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## "Thou Art Come..."

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*Message given at Whitsun Conference, Sunday evening, 1955.  
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Reading: Ruth 2:11,12.

There are two fragments of two words, only in those two verses: "art come", "thou art come", and I want to say a little about what we have come to. I hope that you are familiar with the whole of this story we have in this tiny book. You will probably, if you do not already know it, pick it up from what I do say, but I think it might be helpful to those who are not acquainted with it if I just read again that wonderful passage containing the great decision which this young woman, Ruth the Moabitess, made. We have it in chapter 1, verse 16 and 17: "And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." That really does give me the background for what I want to say in connection with what we have come to.

And I begin by pointing out how unsuspecting was Ruth of all that to which she was coming by her great decision. How unsuspecting was the greatness and the values bound up with that decision. I think it very possible that Ruth did not know of the ban which rested by God's edict upon her nation, her people, and herself as included therein. For, for some very good reasons, God had pronounced a ban upon the Moabites and said that a Moabite should not come into the house of the Lord forever. It is probable that Ruth did not know of that ban, that edict, any more than those who are outside of Christ are alive to, or aware of, what a position they are in as under judgement. It is

probable that those outside of Christ would be either amazed or offended if they were told that they lie under the judgment of God. And yet, the Scriptures declare it to be so, that outside of Christ all are in condemnation. But whether she knew it or not, there is the fact. She may not have known about that ban, that Divine edict. Perhaps the reason for this decision she came to, to go with her mother-in-law Naomi, from her country into the land of Israel, was just that she felt it was something she must do.

Probably she had weighed it up, thought about it, considered it and then Naomi had done everything to dissuade her, to get her to go back and not to accompany her. But if we had asked Ruth why it was that she had decided and was so decided about it, the probability is that her answer would have been: "Well, I can't explain; I can't give you any reasons for it, but I just feel it is the thing to do, I have got to do it." You know, that is very often the only reason at the beginning why people come to Christ. They feel somehow that they have got to do it. They cannot explain, or give reasons, but - well, that is all: "I just had to. There was an urge, a constraint, a something working in me, and all I can say about it is, I felt I just had to do it. It was a big thing, I had thought about it, I had weighed it up, I had faced what it might involve, but there you are, I could not get away from it."

I think that is probably exactly how it was with Ruth, because, you see, there were costs attached to this, costs enough to discourage and even to disconcert. It was no small thing. As Boaz said, she left her father and her mother and her country to go into a strange land and one of our verses says, *"unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore"*. There were costs attached to it. The thing might, if it had just been faced as something in itself, have been regarded as something she could not do, she could not face, but there you are: "I just could not help it, I just had to. The urge, the constraint, the something working in me was more than all my reasoning, all my arguing and every other consideration..." and you know, dear friends, that is just it. For, as it proved, although she did not know it and could not explain this thing at all, she could not define it, it came to be seen afterwards that there was a mighty Will at work upon her. Yes, all undefined, all unexplained, without any bribes or any offers, or any prizes, or anything to try to get her in mind to go this way, there was this working of God.

Quite quietly, but strongly and deeply, the Spirit of God is at work, creating something that you cannot define any more than, "Well, that is the way I feel I ought to go. That is the way in which I know, sooner or later, I will have to go. I may put it off, but I know I will come to it at some time." Yes, perhaps Ruth had no more than that and she had plenty to discourage. Her very mother-in-law was seeking to shake her off it seems, to send her back and say, "Don't come, your sister has gone back, you do the same". But no; she would have said, I think, "It is no use, that is the way I have got to go and so, whatever it means, I am going. Entreat me not to leave thee, nor return from following after thee. Whither thou goest, I will go". Well, that is all there was to this great decision, I think, when it was made. But then what a tremendous amount came to be afterwards shown as bound up with it!

Let us look at these two fragments in the statement of Boaz to her, for they really are an explanation of this decision under Divine constraint: "thou art come unto a people that thou knewest not heretofore"; "thou art come to the God of Israel under whose wings thou art come to take refuge". That is how it is explained - a place among the people of God, and a place under the wings of the Lord. That does not sound very much, does it, as it is stated, but oh, what a lot is in that!

Let us turn for a moment to the story. You know that the property of Ruth's father-in-law and therefore of Ruth's own husband had been disposed of because they had left the land. They had lost

it, they had forfeited it, but when they came back, this great man of the land, Boaz, by strange and wonderful providences, came across their path, or they came across his, and it was found that he was a near kinsman who had the right to redeem this lost inheritance. To make the story short, he decided to do so, and at once set about dealing with the difficulties which we will not refer to at the moment. The main difficulty was that there was another man who was a nearer kinsman and therefore had a prior right to redeem. And these two, Boaz and the other man, met in the gate where these transactions of redemption of lost possessions were carried out and he challenged the other man and he said, "Now look here, you have the right to redeem this lost inheritance. Are you prepared to do so?" And the man said "Yes, all right". But then said Boaz, "Look here, in the day that you redeem the inheritance, you have got also to redeem Ruth, for she and the inheritance are one". And the man said, "No, I am sorry, I can't do that, therefore I cede you the right to redeem". And Boaz redeemed the inheritance, but he also redeemed and purchased and married Ruth and that was all in this strange, mysterious urge of God in her heart. He was urging her firstly in the direction of redemption, of being purchased, and then married.

Joined to Christ through redemption! "Redeemed and purchased with His blood, redeemed and sanctified" - and *sanctified*, a Moabitess, outside of the pale, as an unclean thing in Israel, redeemed and, by union with this great Israelite, sanctified. You see the picture? The urge of the Spirit of God upon you contains this: your redemption from the ban, from the condemnation, from the judgment that lies upon all who are outside of Christ. Redemption! Oh, wonderful story - purchased: "*Ye are bought with a price*" - purchased and joined to the Lord. All that is in the urge, in the constraint, in that something that is making you wistfully say, "Oh, that I knew all that in my own life and experience!" Yes, that is a work of the Spirit of God, urging you in the direction of redemption and union with His Son.

And then next, there is more, there is more to follow. "And art come to a people that thou knewest not heretofore". Yes, you say, that is the Old Testament, a beautiful Old Testament story, an idyll of long ago, but is there anything now to correspond to that? The answer, of course, must be in whether you agree that the New Testament belongs to now. Does the New Testament belong to now, or does it only belong to long ago, when it was written? No, of course not, it belongs to us now. It is contemporary, it is up-to-date, and everybody that comes to Christ finds that it is the most up-to-date document in existence.

Well then, have we got something that corresponds to and is illustrated by Ruth the stranger, Ruth the alien, Ruth under condemnation being brought into redemption and union with Christ? Yes, we have got it, let me read it to you: "Wherefore remember that once ye, the Gentiles in the flesh who are called uncircumcision by that which is called circumcision in the flesh, made by hands, that ye were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenant of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye that once were afar off are made nigh in the blood of Christ. For He is our peace..." and so on. You could not have a better commentary and exposition of the story of Ruth than that! True to the letter! "*Unto a people whom thou knewest not heretofore*". Unto the people of the Lord - *you*, you, now the people of God. And when you come to look at that from which I have just read, that whole letter, you have some wonderful things said about this people of the Lord. This people of the Lord, not of the Old Testament, but now, those of us who have our citizenship in heaven, who have been born from above, who do form for God His new nation, His spiritual people.

Firstly, that this people is:-

### **An Elect People From All Eternity.**

Now, Israel as a nation was an elect nation, God chose Israel from among all the nations. He elected Israel. Ah, but the election of Israel is only a mere shadow of this greater election of the Church. The election of Israel was a time matter, after all. But here in this wonderful document, from which I have just read, we are told that this people, to which you and I belong and to which the Spirit of God is urging everybody else to belong, this people have been chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world. It is a wonderful thing that that simple act upon an undefined, an unexplained urge of the Spirit of God involves that. And you come afterwards to see that "your decision", as it is termed, rather your response to this constraint of the Spirit of God, was involving you in something which God had already planned and marked out before ever this world was. It is a wonderful thing. It is not just something of the moment, of your lifetime, something in itself: you "decide for Christ", you decide to "give yourself to Christ", you decide to "be a Christian", however you may put it. What you really decide to do is to fall in with the eternal plan of God. And you don't know that when you make your decision, any more than Ruth did when she made her decision. She made her decision simply because she felt that was the thing to do. And all unsuspectingly she found eventually that she was right in and part of a covenant people, an elect people, with whom in the next place the covenant of God was.

You see, in my translation I did not read it as it is translated. The word "Lord" is "Jehovah" every time, "Jehovah recompense thee". "Under whose wings", the God, the Jehovah of Israel, and that name is the name which implies and means the covenant God. It is the name which has to do with man.

A little technicality by the way: when God created things, heaven and earth and these things, he was called by another name - Elohim - creating things, but when it comes to dealing with man, His name is changed and He is called "Jehovah" which means "the covenant God". And she had come, not knowing it, right into the realm of the Divine covenant. And you know that covenant is a tremendous thing, even with Israel. In the prophecies of Jeremiah a very, very strong way is taken of indicating what this covenant was with Israel. He said: "Look at the stars, look at the moon. If you can, if you can cause to cease the ordinances of the heavens, the sun, the moon, and the stars, then My covenant will cease with Israel. It shall be as long as the sun, the moon, and the stars".

Well, what are you going to do about that? But even so, it is not like the covenant made in the blood of Jesus Christ, with you and with me. This is an eternal covenant of another order. I cannot stay, even if I were able, to explain that. All I am trying to say is that here is something tremendous; that she had come into an elect people, and into the place of God's covenant. And that is all in the direction of this constraint of God's Spirit if it is upon you, and, dear friends, those of us who have come in response, this is what we have come into. It is something very great.

Going further in this letter from which I have read, this people is not only an elect people, and the covenant people of God. It is:-

### **A People Called With a Great Vocation.**

Those people here who know this letter to the Ephesians, know what I am talking about. Here, it is made known that this people stands in relation to God for a very great purpose, a great vocation, a heavenly vocation. When we come to the Lord Jesus one of our first senses is that we have come

into the very purpose for which we have a being - a sense that there is now purpose in life. And that was not so before. But oh, what is it, this tremendous vocation with which the Church is called? And the apostle here says: "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called." A great vocation.

Now, Ruth came to be a part of Israel, which was raised up to be a nation by which God should be made known to all the nations, what kind of God He is: a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and plenteous in loving kindness. He raised them up as a nation for that vocation. This people, of which we are a little part, are called with a great heavenly vocation, not an earthly, temporal one, but an eternal vocation, to serve the purposes of God in this universe, as this letter says, "unto the ages of the ages".

How little Ruth suspected all this in that day when she said "I will"! And you are going, dear friend, when you respond to the constraints of God's Spirit, to find that right on to the end of your life, no matter how long you live, that it is one continuous discovery of how much there is in Christ to whom you have come. That is how it should be and that is how it can be! "A people whom thou knewest not heretofore".

And the next thing in this letter is the conduct of this people. I have just quoted or cited, "Walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye are called, in all lowliness and meekness", and then it makes some practical applications: husbands and wives, it has all got to come in there, and wives and husbands, children and parents, and parents and children, masters and servants, and servants and masters, Christians and the world. And in effect it is saying this: "Look here, when you come amongst these people, these people have a testimony, and you have got to take on responsibility for that testimony and be loyal to the very vocation of this people. Come in and stand truly with them that in every relationship of life, in every connection of life it might be seen that this is no ordinary people; this people is different, this is a heavenly people. You are taking on the conduct of this people."

Yes, it is true, Christians are different and their conduct and behaviour is supposed to be different from all others. It should be on a very much higher level than others. And when we come amongst *this* people, well, you may say, it is all different, it is all strange, but, I venture to say, that it was not very long if it was long at all, before Ruth said: "I don't know, but I feel more at home amongst these people than I did in my own country. I somehow feel that these people are more my people than even the people among whom I was born. Somehow or other, I feel this to be more my family than even my natural family!" Now, is that true, Christians? Isn't that exactly what happened? It is not that we cease to love or be concerned for those of our relations who are outside of Christ, but somehow or other those inside of Christ have become our nearest relations.

We feel more at home and when we go back home to the unconverted relations, we do not feel at home at all! We feel strangers. Isn't it true? People we knew not heretofore we seem to know now better than we have known anyone else. We are at home. I am sure that was true of Ruth. But that is a very blessed, wonderful reality, but you see it involves a responsibility: "All right then, their interests shall be my interests, thy people shall be my people, their interests must be my interests, their testimony must be my testimony. I must be loyal, I must stand with them in what they stand for." Vocation.

And finally, in this letter, strangely enough these people are not universally liked. You would think they ought to be, a wonderful people like this about whom these things are true, well, they ought to

be the most liked people in the world! Somehow or other no one likes them. They are all disliked by other people and somehow whenever they are present or are mentioned, the very atmosphere seems to get thick. That is exactly where this letter to the Ephesians finishes. Here is this people right at the centre of this letter and then it says: "Principalities and powers, world rulers of this darkness, hosts of evil spirits", all against them! They are involved in a great spiritual conflict. You are involved in that when you come amongst them. Yes, I don't want to tell you otherwise. You are involved in that. You are probably going to be very much disliked if you become a Christian. You are going to find that your very presence sets up an antagonistic complex. And if it does not come from men, it will come from the unseen; you will know it.

Ah, but then, I'll be quite frank about it, what it means to come to the people whom "thou knewest not heretofore", there is the other side. "And thou art come unto the God of Israel under whose wings thou art come to take refuge." The wings of the Lord are over the people of the Lord. I want to point out here that the Lord's wings are to be found over His people. Do you want His wings over you? You will not get them out in Moab! You will get them in the midst of His people.

Somehow or other the Lord has appointed that all the blessings that He will give are to be found amongst His people and not to be had apart. You have got to come in with the Lord's people to get the wings of the Lord. Whatever it is that the Lord would have for us we are going to find it relatedly and not independently; corporately, and not in a detached way. Now, this is very true from the letter from which I have read, and we are keeping true to the Scripture, but, you see here is the protection of the wings: "under whose wings thou art come to take refuge". This can be proved from this very little book. Naomi with her husband left the place of the covenant elect people and went into Moab, and what happened? They lost everything and they lost the protection of God, calamity upon calamity befell them, and Naomi put it this way: "I went out full and I am come back empty." Why? She deserted the place where the wings were. It is always, let me say for Christians, a disastrous thing to leave the place where the Lord is and where the Lord would have you. They may have thought that it was going to ease the situation, but it made it a thousand times more difficult. And not until they came back to the place where the Lord was did they find the Lord's wings and their refuge.

Now that is a word to Christians, remember. If you forsake the place where the Lord is, wherever that may be, and where the Lord wants you to be, and you forsake the Lord's protection, the fellowship of His people, the "assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is", trouble will follow. Protection is found there, in the House of the Lord, amongst the people of God. And so when they came back, it was just put like this: "Under whose wings thou art come to take refuge". Come where the wings are! It ought to be like that, and it is where things are as the Lord would have them that people find amongst the Lord's people a refuge.

It is a wonderful thing, is it not, to belong to the Lord's people, when the Lord's people are as the Lord would have them? Oh, what we owe to the Lord's people, when we are in trouble. What a refuge they are! What it is to have them pray for us, to take them on our heart and care for them. Oh, yes, a refuge amongst the Lord's people. It is a sorry thing to be a lonely soul with no spiritual fellowship.

Yes, that is where the wings are and I will close with this. The Lord is more than once in the Bible spoken of as having wings in this representative or symbolic way and there is one instance in which His wings were referred to in this history of Israel. You will find it in the book of Deuteronomy. It says

this about Israel, speaking to Israel: "As an eagle casteth forth her young, hovereth over them and taketh them upon her wings, so the Lord thy God with thee." Of course you know the truth of nature: the eaglets high up in the lofty crag, overlooking the immense abyss, and the day comes when the mother eagle, seemingly so cruel and heartless, takes them and pitches them right over and they have never yet been on the wing. How cruel it seems! But then she flutters over them, swoops under them, catches them on her wings and takes them back to safety. And her cruelty is only her way of teaching them to fly and take responsibility for themselves. And the wings of the Lord are said to have fulfilled that function with His people.

Oh yes, this terrible experience, a frightening experience through which the Lord takes us, but His wings are His means of training us to take responsibility and they will never let us down. The crash that we feared will never come while it is the wings of the Lord not only under which, but upon which, we have come to rest. It is a great thing to have the Lord and the wings of the Lord and the shelter of the people of God!

And so I finish and say again, if you have not come, and the Spirit of God is just laying His gentle constraints upon you, and yet sufficiently strong, to know where you ought to be, what you ought to do, the way that you ought to take; if you have not responded, come, and although everything may seem strange and a great adventure and there may seem great risks and involvements and costs, you are going to find that there are very great compensations, far outweighing everything else. But the Lord is not going to tell you all about this now; He will not make it all plain yet.

Although I am telling you about it, it is only information. It can't be real to you until you have made your response. It is only what someone else knows, or other people know, you don't know it until you have made the response. But what we can say to you is that the gentlest influence of the Spirit of God upon your heart, constraining you towards Christ, involves the greatest things conceivable. They are wrapped up in your response; immense issues to miss which would be irreparable. If you have not come, come. I said just now that it looked as though Ruth was leaving home and kindred and country, but in effect she really only came home, because I am certain she was able later to say: "This is really home to me". And so we say, "Come home, come home". If you have gone away, "Come back, come back". You know you are not happy, you know you have left home. And if you are at home, stay at home. Don't run away, or be driven away; don't allow anything to force you away, however difficult it may seem. Your refuge is at home, abiding in Christ.