

Distinguishing grace: its marks and effects

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- [0 : 00] The End As the Lord may be pleased to help me this morning, I'll direct you to a word in the first chapter of the book of Ruth.
- And we read verses 16 to 18. And Ruth said,
- What a beautiful confession of faith we have in this word before us.
- And when you think it was expressed by one who was a Moabitish person. One who had been brought up under the influence of idolatry.
- Yet we see the wonders of God's distinguishing grace in the case of this dear person. And how this did distinguish her as it were from her sister-in-law Orpah.
- [2 : 43] And we see how clearly it is that it was the effect of the Lord's gracious dealings with her.
- That she was in such a case, had such a desire. And what a great mercy, friends, if there's something about this confession and this desire expressed by Ruth to Naomi.
- Is the language of your heart concerning the people of God and the things of God, the worship of God. And those who, by God's grace, are called to walk in that way that leads to God and to heaven.
- And you'll notice that there's a very clear certainty about this confession. It is beautifully simple, but it is very clear, very definite.
- Ruth did not hesitate at all. Though she was tested and tried, as the chapter reminds us, in the way in which Naomi saw fit to speak to her.
- [3 : 58] And yet it only went to show, more clearly, that which was wrought in her heart by the Holy Spirit. And we see Ruth as a gracious character.
- One who was the subject of God's distinguishing grace. And, of course, the book of Ruth is a very precious book. And I believe it has been made very precious to many of God's dear people, down to the generations.
- And when we always ever think of the word of God altogether as a precious book, it is indeed precious, from Genesis to Revelation. But are those portions of Scripture which sometimes have been made especially precious to one another of God's dear people.
- And I believe the record we have in this book of Ruth has been so to many of God's dear people. On the one hand, perhaps, we might think of the case of Ruth as one whom the Lord was pleased to deal with in somewhat of a gentle manner.
- And, as it were, in some ways. It's not an outstanding experience in some ways. And yet very outstanding in another way. But, when you think of it, and those things to remind us, as we look into the word of God, and the record we have of those whom God was pleased to deal with and make manifest as his dear children, we see the sovereignty of God in the manner in which he was pleased to display his mercy to them.

[5 : 43] So that while some were dealt with in a very definite and very solemn way, we think one another in the Scriptures. On the other hand, there were those who were made manifest as God's dear people.

And, with regard to some, their beginnings are not clear in the Scripture. And, it may sometimes be a help to some of God's dear people, especially when they feel they cannot, as it were, clearly discern where the Lord did begin to work in their hearts.

And, these things are written for the instruction and encouragement of God's dear people. I think of what the Apostle wrote to the church at Rome, when he said, this, whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort in the Scriptures, might have hung.

And, there are those ways, and what a mercy, dear friends, if we're not total strangers to this, those ways in which the Lord is pleased at times, and to bless his precious word of truth, yes, to the comfort of his dear people, to their encouragement, and, to be a strength to them, as they journey on, in that way, which the Lord has seen fit, to lead them in.

So, may the Lord help us for a little while, this morning, to consider this word, and, we must consider, of course, the context also, because, here we see, the overruling hand of God.

[7 : 28] Elimelech and Naomi moved out of Bethlehem into the land of Moab. There was a famine.

And they thought it prudent, as it were, to go where there was perhaps more food, perhaps more prospect of being sustained.

But, it could not be said they took a right step. And yet, you see, and there is a deep mystery, we see how the Lord was pleased to so overrule this, that there might be unfolding his purposes concerning one who should be made manifest as a child of God.

This, of course, did not, as it were, make any less foolish in the step which Elimelech and Naomi took.

Indeed, the Lord was so fit to so deal with them that Naomi realized God's chasing hand was upon her.

[8 : 54] It was one of those things, you see, those many things that worked together for good. Although it was a foolish step to take, as it were, to leave Bethlehem and to go into the land of Moab, yet God overruled it for good and brought to pass in that mysterious way his purpose of grace to this one Ruth.

We see how that they went into the country of Moab and continued there. But Elimelech died.

And then her two sons died. And there she was left bereaved as it were of her husband, bereaved of her sons, and she had these two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth.

And the word tells us they dwelt there about ten years. What a painful experience it must have been to Naomi during those ten years.

years. But we see how God's watchful eye was over Naomi, yes, and Ruth.

[10 : 24] I thought as you were singing the hymn just now, what a precious truth that is. God's leading, you see.

God's leading, God's keeping. And hymn writers put it like this, he'll lead them on fair Zion's road, though weary we can faint, for oh they ne'er shall lose their God, nor God our loser saint.

And although dear Naomi was sorely chastened in this matter, and she suffered much, yet there was love in it, there was mercy in it, there was unfolding of God's purposes, was overruling for good, to bring to pass great blessings in due season.

Well now, evidently, there was news that the Lord had visited his people in Bethlehem. She had heard in the country of Moab how the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread.

Here again we see how wonderful it is the Lord does remember his dear people. There may be a famine. But he never suffered his dear people to starve.

[11 : 47] Elimelech and Naomi thought it was prudent to go into the land of Moab. But you see, they learned when they were there that the Lord had visited his people and that there was bread in Bethlehem.

The Lord had visited, he had appeared for them in this time of famine. He never let his people starve. We have abundant evidence of this in the scriptures of one another, how the Lord did supply their need in remarkable ways, in miraculous ways.

They should be fed. Well this being so, the word tells us that she arose and journeyed toward Bethlehem.

there were three of them. There was Naomi, there was Oprah, there was Ruth, and they went forth.

The word tells us that she, Naomi, went forth out of the place where she was and her two daughters-in-law and they went on their way to return unto the land of Judah.

[12 : 56] But then you see, there came this testing time. This testing time. You know, there are testing times.

There are those ways in which the Lord is pleased to try his dear people. And to this end, it might be made manifest his work.

we read the Lord tries the righteous. We read the Lord has his fire in Zion, his furnace in Jerusalem to try his people, to make manifest that which is of him.

And how important that is, isn't it, dear friends? There may be sometimes perhaps in our own experience, we may suffer loss as it were in various ways.

yet what a mercy if there's something which is left. You know, with dear Job it was like that, wasn't it?

[14 : 05] The dear man suffered great loss. Indeed he did. He was brought in a very low place. He found it to be a very trying place.

But there was that time when it was as though the Lord was pleased to shed a light upon Job and his path. And so you read in chapter 23, the book of Job, he was brought to this point, he, that is God, knoweth the way that I take.

And when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as God. How often times it is in a time of trial, that the Lord makes manifest that which is his.

You see, the tin in the dross has to be burned up, has to be some consumer, as it were. All that which is but wood and stubble has to be burned up.

But to this end, that that which is fireproof should be made manifest. Job could say, when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as God.

[15 : 17] And it came to pass. Job did come forth as God. Yes, he was humble, laid low in the dust, felt to be a poor, vile sinner before a holy and heart searching God.

To acknowledge his sin. Yes, to realise he was before a holy and heart searching God, but he came forth, he came forth as gold.

But to return to this, there was this testing time. And we've been reminded as we read the chapter together this morning, how Naomi converses with her two daughters-in-law and raises this question as it were, why will you go with me?

what's the prospect in you coming with me to Bethlehem? And she reminds them that with regard to material things, there was no prospect.

And this had an effect upon them. And we see a distinction here. we read this, and they lifted up their voice and wept.

[16 : 35] Evidently, Orpah was fond of her mother-in-law. There was something there, as it were, that caused Orpah to feel something in a way of love to her in a natural sense.

And she wept. Yes, she wept, and she considered she'd have to, as it were, Orpah would have to leave her. But you see, there was something lacking.

And that which was lacking was found in the heart of Ruth. And it made a great distinction. Now, while they were both Moabitish people, they'd both been brought up in an idolatrous country, yet the time came when, in the case of Ruth, something made manifest that great distinguished her from her sister-in-law.

We have these words, and I've read these verses this morning to remind us of how the dear woman felt concerning Naomi and her God.

And while they both kissed their mother-in-law, Orpah went back. It would seem that Naomi put this test to Ruth.

[18 : 13] She said, behold, thy sister has gone back to her people and to her gods. Notice that. Return now after thy sister-in-law. Well, it stirred something in her heart which was put there by God and his grace.

And you know, if the Lord has been pleased to implant that good thing in a poor sinner's heart, nothing can destroy it. It won't be betrayed.

heavenly speaking, Ruth had little prospect really, in continuing with Naomi. There's something there which was made very manifest.

And I like to read it. There's just these five words, but Ruth clave unto her. Oh, what can we see in this?

Oh, there's something wrought in Ruth that distinguished her from all of her. Ruth clave unto her. It's a great mercy, dear friends, to know what it is, to feel a union to the people of God.

[19 : 30] And rather than turn your back upon them, to be with them, to go with them, like it was with Ruth. And you see, we have to trace this to God's sovereign grace.

You see, here was the distinction. Orpah was left to go her own way. She went back to her people and to her gods.

But not so Ruth. Surely, it was something like this as expressed in one hymn, an aching void, which this world cannot fill.

There was nothing in Moab that could fill this void that Ruth felt in her heart. No, God had placed it there.

Oh, we see God's distinguishing grace, sovereign grace, distinguishing grace, effectual grace, tried, though it may be.

[20 : 36] It made no difference with regard to Ruth. There was something wrought in her heart. She says, the word says concerning her, but Ruth clave unto her. She felt such a union to Naomi.

No doubt to Orpah. She felt a love to Naomi as a mother-in-law. And probably Naomi would be very kind to these daughters-in-law, both of them.

She would not have distinguished one from the other in that sense. But she saw something wrought in Ruth's heart that made a difference. She couldn't go back to Moab.

She couldn't go back to the idols. No. She felt a drawing. But it was not just to Naomi, was it? Listen to these words then.

And Ruth said, entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee. For whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge. Notice this.

[21 : 42] Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Oh, there's something very definite brought in Ruth's heart, made manifest by those words.

You see, she spoke from the heart. God. There were desires which had been implanted in her heart. Desires, yes, towards God's people, and to God himself.

Now, nothing short of grace can bring that about. And take courage, poor sinner, if perhaps sometimes you have felt very tried with regard to your religion.

It's just something about Ruth's case and character that, as it were, is akin to what you may feel yourself. Do you know what it is to feel?

A desire towards God's dear people. Something which would make you, as it were, cleave to them, to continue with them. But then, deeper than that, God was the God of his people.

[22 : 56] You see, the Lord draws his people to himself, doesn't he? Yes, he distinguishes them, he calls them by his grace, he opens their eyes to see something, the vanity of worldly things, the reality of eternity, the solemnity of these things, the blessedness of God's people, by his grace, eyes, the eyes are open to see something of these things, and it has an effect.

It was as though, dear Ruth, saw something of this. She found out there was nothing attractive in Moab. There was indeed an aching void which this world and Moab could not fill.

but there was this, those things that Naomi evidently had experienced in God's dealings with her, in her life, there would have been something about her life, you know, that would make manifest that she didn't belong to Moab, no, she'd gone there with her husband, but she did belong to Moab, no, she belonged to Bethlehem, and to Bethlehem's God.

And it is evident that Ruth discerned something of this, and what is more, there was something brought in Ruth's heart, that did as it were unite her to her mother-in-law.

And in spite of all that Ruth, Naomi, spoke to Ruth, which was very testing really to her, he made it very clear, that there was this here, wrought in Ruth's heart, that could not be obliterated.

[24 : 58] And the least mark of grace, I'll speak carefully, the least mark of grace in the heart of a sinner, can never be obliterated. Satan, with all his hellish designs, couldn't destroy the principle of grace lodged in the heart of a poor sinner.

However small that may seem to be, he cannot destroy it, no. It is there, it is telling, it will have a lasting effect.

And what a great mercy, dear friends, if perhaps although you may be sorely tried sometimes, and feel you cannot lay claim to great things, outstanding experiences, but what a mercy, if there's a love wrought in your heart, and I put it like that, wrought in your heart, it is not a human product, you know, it springs from grace.

what a mercy is that brought in your heart, whereby you do feel a desire and a cleaving to God's dear people, and to their God.

Although perhaps you might say so in a trembling way. I like to notice, you know, how Ruth could speak very definitely in this way, she was seeking after these things, she was following after these things, and in so doing, she went with Naomi.

[26 : 40] And so we notice in the 18th verse, when she, that is Naomi, saw that she, Ruth, was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

Oh, it made very clear, no doubt, to Naomi, there was something wrought in Ruth's heart. She could not be deterred from following Naomi. She would go with her.

Although there was no particular pleasing prospect, as it were, in one sense, for her, little did she know what died in her pathway, to God's great goodness, but as yet, she did not know this.

but there was something, you see, which persuaded her, and nothing could turn her from it. And what a mercy, friends, if there was something wrought in the heart of a poor sinner like that.

You see, she was steadfastly minded. It seems to me so desirable in these days in which we live, that this steadfastness in the faith.

[27 : 57] There are many types of religion about in these days, religious cults, false religions. And there are those, alas, who seem to turn their backs upon the things of God.

There's something very beautiful, very wonderful about this. She was steadfast. How we do need, do we not? We need to pray, don't we, for that steadfastness. For faith, to be in gracious exercise, though tried.

And to be able still to continue, still to look on straight before you, as it were. What a mercy, where that grace is given.

And although there may be the things that try, there may be the disappointments perhaps in the pathway. But there is this, this steadfast mindedness.

And are there not exhortations in the scripture to send, to be steadfast? Yes, steadfast in believing. You know, Satan is a wily foe.

[29 : 15] He's a great enemy to to God's dear people. He does everything he can to turn them aside, as it were. What a mercy.

There's one who is greater than him. Satan is a mighty foe, but the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the saviour of his dear people, is mightier than he.

I like to think of those words in Isaiah's prophecy, you know, where he speaks, as it were, through the prophet, I that speak in righteousness, mighty to say, such is the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a mercy to be a humble follower. Yes, although perhaps you may feel sometimes to follow so far off. And you see, there's still that to contend with, not only the temptations of Satan, but what there is in our hearts by nature.

this is very sad and very solemn. The plague of the heart, the deceitfulness of the heart, and all this has to be contended with, doesn't it?

[30 : 25] But what a mercy to be made by God's grace steadfast. Yes, to continue. This is good with regard to a seeking soul, and we can think of Ruth in that way.

Yes, to continue seeking. And even though perhaps you may feel as yet you do not experience that you desire, what a mercy it is to press on still, yes, to follow on, by God's grace.

Because as the word of God reminds us, then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord. There will be that knowledge communicated in God's time and way. And so then, to the true seeker, what a mercy to be steadfast, still to be seeking, and that in spite of the disappointments perhaps, in spite of the temptations of the enemy, still to be seeking.

Yes, Ruth says, entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee. For whither thou goest, I will go. Now, Naomi was on the way to Bethlehem, wasn't she?

She was a returning one. God had dealt with her. We notice in the end of the chapter, she felt that it was a bitter pathway.

[32 : 04] I, in fact, she says, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out, full notice this, and the Lord has brought me back home again, too.

The Almighty has afflicted me. She was a chastened person, yet she was a blessed person. And Ruth felt such a drawing to her dear mother-in-law, in these things, you see.

And they could, as it were, sympathize one with the other. They both lost husbands. Yes, Naomi had lost her husband, Ruth had lost her husband.

It was a path of sorrow. Yet, you see, that they went together. And what a mercy that is, isn't it? To know something that drew them together. I know Satan, and whatever it was, he would seek to divide, wouldn't he?

Yes. But there's something very beautiful about those drawings of love. The source of it is in God himself, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[33 : 24] His, the hymn writer speaks about his resist this grace. How good it is to know something of that. Yes, to draw you to the people of God, and to draw you away from the other things.

You see, it drew Ruth away from Moab. Those former things had no attraction to her now whatever.

She must go with Naomi. whatever the future would hold in store, she could leave that. But this she persisted in, as it were, by grace, entreat me not to leave thee, or to return for falling off to thee.

For wither thou goest, I will go, where thou lodgest, I will lodge, thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. For there's something you see about Naomi and her God.

that Ruth could discern something. It's because the Lord had been pleased to deal graciously with this Ruth.

[34 : 37] There was a making manifest of his sovereign grace and mercy for this one. He was one that was to be made manifest as one of his children. And as you know, the unfolding of God's purposes, mysterious, but very blessed.

very blessed. There were great blessings in store for Ruth, although as yet she did not know. But here she is, as she sets out, yes, with her back to Moab, and her face, as it were, toward Bethlehem, and Bethlehem as God.

God and the people of God. great mercy to feel that drawing, dear friends, by grace, that which unites the people of God heart to heart.

Think of the source of it. It's in the Lord Jesus Christ. What did Jesus say when here upon earth?

I am the vine, you are the branches. He abideth in me, and I in him, the sign bringeth forth much fruit. You see, there's an abiding in him. There is something, yes, that draws.

[35 : 58] God draws his people to himself. He draws them to each other. He draws them to his ways, his worship. And it makes the things of the world to appear in such vanity, as it were.

As Solomon had to describe, didn't he, and declare, vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Yes, such are the attractions of the world.

But to a sinner wrought upon by the Spirit of God, these things will appear as vanities. But all the things to do with God and the worship of God, the people of God, the ways of God, there's something attractive.

it draws you. Although you may feel perhaps not to obtain too much, you may feel so unlike many of the people of God.

Well, you read later on this book in the book of Ruth, what does she say? I'm not like one of thine handmaidens. She realised there was a difference.

[37 : 11] she was a poor, righteous person in that sense. And yet you see, there was root of the matter there. She was a child of grace.

Yes. And now what a mercy if there's something wrought in the heart. And now perhaps you cannot feel to attain to great things. Yet you cannot go with the world.

you cannot pursue those vanities that so many pursue. There's an aching void which this world cannot fill.

And it is that you would seek to know. And to, as it were, to be found in those ways, yes, where there is a prospect and the promise of God's blessing.

Naomi could not hold out, as it were, great material blessings to Ruth, but you see, there was something which was far greater than all this.

[38 : 22] Not earthly prospects, no, but something wrought in her heart. Yes, those things that were evidence in the life of Naomi, that caused her to feel such a union to her.

She fought she was loved to her, nothing could separate. She craved unto her, she was steadfastly minded to go with her. And as I said earlier, what a mercy to be given that steadfast mind.

Not to be left to run hither and thither, to be blown about by every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men and cunning craftiness, as the word of God speaks of.

But to be made stead first. Yes, and to have that desire, and for that desire to be kindled, as it were, to a greater desire, so that nothing can deter it.

Now, I know, there is what we are by nature, a sad state by nature, there is in us each one of us, and many are the pitfalls of Satan.

[39 : 35] But you know, that good thing wrought in the heart, Satan cannot destroy. Something wrought in Ruth's heart, which distinguished her from Orpah.

And it was made manifest, and more clearly as time went on, but here she is now, then, setting out, as it were, with her back to Moab.

the face toward Bethlehem. Yes, and with a child of God, one she felt such a union to, and desire to follow her, and that nothing should separate.

And she was given very definite views about these things. and she said, it was not her own strength, no.

And I'm sure she did not state these things in her own strength. It was something which was wrought in her heart, which compelled her, as it were, so clearly and so definitely.

[40 : 46] She says, for whether thou goest, I will go. She didn't know as yet how things would fall out with her, but she must go with Naomi. She felt persuaded Naomi was going the right way, and she wanted to go as well.

For whether thou goest, I will go. We have a lodging so I will lodge. Oh, she desired to find a lodging place. God has great mercy grants these lodging places to his dear people, doesn't he?

As they journey on, yes, with their backs to the world, as it were, and their faces, Zion, Lord, they're those lodging places. Have you felt a house of prayer to be a lodging place to you?

Do you feel atone amongst the people of God? Do you feel you can lodge with them? Well, the Lord does give his people lodging places as they journey on.

Yes, you see, not a resting place completely, you see. but it is an earnest of that resting place which is yet to come.

[41 : 59] But meanwhile, these lodging places, where thou goest I will go, where thou lodgest I will lodge.

Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. And then she thinks of it, you see, in the light of the end of the journey, where thou diest I will I die.

Now, of course, both Naomi and Ruth had had very close experience of this. They'd lost their husbands, they'd seen death come, yes, which severed all earthly ties.

but in the prospect of death, she says, where thou diest will I die. In other words, she wanted to die as she believed, no, and we would die.

Yes, to die in the Lord, and there will I be buried, and that the Lord do so to me more, so it ought but death, partly in me.

[43 : 06] What a beautiful confession this is, wrote in Ruth's experience, which she was able to testify of it, as it were, under this testing time, and she was steadfast.

And it was evident that Naomi was well satisfied that there was something wrought in Ruth that couldn't be destroyed, and how it did bind them together.

Yes, and the grace of God will bind together. Sin separates. And that there is that which binds the people of God together.

The union is in the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Where thou diest, I will die, there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death, part thee in me.

And she was steadfastly minded. O grant, may the Lord grant to us, in all matters, that steadfast mind. Amen.

[44 : 16] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Let us conclude this morning by singing hymn number 999 and the tune is Contemplation 117.

Hymn number 999 When any turn from Zion's way, alas what numbers do?

Methinks I hear my Saviour say, Will thou forsake me too? Hymn number 999 When any turn from Zion's way, alas what numbers do?

We hear my Saviour say, Christ the Greatest Day, Christ the Greatest Day, escorted and strolling democracy.

[46 : 28] Christ the Greatest Day, Christ the Greatest Day, Christ the Greatest Day, Hymn number 999 The End The End

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