never leave you till your corruption has been removed, till your loathsomeness has been washed away, till for deformity you have matchless beauty, and for unholiness His perfect righteousness. I say to you, even to you, are we sent today.

Once again, these gleaners have a very high opinion of those who are true Christians. You notice Ruth says, "I am not like unto one of the handmaidens." No, and my poor gleaner yonder, she thinks the saints of God are such a blessed people, she is not like one of them. When she gets into her sin experience she says, "If I were a child of God I should never be like this." Knowing her vileness and her imperfections she cries, "Ah, if I were one of Christ's chosen, I should be much holier than I am. Though I love His saints, I cannot dare to hope that I shall ever be numbered with them. My goodness can never reach so high as to be joined with them in visible fellowship."

Ah, I know some of you feel that if you ever did get to Heaven you would creep through some cranny in the door and hide yourselves in some mouse hole far away, where none could see you. And today, though in truth you are the best of the saints, you think yourselves the vilest of the vile. For many there are that are very rich in Divine Grace who think themselves miserably poor. On the other hand, many who say, "I am rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing," are naked and poor and miserable. Poor Moabitess, long an alien, having gone far into sin and now decided for Christ, with a sort of despairing hope that maybe He will look upon you. Today, even today, He speaks to you. Open your ears and hear Him. Forget your kindred and your father's house, for He greatly desires you, and He would have you even now come to Him and be espoused unto Him forever.

I need not prolong our description of the gleaners to whom I speak. The Holy Spirit, I hope, will find some of you out and may He press home the Truth of God to your hearts.

II. Having beckoned to the gleaner, I shall now, like Boaz, ADDRESS THE REAPERS. The ministers are the reapers, and thus speaks Boaz to them—"Let her glean, even among the sheaves, and reproach her not. Let fall some of the handfuls on purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not."

The first command Christ gives to his ministers is—"Rebuke her not." Ah, I fear, my Brethren in the ministry, that we have often rebuked where we ought to have comforted. And perhaps our unwise speeches, when we did not mean to do it, have been very hard blows to the afflicted in Zion. It is an ill thing for the strong cattle to push with horn and shoulder. We are very apt, unless we have much trial and trouble ourselves, to lose the lady's hand which is so necessary for a physician of souls. We keep the lion's heart but oh, the tender hand and the downy fingers—we are not so ready to keep these in dealing with sore consciences.

I know some preachers who never went to Martin Luther's school. They may have prayer and meditation, but they have never been schooled by temptation. And if we are not much tempted ourselves, if we are not emptied from vessel to vessel ourselves, we are in very great danger when we are dealing with these truths—lest we are hard with them and rebuke and reproach them, when instead we should hear the Master say—"Comfort you, comfort you My people. Speak you comfortably unto Jerusalem."

Now I take it that we do very much reproach these tender ones when we set up standards in our ministry to which we tell them they must come or else perish. Some do it in experience. I have heard old divines and, like Elihu, I have been ready to rebuke my seniors when they have taught their experience, in all its length and breadth, as necessary for all the people of God. The experience of the advanced saint must never be set up as a standard for the young beginner. There are mountains for us to climb when our bones are firm, but these mountains are not for babes. There are depths into which we are to dive when we have learned the art of plunging into them, but these are not for little children, who must be dandled on the knee and fondled at the breast.

When we describe some dark passage in our lives, and say to the young convert—"You must have felt all this or you are not a child of God," we are reproaching when we ought to have comforted, and rebuking where we ought to have consoled. So have I seen a standard of Grace set up. Some Christians are eminent in their graces. Their faith is valorous. Their courage defies all danger. Their hope is bright and sparkling like a diamond. But if in our preaching we tell young converts that their graces must be equal in luster to the fathers in the Church, what do we do but rebuke Ruth when we ought to have let fall handfuls of corn for her to gather?

And so, too, with regard to doctrinal knowledge. I have known some Christians well-schooled in these matters, and deeply read in theology who, when they meet with one who knows no more than this—that he is a sinner and that Christ came to save sinners—will ask hard, wrinkled questions, which are more fit for an assembly of divines than for a babe in Christ. And because, indeed, the little child cannot untie a Gordian knot, because the babe cannot crack the hard shells of these theological nuts, they send him away and say, "The root of the matter is not in you. You have not passed from death unto life."

Oh, let us not do this, dear Brother Reapers. Let us sooner cut ourselves with our own sickle than cut Ruth with it! Let us rather be patient and very tender and receive the weak in the faith, as Christ has received them. Let us, like our Master, not overdrive the Lambs, but carry them in our bosom, and gently lead them when they need our tenderness and our care.

There is also another way in which some rebuke these gleaners, who should rather be invited and comforted—that is, by denying their faith when it is mixed with unbelief! It is marvelous, it is miraculous, that a spark of faith can live in the midst of an ocean of unbelief. You will find men who, at times, fear that they believe nothing. In their own apprehension they are so beclouded and bemisted that they have lost their way, and do not know where they are. And yet they are true Believers for all that. Some of us have passed through crisis of our being in which, if we had been asked our very name, we could hardly have told it, for we were so utterly distressed, so lost and cast away by reason of overwhelming blasphemies, or incessant temptations, that we could scarce tell our right hand from our left.

And were we therefore without faith? No, there was a little faith, still. There was an undying principle still within us when death had made us wretched men. So we must not talk to these young beginners as though the uprising of their corruption disproved the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—we must succor them. We may tell them of the dragons we have fought and the giants we have slain, but we must use discretion even in this.

And when they are in the Slough of Despond, we must not leave them to sink there up to their very necks but go lend them our hand to pull them out, for they may be in the right road even in the slough, and they may still have their faces to Zion though those faces may be besmeared with the mire and filth of that dreadful bog. Let us never rebuke or reproach these timid ones, but help and sustain them.

But further—Boaz gave another exhortation to the reapers—"Let fall handfuls on purpose for her." In our ministry there should always be a corner cupboard for the tried and timid saints. I think there should never be a sermon without a Benjamin's mess for the children. There should be strong meat for the men, but there should always be milk for the babes. Ready to adapt our ministry to all sorts of people, if we forget any, we should never forget these.

My Brothers, would you minister to these gleaners? Let me remind you, first, that our ministry must be plain, for these timid souls cannot feed on hard words. Dr. Manton once preached in St. Paul's Cathedral and a great crowd went to listen to him. A poor man who had walked fifty miles to hear the good doctor, afterwards plucked him by the sleeve and said—"There was nothing for me this morning. The doctor had preached a very learned sermon, full of Greek and Latin quotations which the poor countryman could not understand. But the doctor had not expected him and there was nothing for him.

I think there should always be in our ministry some things for poor Ruth. Something so plain and so simple that the wiseacres will turn up their noses and say, "What platitudes!" Never mind, if Ruth gets a handful of corn, our Master at the last shall know who did His errand best and served Him with a perfect heart. And then, if plain, we must remember, too, that it must be very elementary. We must be often laying again the foundation stone—teaching faith in Christ again and again. As Luther says, we must repeat justification by faith every Sunday, because men are so apt to forget it.

Oh, you fine preachers who elaborate your learned essays, who work all the week long to addle your own brains and then spend the Sunday in muddling your hearers—would that you would remember these poor gleaners, who want none of your fine stuff, none of your glorious flights, none of your rounded periods! They are far better off if you will tell them that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and point their eyes to Calvary and bid them look and live. We must let fall handfuls on purpose for the weak and ignorant.

And then again, our preaching must be evangelical. Weeping eyes need Christ to dry them. Tender hearts need Jesus' wounds to make them whole. A man who lives without temptation may enjoy a Sunday's sermon without Christ in it—but give me a man who is tempted in the week and I know he wants Christ! Give me a man who has lost money in the week, or that has been subjected to ridicule for Christ's sake, and I know that you might as well offer him the husks that swine eat as offer him anything but Christ crucified visibly set forth before his eyes.

Oh, we must get back to this, all of us who are preachers! We must forget what we learned at college. We must leave behind what we pick up from learned books and come out to tell Ruth just that which she most wants to hear—that Boaz welcomes her to the field and bids her glean till her hands are full.

But then, Brethren, you will notice that these reapers were to let handfuls fall on purpose for her. Well, then, you reapers in God's field, let your preaching be very personal. Oh, I love it, when I draw the bow, not to do it at random, but to single out some troubled heart and speak to you all as though there were but one here. Not pouring the oil over the wound, but coming up to the edge of the gaping sore to pour in the oil and wine. These poor Ruths will not dare to take the corn unless we put it right in their way. They are so fearful, so timorous, that though it seems to be scattered for everybody, they think it cannot be for them. But if it is there, put there so that they cannot mistake it, then they say—"Well, that is for me. Yes, that is what I have felt. That is what I want." And they cannot, unbelieving though they are, they cannot help stooping down and picking up the handful that is let fall on purpose for them.

Then, if it is so, our preaching must always be very affectionate, for if we let fall a handful with a scowling face, our Ruth will go to the other end of the field rather than pick it up. Oh, Brethren in Christ, it is, after all, our sympathy with our fellow men which is the great engine the Holy Spirit uses in converting them. It is not merely telling out the Truth of God which is the power—God, if He had willed it, might have made statues which could preach, and they could have preached as well as we do and infinitely better if the Lord had poured the words out of their cold lips.

But he made men preachers, that men might feel for men, and that our words might come out from our hearts and so go glowing into the hearts of the afflicted. Oh, let us, then, who are reapers for Christ, be very tender with poor Ruth! And often when we forget the strong, and leave the mighty man to take care of himself, let us go to the gate to pull in the fainting Mercy and invite Christiana and her little children to sit down and rest. So would I do this morning, and therefore, I pass on to our third point.

III. As myself a reaper for Christ, I must try to follow the example of the reapers of Boaz and let fall handfuls on purpose for the gleaner. I am afraid I shall not be able to give you such handfuls as I would, but they shall come out of the right field. Oh, you timid and troubled Heart, let me drop before you now a handful of precious promises. "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax."

Does not that suit your case? A reed, helpless, insignificant and weak. A bruised reed, out of which no music can come. Weaker than weakness itself—a reed—and that reed bruised! He will not break you. He who broke Rahab by His right hand will not break you. You are like the smoking flax—no light, no warmth comes from you. You are, on the contrary, like flax that smokes, giving forth a foul, offensive smell. But He will not quench you. He will blow with His sweet breath of mercy till He fans you to a flame.

Do you need another? “Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls.” What soft words! Your heart is tender, and the Master knows it. Therefore He speaks so gently to you. Will you not listen and obey Him, and come to Him, come to Him even now? Hear him again—“Fear not, you worm, Jacob, I will help you, says the Lord, and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.” Or would you hear Jesus Christ speak to you again?—“Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in Me.”

Or, again, “He is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.” Do you not remember ten thousand such passages as these? “When you pass through the rivers I will be with you, and the floods shall not overflow you. When you go through the fires you shall not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon you.” Or this, “Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, she may forget, yet will I not forget you.” Or this, “I have blotted out your sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud your transgressions.”

Or this, “Though your sins are as scarlet they shall be as wool. Though they are red like crimson they shall be whiter than snow.” Or this, “The Spirit and the bride say, Come, and let him that is athirst come, and whoever will, let him come and take the water of life freely.” Or this, “Ho, everyone that thirsts, come to the waters and you that have no money, come and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.” Oh, my Master’s field is very rich. Behold the handfuls! Look, there they lie before you, poor timid Soul. Gather them up, make them your own, for Jesus bids you take them. Be not too bashful. But take them, feed on them, and go on in the strength of this meat all your days.

Well, I have dropped a handful of promises. Now let me try and scatter a handful of doctrines of Grace. But Ruth starts back, for she is afraid to glean in the wheat fields of doctrine. No, but Ruth, here is the doctrine of election—come and glean that. Fear not, poor timid Soul, it is a sweet and blessed Truth of God. Hear it—“God has chosen the weak things of this world and the things that are not has God chosen to bring to nothing the things that are.” “I thank you, O Father of Heaven and earth, that You have hid these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them unto babes.”

Does not that suit you, timid Soul? Are you not as a babe, as a weak thing, and as a foolish thing? Oh, there is a handful on purpose for you, in the doctrine of electing love. Hear another, the doctrine of justification by faith—“not by works of righteousness which we have done He saves us, but through Christ Jesus. We are saved through what Jesus has done on our behalf.” “He that believes on Him is not condemned, but has everlasting life.” What do you say? Does not that suit you? You have no good works—can you not trust Christ and His good works on your behalf? Is not this a handful on purpose for you?

“Yes but I fear,” says one, “that if I were saved I should yet fall away, for I am so weak.” Here is another handful for you—“I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand.” “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.”

Is not this a handful on purpose for you? “I have made and I will bear, even I will carry, even unto hoar hairs. I am He and unto old age will I carry you.” What more do you want? I tell you, Ruth, there is not a single doctrine in Scripture which, if it is rightly understood, will not yield handfuls

on purpose for you. Indeed, my Master's Gospel, though it is a chariot in which a king may ride, is like an ambulance used on the field of battle, in which a man with broken limbs may ride comfortably, too. Oh, it is soft riding when Christ carries in His arms! And He does this for such as you are. Broken in pieces all asunder, with your thoughts like a case of knives cutting your soul, and conscience through and through, Christ has made His Gospel to suit you.

The other day, when one of our Brothers was sick of consumption, we sent him a waterbed to rest on and the comfort it gave him was indeed delightful. But oh, Jesus Christ's bosom is something softer than that! Though you are ever so weak, though you are like a sere leaf driven in the wind and broken of the tempest, you shall yet find perfect peace and quiet in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is a Gospel on purpose for you.

Once more, we have some handfuls to drop that we have gathered in another field. We have been to promise field and to doctrine field, now let us go to the field of experience. Do you not know, Ruth, that your experience is no exception to the rule? There are thousands such as you are. And I, too, who speak to you this morning, that you may know the truth of this matter, I tell you that once upon a time I stood like yourself shivering at the gate. And I said in my soul, "His mercy is clean gone forever. He will be mindful of His Covenant no more."

For years I cried for mercy but did not find it. I wrote my name among the damned and said I must perish, for God had shut up the heart of His compassion. But He has never despised the cry of His prisoner. I looked unto Him and was lightened and I am not ashamed to confess that there is light nowhere but in Him. "Oh," you say, "then your experience is something like mine!" Just so, it is. And so there is a handful on purpose for you. I know the devil tells you, you are lost in a road where Christ's mercy never travels. But it is a mistake. You are in the midst of the King's highway. I know Satan tells you that you have come to the ends of the earth. But my Lord puts it—"Look unto Me and be you saved, all you ends of the earth."

Oh, but you think you are the last man! Ah, but Christ loves to take the last and make them first, while the first he often leaves to be last. Yes, but you have written bitter things against yourself! Never mind what you have written. What a mercy it is Christ did not write them, and that, on the contrary, He has written sweet things of you! And he has said, "Return unto Me, says the Lord, for I am reconciled unto you." Soul, my Master—would that He were here to speak for Himself—for my poor words are so feeble compared with His—my Master woos you this morning.

Instead of offering you a gleaning, He offers you Himself. You came to be a gleaner. He would make you His spouse. See, Boaz comes to you. Will you have Him? The ring is in His hand. Come, stretch out the finger of your little faith and let the deed be done. Say, "Unworthy though I am, I hope, my Lord, I am Yours. No other would I have to serve, to love, to trust. Jesus, just as I am, take me and make me what You would have me to be." It is done. The marriage is ratified, and by-and-by, it shall be consummated before the eternal throne in your everlasting bliss.

I have good reason for being earnest in trying to comfort this Ruth, because, though she is a stranger, she is a sister of mine. I am a stranger, too. We both come from the same land, and the same howling wilderness. She is in trouble and my soul has known trouble, too—the same trouble—and I would desire to bring her to the port of Peace. Besides, she is to be my Master's wife, and I would be on good terms with the mistress of the house. It is ill for the reaper to have an enemy in the mistress. And since I know that this Ruth shall by-and-by find Boaz to be her next of kin, I would desire do her a good service and bring her to her Master's house, if so my Lord would honor me.

IV. I close my sermon of this morning, by stirring up timid and troubled ones to do what I know Divine Grace will make them do before long. I say, then, to you who are thus troubled in your consciences, since the field is open to you, and we bid you glean—since Boaz himself commands us to let fall handfuls on purpose for you—do your duty and be bold to believe today. You have been afraid to trust Christ up to now—trust Him now. Venture on Him. It is a poor word to use, but do it. Though something tells you you have no right to trust Christ, do it, right or not right, NOW, flat

on your face before Him, with no confidence but in what He has done and in what He is doing still.

Be bold to believe in Him at this moment and you shall live. And having believed in Him, be industrious every time the Word is preached to pick up every ear of comfort in the sermon. Ruth must bend her back, though it is but one ear at a time she gathers. Think it worth while to hear a sermon in ever such a crowd, if you may get but one ear of comfort—for one ear is a great thing for one who deserves none. And but one word of mercy from the lips of Christ should be accounted more precious than rubies to a soul that deserves to hear Him say, “Depart you cursed.” And when you have gathered one grain and another, seek a retentive memory to keep in your hand what you have gathered, or else you will be like a silly gleaner who stoops to glean one ear and drops another at the same time.

Carry home what of truth you can. Take notes in your heart. And when you have gathered, and your hands are full, take care to discriminate. Ruth, we are told, threshed her corn and left the straw behind—she took home the good wheat. You do the same. There is much straw in all our sermons, much that our Master would not have us say—for we are poor, poor creatures, and but fallible like yourselves. But leave the straw behind and take home the good wheat. And do us this service—do not take home the straw, and leave the wheat, as some do. There are many foolish gleaners who, if there is one word of ours awry, will tell it to our discredit—but our Master’s words they will forget.

And, lastly, while you are on your knees in prayer, beating out the sermon in meditation, turn your eye to my Master. Go to Him and say to Him, “Lord, I am content to glean, though I get but one ear of mercy. But oh, that I had You! Oh, that You would give me Yourself! I have no beauty, but oh, You do not love us for our beauty but for Your beauty which You cast on us. Lord, look on me! All I can say is that if You will save me, I will praise You on earth, and I’ll praise You in Heaven. There shall not be one before the Throne more grateful than I, because there shall be none who shall owe so much to Your unmerited, rich, free, Sovereign Grace.”

Sinner, if you do that now, my Master will accept you. Trust Him NOW, poor Hearts, trust Him now! Away, you devil of Hell, away, away! Why will you molest these lambs? Timid and troubled consciences, hear not what your doubts and fears and Hell and the devil would say—come now to my Master! His wounds invite you—His tearful eyes invite you—His open heart bids you come. Come and trust Him, He cannot reject you if you trust Him just as you are!

God help you to do it and you shall see sin forgiven, your foes trampled under your feet, and you yourselves shall meet the great Boaz at the marriage supper and to Him shall be the glory forever and ever. Amen.