

***FROM BITTERNESS
TO BLESSING***

*Notes from Sermons
on the Book of Ruth*

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FROM BITTERNESS TO BLESSING

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1. DEPARTURE – DISTRESS – DEVOTION – DECLARATION

Ruth 1

The *Book of Ruth* is set at a period in the history of the Children of Israel when the judges ruled in Judea. In the good times God was worshipped as King and the Judges ruled with integrity and justice. But in the bad times God and the rule of justice and integrity were forsaken, so that judgment followed.

It was a time in the history of the Jewish nation when there was a constant cycle in their relationship with God. Departure from God resulted in deprivation and distress under His judgment. But then, when a faithful Judge was raised up by the Lord, repentance resulted in restoration and the richness of God's renewed blessing.

The *Book of Ruth* commences at a time of deprivation when the land was under the judgment of God. Bethlehem, normally known as the 'house of bread', becomes a place destitute of bread.

Now a question arises for our consideration at the start of the *Book of Ruth*: how should we respond to such times of deprivation? Twice we are told in the *Book of Judges* that in those days 'every man did that which was right in his own eyes' (*Judges 17.6; 21.25*). When the Lord raised up Judges we are told there were still those who did not listen but did their own thing. The response of Elimelech, as the leader of his family, is an Old Testament example given to us by God of a man doing what seemed right in his own eyes without applying biblical principles to his decisions. His guidance was directed through humanistic thinking which lacked the fear of God. In the end God overruled in His sovereign correction and mercy, and turned sorrow into blessing. God, according to His marvellous grace, turned bitterness to blessing.

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However God's mercy must not be used as justification for departure from God's way. We should not approach decisions in our own wisdom, doing what is right in our own eyes because we think God will sort it all out in the end. We must start where God starts. We must consider first some of the problems when making decisions that are contrary to His Word.

Departure

'Departure' sums up the physical action and spiritual state of Elimelech. This is characterised in three ways.

1. Independence

'Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab' Ruth 1.1a.

The name Elimelech means 'my God is King', yet he acted in a way of independence from God. Elimelech was evidently a man who had wealth. Jewish historians tell us he was an important man of both substance and influence, even like a prince. Perhaps he thought he could independently buy his way out of trouble. We know from the end of the *Book of Ruth* that he must have taken out a mortgage on his land to raise money, for later it was left to Boaz to redeem the land back into the family after the death of Elimelech.

At this time business was bad in Bethlehem – things were tight. The economy was in recession and there was not much prospect of profit. It seems Elimelech saw a better opportunity for his investment with the people of the land of Moab. But in Moab dwelt the enemies of Israel and God. The step was taken, and probably justified to his relations under the cover of providing for his wife and family. Elimelech could afford to travel down into Moab, so why not depart from Bethlehem? Elimelech was financially independent, so why not exert his financial independence?

'Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into

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such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that’ James 4.13-15.

Elimelech’s wife, Naomi, testifies later that she went out from Bethlehem full, but she came back empty. This fullness is seen not only in financial terms but also as being full of self, pride and independence.

It is important at this point to remember there was another wealthy man in Bethlehem at the time. His name was Boaz, and he stayed in Bethlehem and patiently waited upon God in the trial. As a landowner the pain of the judgment of famine on the land would have hit Boaz extremely hard too. Ultimately Boaz, by faith and dependence on God, entered into abundant blessing, while Elimelech, in an act of independence from God, went down to Moab and the outcome is death.

We can also see here the danger of using the needs of the family as an excuse for disobedience. Surely there were better prospects for his two sons in Moab. I am sure Elimelech could rationalise going to Moab as an act of kindness to his family, but what sort of kindness did it turn out to be?

The problem for Elimelech was that he was not walking by faith, but by sight. He had not learned from the problem his forefather Abraham experienced at such a time of famine. When Abraham was faced with famine in the land of promise he went down into Egypt and got into trouble. Abraham learned from his experience and went on to be known as the ‘father of faith’. Walking by faith and not by sight means resting on the promises of God in the midst of adversity, not being driven by our own wisdom, feelings or circumstances alone. Job wrote: ‘*Who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?’ (Job 9.4).*

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2. Denial

‘And a certain man of Beth-lehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons’ Ruth 1.1b.

By taking the action he did Elimelech showed he was in a state of denial. The greatest need was for repentance in Bethlehem, not departure from Bethlehem. It is true that a man has to learn the problems of his own heart before his other problems are addressed. By taking this action he was refusing to face up to the real problem in his life. So often in our life activity and actions become replacements for what God is calling us to. Elimelech could afford financially to run away from the material famine but not the spiritual famine in his life. He took that spiritual backsliding with him into Moab. God was calling him to repentance but in his state of denial he refused to search his own heart.

3. Rejection

‘And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Beth-lehem-judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there’ Ruth 1.2.

Living in the land of Moab, renowned for its idolatry, was a rejection of God. The people of Moab were descendants of a wrong relationship between Lot and his firstborn daughter. When the Children of Israel travelled from Egypt to Canaan the Moabites refused to help them. Later they hired Balaam in a futile attempt to curse the Israelites. During the time of the Judges the Moabites invaded Israel and ruled over them for eighteen years. Going to Moab symbolised rejection of God and aligning oneself with idols.

Elimelech probably justified his actions by attempting to treat this move as only temporary. But we need to beware of rationalising disobedience. The word ‘sojourn’ has the meaning of a temporary

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dwelling place. A temporary measure was taken to alleviate the situation he found himself in even if it meant compromise.

This is sometimes the case in our lives. We justify our initial actions by saying it is only for a short while, and God is love so will understand, when all the time we are really open to accepting such a lifestyle on a more permanent basis. The fact that the two sons married Moabish women and dwelt there for ten years seems to confirm the reality that they were actually open to settling down in an idolatrous land. They followed the pattern set by their father who had taken them into Moab in the first place. The responsibility was Elimelech's. This professing believer allowed his sons to marry idolaters. We know Ruth was converted, but Orpah was not.

What we do know is that the hand of the Lord went out against the family while in Moab.

'There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death' Proverbs 14.12.

Elimelech majored on the material, not the spiritual, and this governed his approach to decision-making. Going down to Moab without direction from God made a statement of rejection and independence from God.

Distress

'And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband' Ruth 1.3-5.

This word 'distress' describes the obvious state of Naomi. Her name meant 'pleasant one' but poor Naomi certainly did not feel pleasant. We will now consider how this distress worked itself out in Naomi.

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Naomi had experienced a traumatic time. Her husband and two sons had died in Moab – she was alone. Naomi was undoubtedly at this time suffering in her grief from a type of depression, bitterness of soul. This distorted her thinking and testimony at this particular time.

1. Confusion

‘Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah. And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother’s house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept. And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people. And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons; would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me. And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her’
Ruth 1.8-14.

Naomi’s attitude and words in her distress led at this point to confusion in her testimony and witness. Undoubtedly Naomi had it in

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mind to test whether her two daughters-in-law were really willing to leave Moab. However, the way in which Naomi attempts to persuade her daughters-in-law to go back to Moab raises question marks about her thought process at the time. Her approach to this crisis and cross-roads in life is not a pattern that we should follow. We need to be so careful about the advice we give and the spirit in which we give it.

Naomi was undoubtedly deeply distressed, acknowledging the hand of the Lord had gone out against her. She was not only distressed for herself but also for her daughters-in-law. However, in her distress the advice she gives to her daughters-in-law is humanistic: return to Moab. The issue for Naomi for their future comfort and support appears simply to get them remarried. Her obvious concern must have appeared to Orpah and Ruth to major on the material, not the spiritual. Encouraging her daughters-in-law to go back to Moab and marry unbelievers for the sake of having a husband and a quiet life, and wishing them God's blessing on such a return to Moab, is a highly questionable approach to use. There is no biblical warrant for such an approach. It is to spiritualise ungodly advice.

What Naomi was proposing to her daughters-in-law in the case of Ruth was directly contrary to God's will. We will notice how Ruth, as a new believer, had to rebuke Naomi and ask her to stop giving such advice. God had predetermined that Ruth would marry Boaz and be in the line of the genealogy of the Messiah. God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts (*Isaiah 55.9*). God can and does bring blessing out of bitterness and triumph out of trial, but this is God's amazing, sovereign overruling, not a vindication of Naomi's unbiblical advice. It is an evidence of God's power to bring about His purposes, despite our folly. It is not good for us to spiritualise unbiblical advice because we can look back and see a blessed outcome; rather we should look at such an event and marvel at the amazing grace of God to overrule the advice of Naomi to go back to Moab given in her time of despondency and bitterness.

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If we look at the pattern set by the Lord for such an occasion, we notice the right approach. The approach of the Lord Jesus to the crossroads in life simply outlines the cost of following Him. He encourages us to take up our cross and follow Him, while warning us it is a difficult pathway. Yes, there will be trials ahead, but He has promised to be with us in them.

Notice Naomi seeks God's blessing upon a union in Moab, attempting to spiritualise pragmatic advice – verse 9. Can we really ask the Lord to deal kindly with us when knowingly returning to an idolatrous land? What kind of rest did Naomi have in mind? Orpah took her mother-in-law's advice and returned and, by Naomi's own admission, went back to her gods. But remember it was Naomi who advised her to go back! I wonder, when restored to a proper relationship with God, if Naomi regretted that conversation with Orpah.

We sometimes look back with sadness at some of the conversations we have had when in distress. Note the care needed when advising in times of despondency.

2. Hope

'And Ruth said, Intreat 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: 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 ought but death part thee and me. When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her. So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem' Ruth 1.16-19.

There is a danger, when distressed, of forgetting the previously encouraging aspects of our witness and becoming totally disillusioned with the situation and consumed with our grief. But in the distress of Naomi the Lord is going to show her hope! Despite her present condition, it is evident that in previous days she had been a good witness

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to Ruth. Ruth was attracted to her mother-in-law knowing her in the better times to be a godly, loving witness. She had seen in the life of Naomi genuine and proven belief in God. This testimony had already spoken to her heart. Despite the bad advice Naomi was giving now in telling her daughters-in-law to go back to Moab, Ruth remembered Naomi's previous consistent testimony in the family home as her mother-in-law. The present bitterness of her testimony did not completely cloud and ruin the positive part of her testimony. This is an encouragement for us because sometimes we all say unwise things in the heat of the moment, in our despair. When all things seem against us, sadly we dishonour the name of the Lord. But God in His grace and mercy is still willing to use the previous positive elements of our testimony.

Devotion

The testimony of Ruth is one of most remarkable in all Scripture. She had lost her husband but she still trusted God. She was willing to leave her homeland because of her trust in God. She had no prospect of marriage, no money, no rights, and no prospects materially. She had no encouragement verbally from Naomi to continue on to Bethlehem. Despite all this she believed in God and wanted to follow God and to be with God's people.

There are four points to Ruth's testimony to take serious note of.

1. Correction

'And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee' Ruth 1.16a.

Ruth had to rebuke her mother-in-law, telling her to stop advising her to go back to Moab. Ruth was a believer who had come from an unbelieving family, yet she was already teaching Naomi a lesson. While Naomi focused upon her grief, and consequently her testimony at the time was confused, Ruth, as a new believer also in the same grief, focused upon God, and her testimony was clear.

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The commentator Matthew Henry, while acknowledging Naomi's motive was to test her daughters-in-law, summarises the danger of Naomi's approach to such a test, confirmed by Ruth's correction of her:

'It is a great vexation and uneasiness to those that are resolved for God and religion to be tempted and solicited to alter their resolution. Entreat me not. The margin reads it, Be not against me. Note, we are to reckon those against us, and really our enemies, that would hinder us in our way to the heavenly Canaan. Our relations they may be, but they cannot be our friends, that would dissuade us from and discourage us in the service of God and the work of religion.'

2. Commitment

'...for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge' Ruth 1.16b.

Ruth was ready to go with Naomi wherever and whatever.

3. Confession

'...thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God' Ruth 1.16c.

This is a wonderful statement of faith – *my God*.

4. Consecration

'Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me' Ruth 1.17.

This was total consecration unto death. What a statement of unreserved faith in God, and of wholehearted obedience to God! Ruth was steadfastly minded. We can see here the freshness and clarity of God-given faith in its infancy. Like a child depends upon its mother, here we see an entering into the Kingdom like a little child with unhindered, simple trust.

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Declaration

‘And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?’ Ruth 1.20-21.

1. Confession

In God’s amazing dealings it is Ruth who is used by the Lord to correct, comfort and encourage Naomi. So the two of them go together to Bethlehem. On her return to Bethlehem Naomi requests that her name be called Mara. The name Mara means ‘bitter’, and in Naomi’s view the Almighty had dealt bitterly with her. It seems that Naomi felt very bitter in her spirit and expressed God’s dealings with her in such a manner. Satan wants to make us bitter in our grief, not broken, so that our relationship with God is upset. Yet:

‘The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise’ Psalm 51.17.

It seems Naomi was struggling with bitterness of spirit in her grief rather than the tears of brokenness. However, in her grief at the chastisement of God she now makes a personal and humble confession. It is at this point that Naomi turns back to God in her personal confession and brokenness of heart. In her confession the bitterness departs and the liberation of honesty and truthfulness shines.

‘I went out full’. In other words, I went out in my own spirit. *‘The Lord hath brought me home again empty.’*

Even in Naomi’s darkest moments there is confession and a spark of light and realisation. The Bible says that God does not break the bruised reed (*Isaiah 42.3*). She now acknowledges the Lord’s hand not only in the correction but in her returning. Here is a statement of faith in which bitterness will now turn, by God’s grace, to the fruit of

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blessing. Naomi humbles herself in this statement under the almighty hand of God in His correcting dealings. I went out full of self-confidence and independence; I have returned humbled and empty under the almighty hand of God. What a blessed 'afterwards' there is to be in the life of Naomi who is corrected because she is a child of God.

Conclusion

This incident points us to Christ encouraging us in our distress to return to Him. You will remember that Naomi had heard that there was bread in Bethlehem. This encouraged her to return. However, we can see a deeper, wonderful picture of Christ, the coming Messiah, in the news she heard. It is said that she heard that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread. Hundreds of years later in Bethlehem the Lord visited His people with Christ, the Bread of Life.

'...through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace' Luke 1.78-79.

Here is our hope in distress. Ruth found Boaz in Bethlehem. Boaz is a type of Christ in his grace to Ruth. Ruth came to Bethlehem, picturing the rejection of the world in Moab and wholehearted faith in Christ. Naomi returned to Bethlehem and acknowledged the bitterness of soul but confessed the reality. In the end both these ladies were truly blessed in coming to Bethlehem.

'I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee' Isaiah 44.22.

'Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up' Hosea 6.1.

2. THE GRACE OF GOD

Ruth 2

Ruth the Moabitess had travelled from the land of Moab with her mother-in-law Naomi to Bethlehem. She entered Bethlehem by faith trusting in the living God. She was in fellowship both naturally and spiritually with Naomi (see *Ruth 1.16-17, 22*).

Ruth asked Naomi if she could go and glean, picking up ears of corn left by the reapers, as a way of providing for them both.

‘And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter’ Ruth 2.2.

When she set out to go to the field it was an action of faith and dependence upon God to direct her. As a stranger she had no idea which part of the field belonged to which owner. Ruth was penniless, and went to glean in the field dependent upon the grace and favour of another. It was important to her to be guided to the right part of the field.

What Ruth was to experience practically she had also experienced spiritually in God’s pattern of grace. Spiritually applied, grace had chosen and called her, grace had created a need and grace had also met her need. The sovereign grace of God shines so clearly in this chapter.

For example, we can also see how God graciously directed and overruled her footsteps to ensure she was in the right place at the right time to meet Boaz. It was a divine appointment of grace, planned in eternity for the mutual blessing of Boaz and Ruth.

‘And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech’ Ruth 2.3.

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This is expressed in this manner as viewed from our human perspective. But behind the ‘happening’ is the divine providence of God ordained from all eternity. Such a lot rests on a little in the sovereignty of God. Great things develop from small beginnings. Ruth, under the sovereign hand of God, stops in the exact part of the field belonging to Boaz! The unseen hand of God was controlling the situation. Ruth purposed to glean, while God purposed for her to meet Boaz.

From this account we learn to have the greatest respect for God’s providence. God has a plan for us; there is a reason for us to be where we are. God is almighty, and things are not left to chance. Sometimes life’s pathway turns on a very little thing. Ruth’s ‘hap’ was to be in the part of the field belonging to Boaz, but behind this was God’s sovereign hand. This shows the determination of holy providence. Scripture tells us:

‘The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord’ Psalm 37.23.

‘For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death’ Psalm 48.14.

‘I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master’s brethren’ Genesis 24.27 spoken by Abraham’s servant.

But now we will focus on the testimony of how the grace of God shone in the life of the man of God Boaz, particularly in the way he treated Ruth. It is the grace of the strong helping the weak.

Boaz was the grandson of Nahshon, a prince of the tribe of Judah, the son of Salmon by Rahab, the harlot delivered from sin by faith in God. Again we can see in the pattern of God’s salvation the wonders of His grace. The name Boaz means ‘In Him is Strength’. He used and displayed strength graciously.

The account is a picture given to encourage us in the way the grace of God in Christ Jesus works in a believer’s life. We will end the chapter by considering Ruth’s response to this amazing grace.

The grace of God shining in the life of Boaz

1. Boaz takes the initiative

‘Then said Boaz unto Ruth...’ Ruth 2.8a.

It was Boaz who first spoke to Ruth. In the culture of her day she would not have dared to speak to Boaz first. She was a widow and a stranger: he was the lord of the harvest. When we consider the work of God’s grace, it always starts with God. Salvation is by grace; it is all of God’s favour. He is the One who has initiated the work of salvation, and He is the One who is accomplishing the work of salvation. God makes the first move to come to His people’s aid, not because they deserve anything but because He loves His people and wants them for Himself.

*‘In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him... We love him, because he first loved us’
1 John 4.9, 19.*

2. Boaz speaks personally to Ruth

‘Hearest thou not, my daughter?’ Ruth 2.8b.

Boaz’s actions to Ruth are a pattern for gracious kindness and compassion. He came across especially to speak to Ruth, a humble gleaner. This reminds us that God’s grace can come to us in humble circumstances and reaches us where we are.

Boaz’s interest was sincere, developing, and personal and resulted in action. He began by referring to Ruth in *Ruth 2.5* as ‘damsel’, or young woman. Now Boaz uses a term of endearment to Ruth: ‘my daughter’. So God by His love, by His Son, and by His Holy Spirit, speaks to each one of His people personally.

‘God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days

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spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds' Hebrews 1.1-2.

We are unworthy, but He comes and speaks so kindly and graciously in Christ. He says, 'Come as you are: separate from the world and I will be your Father.'

'...who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began' 2 Timothy 1.9.

God as the Lord of His harvest speaks to each of His people according to His grace as His special person. We know in ordinary life how important it is to feel welcome and wanted. When we arrive somewhere for the first time, it is the first impression that counts.

3. Boaz clearly directs Ruth

'Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence' Ruth 2.8c.

Boaz was very clear in his commands and direction to Ruth. So the Word of God is very clear in its commands to the believer: we are to glean from the field of God's Word. It is so important we do not get our instruction from elsewhere. God in His grace has provided the source of spiritual food.

'My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures' Proverbs 2.1-4.

'...but abide here fast by my maidens' Ruth 2.8d.

Boaz knew the women who were working for him and he wanted

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Ruth to stay with them. We are called to stay close to God's people, to stay alongside those who will be a good, not a bad, influence. We are to be careful with whom we spend our time. God, by His grace, provides for us people with whom we can have spiritual fellowship.

'Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them' Ruth 2.9a.

Ruth was called to work in the field of God's ordaining. There is a saying that 'the grass is greener on the other side of the fence', but a believer is called to work in the field God has placed them according to His grace and kindness. Paul picks up this theme of being focused in the Christian life:

'I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus' Philippians 3.14.

4. Boaz protects Ruth

'...have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee?' Ruth 2.9b.

There is no racism in grace. The Jewish women were required to work with Ruth the Moabitess, despite her background. Boaz also commanded and warned the men not to touch her. Ruth was a widow in a new country, and Boaz was concerned for her safety. God is concerned for the safety of all His people spiritually. God is with us in the storms of life. With the Lord at the centre there can be calm and peace, even in the most difficult circumstances. Peace and safety are God's gift to us.

To illustrate this point, two artists entered a competition to paint a picture depicting peace. The first chose to portray a pretty cottage surrounded by a beautiful garden in a tranquil valley. It seemed the most peaceful setting. However, the second artist painted a great storm raging by a cliff side. But in the centre of the picture, on a ledge

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high up the cliff, sheltered a bird on a nest, at total peace in the midst of the storm. This second painting was judged the winner.

The soul is protected by the sovereign grace of God, even though naturally we may be under stress and the pain of our decaying bodies, or perhaps enduring the challenges of change.

'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him' Job 13.15.

'For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth' Job 19.25.

Note also Asaph's attitude in *Psalm 73*.

I once visited a man dying of cancer. His home was very poor and he lay in pain. But his conversation mentioned nothing of his circumstances. What he wanted to say was this: 'God has been so good to me'!

'...and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand' John 10.28.

God protected Ruth even in great stress.

5. Boaz provides for Ruth

'...and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn' Ruth 2.9c.

Boaz knew gleaning was back-breaking, thirsty work. Ruth was privileged to drink from water that was readily available, drawn from the well. Normally the women had to draw water for themselves. Matthew Henry observes:

'Sure this is from the famous well of Bethlehem the waters of which David longed for.'

Preaching ministry is like this: a minister goes to the well of God's Word; he draws from this well so the hearers, coming thirsty to the house of God from a stressful busy day or week, can drink from the

pre-drawn, refreshing waters of God's Word. This is the only proper and safe well for the hearers to drink from. In a day and age when preaching is considered to be surplus to the requirements of man, it is vital that God's provision in His grace of the preached Word is respected. However, the preacher has a responsibility before God to deliver a truthful message with a proper and careful understanding of the times in which he is ministering.

6. Boaz encourages Ruth

'And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust' Ruth 2.11-12.

As Ruth bows herself to the ground in gratitude Boaz encourages her. Her kindness to her mother-in-law had not gone unnoticed, especially the sacrifice and the uncertainty involved. The Lord knows all about us, what we are going through, and all our work for the Lord, even that done in secret (*Psalm 139.1-6*). The Lord will reward faith fully.

'Under whose wings you have come to trust' refers to the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies which was overshadowed by the outspread, moulded wings of the cherubim on the Mercy Seat. The wings speak of the forgiveness, protection, mercy, and atonement of God for sinners.

7. Boaz befriends Ruth

'Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine

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handmaidens. And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar'
Ruth 2.13-14a.

This event is a beautiful picture of the kindness of God in Christ. Ruth was greatly encouraged and comforted by the way Boaz dealt with her and spoke with her. She expressed this by saying Boaz had '*spoken friendly*' to her. This means 'you have spoken to my heart.' Naomi had said previously to Ruth, '*the Lord deal kindly with you*' in Moab (*Ruth 1.8*). How much better for the Lord to deal kindly with her in Bethlehem! The way Boaz deals so kindly with Ruth is an example of how we should deal with newcomers to church.

Boaz demonstrates his friendship in a deeper way as '*a friend that sticketh closer than a brother* (*Proverbs 18.24*). Boaz invited Ruth to his table. Ruth had never experienced anything like this before. Here was an important man, the lord of the harvest, the owner, befriending her and showing her kindness, even going as far as feeding her from his own hand. She was deeply moved.

Boaz invites Ruth to come to partake and sits her in honour among the reapers. He reaches forth his hand to provide and satisfies her needs entirely. She was now drinking from the best water and eating the best food, all because of the grace and generosity of Boaz. Ruth received it all with gratitude.

This gives us a picture of the liberality of Christ and how to receive it with humility and gratitude. God invites us as sinners to the Gospel table to eat of His royal food. He gives us the best by His grace. This is done unexpectedly, liberally, without reproach and with encouragement. He feeds His people with spiritual blessings from on high through Christ Jesus, the heavenly Boaz. God gives nothing but the best in Christ: forgiveness, peace and reconciliation through repentance and faith. God's 'bread bin' contains continual blessings of truth from the Word, sanctification, and eternal glory.

8. Boaz abundantly blesses Ruth

*‘And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left. And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not: and let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not’
Ruth 2.14b-16.*

Ruth, though a stranger, was made to feel at home. Boaz blessed Ruth; she ate and was satisfied. There was enough and more to spare. This speaks of gracious hand of God.

‘For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness’ Psalm 107.9.

Boaz ensured Ruth could enter even into the riches of the full harvest by commanding that some grain would certainly be left just for her. So God’s people are privileged to enter into the spiritual riches coming from God through Christ.

‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ’ Ephesians 1.3.

Ruth the recipient of grace

1. Why me?

*‘Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?’
Ruth 2.10.*

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*Why was I made to hear Thy voice,
And enter while there's room,
While thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?*

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

How do you receive God's grace? Ruth was truly humbled at the kindness of Boaz. 'Why me? I am a foreigner, but I have been taken notice of.'

'...that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ' Ephesians 2.12-13.

Here is an example practically of how we should receive the grace of God. Ruth acknowledges her own unworthiness and yet accepts the grace and favour of Boaz. She had truly come to trust in God. Ruth looks away from her poverty and concentrates on the riches coming from the hand of Boaz. She forgets her fears and rests on his promises. We may feel our unworthiness, but should not let this stop us receiving God's wonderful grace. Repentance means we know our need; faith brings us to God. We confess our sin, and then look away from it to the riches in Christ Jesus. We have been shown our need, but must not wallow in that; our need is just the reason to come to Him! He is the only answer. Rest humbly on His wonderful promises.

Conclusion

Ruth came to the field empty and dependent on grace. She returned home full, overwhelmed by grace.

She came under the panoply of grace and entered into the recompense of the reward of faith (*Ruth 2.12*).

The Grace of God

She was diligent in her reaping and showed how godliness and commitment go together.

The chapter ends with heartfelt praise for the kindness of the Lord to both Ruth and Naomi. Naomi blessed the Lord. Naomi had hope. Boaz was a near kinsman. What he did and what he said encouraged her. Now both Naomi and Ruth are looking to Boaz with hope and expectation.

So we have hope in the Lord Jesus Christ for what He did and what He says. Grace lifts us out of darkness. There is no reason to feel hopeless when we are trusting in Jesus Christ the Lord.

'Looking unto Jesus' Hebrews 12.2.

3. STEPS TO A CLOSER WALK WITH CHRIST

Ruth 3

Naomi teaches us what a blessing a godly mother-in-law can be. With her bitterness removed, her advice and desire for Ruth are now positive. A change has taken place from *Ruth 1*. Naomi is moving from bitterness to brokenness, and to blessing back in Bethlehem. The grace of Boaz shown to her daughter-in-law has given her hope for the future.

Previously she had encouraged her daughters-in-law Orpah and Ruth to remain in idolatrous Moab. Now she is seeking the security and welfare of Ruth among God's people in Bethlehem.

'Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?'
Ruth 3.1.

Naomi had a clear understanding of the Jewish custom. She realised that Boaz, an unmarried relation of theirs, could redeem their inheritance and marry Ruth, and so preserve the family name and inheritance. Naomi had a plan for her daughter-in-law, a plan which made sense and was entered into in the fear of the Lord.

'And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshingfloor. Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking. And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do'
Ruth 3.2-4.

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Now remember Ruth at this stage is a believer. She had come to trust in the Lord God of Israel (*Ruth 2.12*). She had been overwhelmed by the grace of Boaz, and had an affection and respect for him. He was the one who had spoken to her heart (*Ruth 2.13*). Now Ruth is entering into a pathway to closer, secure union with Boaz.

So in our walk with the Lord Jesus Christ it is not only His gifts we seek, but also union with Him, the Giver. As new believers we ask: ‘Why do I love the Lord Jesus Christ?’ and should answer, ‘For what He has done and for Who He is!’ Do you desire to know Him more? We should love Him – He is our Saviour – but we should also love Him because He is our Lord. As we mature spiritually we wonder at His glory and His person more and more. This is what this chapter’s spiritual application is about.

Why do we look for spiritual applications in Old Testament accounts? Because the Bible is primarily a book that teaches us vital and fundamental spiritual lessons. Behind many accounts lies a far greater lesson than what the account describes. For example, the account of Jonah in the fish’s belly was taken by the Lord Jesus to show a deeper meaning. After three days in the fish Jonah was released: this depicted the three days Christ was to spend in the tomb and His resurrection. The Lord also taught that the example of Abraham offering Isaac at God’s request and the ram substitute points to the substitutory death of Christ. Abraham saw this meaning:

‘Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad’ John 8.56.

We should beware of the danger of over spiritualising accounts, but see what is clearly being taught. *Ruth 3* reminds us of certain steps we can take to a closer union with Christ, and it is this particular theme that I would like us to consider.

Consecration

Ruth spent time preparing herself to go and meet Boaz. Great care

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was taken in the manner in which she came to Boaz. The preparation demonstrated respect and humility. This reminds us of the way in which we need to prepare ourselves to enjoy fellowship and communion with God, especially in worship. The manner and attitude in which we come to worship and commune with God is important. Some may say, 'It is my duty to come to worship', but this attitude leads to no blessing. We need to prepare with prayer, asking the Lord to bless, to enable confession of sin, and to open our heart so we can contemplate and consecrate ourselves.

There were three specific actions Ruth took under the instruction of her mother-in-law before she went to Boaz. Naomi was well aware of the culture and of the correct and proper way of placing oneself into the secure care and union of a kinsman redeemer.

1. Ruth washed herself

'Wash thyself therefore' v3a

The Law of Moses required ceremonial washings. Taking a wash and changing one's clothes in this manner usually preceded a special event. Naomi was actually telling Ruth to act like a bride preparing for her wedding. Ruth prepared herself accordingly to go and present herself before Boaz.

Spiritually applied we can see the union of the Church with Christ supersedes any other union. If we want to enter into a deeper relationship with Christ, then we also must appreciate the need to be clean. Now when we speak of being cleansed in relation to the forgiveness of our sin, we know only God can wash us clean through His Son, Jesus Christ. We cannot clean ourselves from sin but as we confess our sin He cleanses.

'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' 1 John 1.9.

However, as believers we must also remember our own ongoing

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responsibility for repentance. Repentance also means to separate from sin in a practical way in our lives in order to enjoy fellowship with God. We need to renounce the old way of sin, turn to God and seek cleansing. True repentance and faith in Christ desire union and communion with Him. If we want to enjoy sweet fellowship with our heavenly Bridegroom, then our repentance must have reality. So the Christian is called to some serious separation in his life. We take the name of the Lord in vain when we confess our sins without attempting to separate from them.

'Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God' 2 Corinthians 7.1.

This means putting out of our lives those things that defile us before we approach Almighty God for a deeper fellowship and communion with Him.

'Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil' Isaiah 1.16.

'Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith' Hebrews 12.1-2.

It is rather like have a clearout in our lives – our books, what we listen to and watch, and what we attend – for the purpose of closer union and communion with Christ.

'And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed' Acts 19.18-20.

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This is an important consideration in the believer's life. Notice the need for consecration in our lives if we want to know God's blessing, and a closer walk with God. Boaz had given favours to Ruth, but that was not enough for her. She wanted to know him. Ruth understood the need for consecration.

'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me'
Psalm 66.18.

'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty'
2 Corinthians 6.14-18.

2. She anointed herself

'...and anoint thee' v3b

Eastern people used fragrant oils to protect and heal their bodies, to make themselves not only of a pleasant appearance but of a pleasant fragrance to others. Ruth's preparation reminds us of the desire of bride in the *Song of Solomon* to commune with her bridegroom.

Communion with Christ is the greatest desire for us, and this requires a preparation of the heart. This cannot be accomplished without the work of the Holy Spirit. Anointing in Scripture is a picture of His work in the heart. We cannot fellowship with the Lord without the work of the Holy Spirit. We need the enabling of the Holy Spirit

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to bring forth spiritual fragrance in our walk with the Lord. Our behaviour should show something of Christ, through the Holy Spirit as we depend upon Him. When we come to the Word to confess our sins, we should ask the Holy Spirit to help, to cleanse and to change our life.

'Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits' Song of Solomon 4.16.

We do need to be shown the hidden evils of our heart, and need the warmth and blessing of the Holy Spirit on the Word like the north and south winds mentioned here. Grace is a miracle. We should respect what it means to be a believer, and should desire Christ to come into the garden of our heart, uniting us to Him. Likewise Ruth desired closeness with Boaz.

3. She changed her clothes

'...and put thy raiment upon thee' v3c

As Ruth prepared to go to Boaz her redeemer for security and union, she laid aside the grave clothes of mourning, the clothes she wore in Moab, her work clothes. She replaced them with grace clothes of hope for a union with Boaz, signifying hope for a new life of fellowship and communion. She was going with great expectation.

In this context, spiritually applied, we can see how Ruth must wash, put off the old and put on the new. This we know is a constant exercise for sanctification and closer communion with the Lord.

'...if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.' Ephesians 4.21-24.

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We put off our former conduct and put on the new man, dependent upon the grace, mercy, love and kindness of Christ in the same way as Ruth approached Boaz.

Humility

'And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do'
Ruth 3.4.

There was nothing improper in the way in which Ruth approached Boaz. In our culture it certainly is not an appropriate way of behaving, but in Ruth's day it was one of the ways in which you placed yourself in the hands of a kinsman redeemer.

Ruth was already known to be a virtuous woman. She came in quietly in purity of heart and laid down at the feet of Boaz. Note the humility in Ruth's approach. She did not come in a loose manner but with a sincere purpose. There is a right way to approach the Lord: with humility, reverence, respect and sincerity.

'Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water'
Hebrews 10.19-22.

As Ruth came to lay down in humility at the feet of Boaz, trusting in him to accept her and undertake for her, so we are to kneel down before our Redeemer and Lord, our heart sprinkled with the blood of Christ, trusting Him to undertake for us in our lives.

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Obedience

'And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do. And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her' Ruth 3.5-6.

When Boaz woke up, naturally speaking he was shocked, yet when he realised it was Ruth who had come to him for protection he spoke kindly and affectionately. Ruth had obeyed the instructions and advice of Naomi who had her best interests at heart. As she obeyed she entered into the blessing. Warren Wiersbe says:

'A willingness to obey the Lord is the secret of knowing what He wants us to do and being blessed when we do it.'

The Lord said, *'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine [teaching]' John 7.17.* If we are willing to do God's will, we will know what to do.

At the feet of Boaz Ruth hears the wonderful words in her ears:

'And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman' Ruth 3.11.

Boaz spread his robe over Ruth as a sign of protection. He accepted Ruth and pronounced a blessing upon her, calling her 'my daughter'. She lay down covered by his robe, now under his protection, resting upon his promise of action on the coming day to ensure security and union.

Now when we come to God with consecrated lives in humility and obedience, there are four things which we should be encouraged by. This we can learn from the testimony of Boaz and Ruth.

1. Assurance

Ruth's assurance for the future was not based upon her feelings for Boaz, but on the promise of Boaz.

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'So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God' Romans 10.17.

Boaz assured Ruth: 'Fear not.' Christ assures us through His Word.

'Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom' Luke 12.32.

*Fear not I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
I, I am thy God and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.*

'K' in John Rippon's Collection

Assurance is not in our feelings or circumstances, but in His Word.

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word.*

'K' in John Rippon's Collection

2. Attention

Boaz not only calmed Ruth's nerves but gave her a promise concerning the future. He was attentive to her need just as the Lord is as we cry to Him.

'The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry' Psalm 34.15.

3. Acceptance

Boaz, in love, compassion, and kindness, accepted Ruth into his presence. In His love God accepts us through the heavenly Boaz, Christ Jesus.

'Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him' John 14.23.

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4. Appreciation

Ruth respected Boaz and looked up to him, appreciating him as a godly man. Ruth was not governed by looks or age but by character. Ruth was not only interested in the wealth of Boaz, but in Boaz himself. She made a decision for her wellbeing, not only providentially but spiritually. There were plenty of younger men that Ruth could have married.

‘And he said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich’ Ruth 3.10.

Ruth was interested in Boaz for who he was, not just because of what he could do for her. This is important for us for our spiritual growth. When a person follows Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom, they are not looking at the physical characteristics of the unseen Christ.

‘For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him’ Isaiah 53.2.

Believers do not need inaccurate paintings of Christ, which attempt to visualise Him to inspire faith. Christian believers rather appreciate His perfect character and work as explained to them in God’s Word. An interest in the Person of Christ is one of the surest signs of a desire for fellowship with God, appreciating Jesus Christ, *‘in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Colossians 2.3).*

Ruth showed her appreciation in her reply to Boaz in verse 9: *‘I am Ruth thine handmaid.’* She saw his gracious character and trusted him; the age gap made no difference. Spiritual union was so important.

Patience

‘And when she came to her mother in law, she said, Who art

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thou, my daughter? And she told her all that the man had done to her. And she said, These six measures of barley gave he me; for he said to me, Go not empty unto thy mother in law. Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day' Ruth 3.16-18.

Ruth returned home to Naomi fully laden with corn as a token of the love of Boaz and care for Naomi. There are some important and helpful lessons for us to learn in this verse.

- Whatever God starts He finishes;
- It is through faith and patience that we receive the promises.

'Be still, and know that I am God' Psalm 46.10.

It has been said, 'Patient waiting is often the highest way to do God's will.'

- Boaz was a man of his word and could be trusted not to rest until the matter was concluded;
- Behind Boaz was the sovereign Lord of all working through His servant accomplishing His purposes. Please remember our heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, is a Man of His word. He will not rest until His perfect work of redemption, for all those for whom He died, is accomplished.

Conclusion

Union with Christ is one of the great tests and fruits of repentance. Compare Ruth's testimony with Orpah's testimony. John Owen said in his book 'The Glory of Christ' that a correct approach to God is vital to enjoy union and communion with Him.

In this chapter we have considered four steps to a closer fellowship with God: consecration, humility, obedience, and patience. Like the close of Chapter 2, all the focus of dependence and hope is upon Boaz, reminding us of our heavenly Boaz.

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Ruth desires the closest union and communion with Boaz and looks to him trusting in him to accomplish this. Spiritually applied, so the Church of the living God trusts wholly on Christ for redemption, protection and union.

4. THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE BRIDE

Ruth 4

We will now consider the testimony of Boaz as the bridegroom of his bride-to-be Ruth. The testimony of Boaz is deeply symbolical of Christ and the redemption of His Bride, the Church.

The bridegroom

Boaz was willing to take the responsibility of purchasing the land and so bring Ruth under his loving care. Boaz understood the cost and the commitment. His life would never be the same again. He would leave the relative quietness and independence of his bachelor life. He would take on a new role as husband and before long as a father.

This is something we may be familiar with. As grandparents, a weekend with the family and caring for the grandchildren is a special experience, but you realise your energy levels are less at sixty than they were at thirty!

Boaz was an old man when he married Ruth; this is inferred in *Ruth 3.10*. Jewish historians put him at this stage at 80 years of age and Ruth at 40 years old. But Boaz willingly entered into the marriage covenant, aware that it would involve new commitments and believing the union to be a God-given privilege. Jesus, the heavenly Boaz, the Bridegroom of the Church, understood the cost, the responsibility, and the commitment of redeeming His Church.

Boaz was willing to be identified with and united to a foreigner. This was no small step for Boaz, but believing it to be God's will he was willing to marry a Moabitess. This relationship would no doubt cause quite a stir in the small community of Bethlehem. For Boaz the barriers could be overcome by love and obedience in the knowledge

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that Ruth was a believer. Jesus, the heavenly Bridegroom, overcame the barriers for every one of His people from diverse backgrounds because of the great love wherewith He loved them.

‘...that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us’
Ephesians 2.12-14.

‘Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God’
Ephesians 2.19.

He was faithful in the manner in which he dealt with the situation. There were no short cuts; everything must be done decently and in order. How easy it would have for Boaz to do a deal behind closed doors with Naomi. But he did not run from the obstacles but dealt with them with honesty and integrity. Boaz believed that if this was God’s will then it would come to pass. His responsibility was to act openly before the elders of the city, and first before Naomi’s closer kinsman. Jesus, the heavenly Bridegroom, faithfully fulfilled His role perfectly according to His Father’s will. Everything in the walk and witness of Jesus was done decently and in order and completed.

Boaz’s great objective was Ruth. Redemption means ‘to set free by paying a price’. Freedom for Ruth was dependent upon union with Boaz. When we make the spiritual application we can notice we are all by nature in bondage to sin and Satan, and unable to set ourselves free.

‘And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of

The Bridegroom and The Bride

this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others' Ephesians 2.1-3.

'And he said unto them [the Jewish leaders], Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning. I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him. They understood not that he spake to them of the Father. Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin' John 8.23-34.

Jesus Christ alone can give freedom to those who are enslaved. Our freedom is dependent upon what He has done for us and our ongoing relationship with Him.

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'If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed'
John 8.36.

Boaz had the ability to pay the redemption price. Ruth knew that Boaz had the resources to pay the price for the land and herself. When it comes to the redemption of sinners, only Jesus Christ is rich enough to pay the price. It is not by money, but by the shedding of His precious blood.

'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot'
1 Peter 1.18-19.

Boaz was motivated by love. He went to the city gate for the purpose of redemption (see verse 1). He went knowing he had the ability and the wherewithal to pay the price. He went to the city gate to make this transaction willingly out of love for Ruth. In the end, love was the key to the redemption, as love is the secret of redemption through Christ. Never had Boaz gone to the city gate to make a transaction with such purpose! He was determined to redeem Ruth and take her for his beloved wife, despite her background, her poverty, and her race, because he loved her.

The attitude of Boaz shines so brightly against the attitude of Naomi's nearest kinsman. He was a man who remains nameless, a man who was initially interested in the investment for personal gain, but not interested in Ruth. His own inheritance would be affected, and in any case Ruth was an alien. He did not want to be identified with such a stranger: his inheritance would be spoiled. She was 'not one of us'!

What was the great difference between the nameless kinsman and Boaz? Love! So our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ came to this world determined to accomplish His mission of redemption. He came out of love and mercy. He came knowing the cost, prepared to

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pay the price because of the great love wherewith He loved us, and ultimately to share His inheritance with us. He was not concerned about jeopardising His own inheritance. Instead He made us part of His own.

'In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will' Ephesians 1.11.

'...that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints' Ephesians 1.18.

'But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)' Ephesians 2.4-5.

Boaz satisfied the law. Boaz called ten elders for the meeting at the gate.

'And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down' Ruth 4.2.

This was the place where transactions were made. Ten men were required for a full court in matters so important as redemption and marriage. Why ten men? This number reminded the court of their duty to the moral law as given in the Ten Commandments. Boaz wanted to satisfy the legal requirements, and the law had to be satisfied. So in the eternal transaction between God the Father and His Son; the Father's law was perfectly satisfied. The demands of the law were met perfectly and completely.

So Boaz could claim his wife. He had purchased her to himself, because he loved her and wanted to redeem her. He wanted to rescue her from her poverty. He wanted to raise up the name of the dead on Mahlon's inheritance as the law required. The mission was right, the motive was right, the outcome was blessing! As verse 11 states, Boaz would not be forgotten.

From Bitterness to Blessing

'And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Beth-lehem' Ruth 4.11.

His name would become famous because of his actions. Bethlehem would become famous because of Who was born there. All the actions and transactions were under the providential guidance of God. God was ensuring the earthly genealogy of His Son, Jesus Christ, according to His good pleasure. As the name of Boaz became famous, so there is none other name under Heaven like the name of Jesus whereby we can be saved.

The bride

Ruth desired a closer union with Boaz: she looked to him for redemption and marriage. Ruth was not only interested in what Boaz could give and what he could do, but who he was. Boaz was diligent in business, fervent in spirit, courteous, discerning, generous, hospitable, caring, kind, wise, circumspect, and godly. Boaz, as a man of God who redeemed Ruth, was truly a type of Christ.

Do we appreciate Jesus for Who He is as well as what He gives? Do we appreciate the heavenly Boaz like Ruth loved and respected Boaz?

Ruth waited for Boaz. She was waiting to receive the reward of trusting in Jehovah God. This is a picture of how the Church waits for her heavenly Bridegroom to come and claim her to Himself. We live today in what is called the 'day of grace', that is the day in which the Church is being gathered together into one family. The growing Church awaits the day when they will all finally meet the Bridegroom. The Church waits for the day when Jesus will come.

'And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come'
1 Thessalonians 1.10.

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So Ruth, adorned for her husband, patiently waited for Boaz to come for her. She looked forward with hope and anticipation. He did not disappoint Ruth. He came and took her.

'So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife' Ruth 4.13.

As Naomi said, the man will not rest until the matter has been dealt with. So Jesus will ensure that all His sheep will be gathered into the fold. Not one will be lost; the Church will be finally ready. Like Ruth, the Church of Christ will not be disappointed on the great day spoken of in *Revelation*:

'After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen'
Revelation 7.9-12.

Conclusion

The *Book of Ruth* starts with tears and ends with joy. It encourages us to remember that the sovereign grace of God knows the end of the matter from the beginning.

It reminds us that God is bringing about His purposes for His glory, sometimes in unusual and unexpected ways.

Ruth marries Boaz and they are blessed with a baby which they call Obed. He in turn becomes the father of Jesse and grandfather of David.