

Ruth 2:14-20 'Will We Cross Over to the Other Side?'

Last time we looked at Ruth 2:8-13, under the title 'Come!' We saw that, far from sitting at home and worrying about things, (which Jesus warns us against in Matthew 6:31-32) she "seeks first the Kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33).

As I explained from Psalm 130:5-6, "My soul waits for the Lord." But "waiting upon the Lord" is not about doing nothing. Proverbs 16:9 "A man plans his course but the Lord determines his steps." So we step out the door each day pursuing God's guidance and provision!

Just as these two people are brought together by God, I explained that here we have a biblical pattern to point our children and grandchildren toward when seeking out a marriage partner. Proverbs 31:10: Noble character. Someone who "fears the Lord." "Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting." Yes, we are called as followers of Jesus to be equally yoked. And so these two people will prove to be!

So as Boaz now sees with his own eyes what he had heard of this young woman, he goes to her and says, "my daughter." This is the same term that Jesus uses when referring to the woman who touched His cloak. Yes, Boaz spoke words of comfort to Ruth even as Jesus does in Matthew 11:28-29, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." Even words as though Boaz was speaking to his own daughter. Words of comfort, security, protection and provision.

Overwhelmed with gratitude, she "bows with her face to the ground" (v10), asking why such benevolence had come to her. Boaz explains (v11) "that he had heard all about how she left all behind" out of love and devotion for Naomi. And as I explained, Ruth's self-sacrificial love and Boaz's condescension to her, cry out to us of Jesus. Ultimately, we don't only see the love story of Boaz and Ruth here, we see the love of God for His people! He has condescended to us with His Son's sacrifice. Or as Ruth puts it, "we have found favour in His eyes" "He has given us comfort." And "He has spoken kindly to us" by bidding us come!

And now we pick up the text in Ruth 2:14-20: 'Will We Cross To The Other Side?' So after working since dawn and stopping only for a short rest out of the sun, the time comes for lunch, or whatever they called their break in those days. Ian Duguid, the Bible commentator, points out that like God's mercy upon His people of which Jesus is the pinnacle, Boaz' kindness, continued to flow forth upon this stranger, this foreigner, this Moabite woman!

Now although someone (who shall remain nameless) at Bible study years ago did suggest that Boaz has gone, "Wow, who is that woman gleaning in my field?" I tend to believe that his motives were far more righteous. And the Bible commentary asks the question of us: How do we look upon the outcast?. The foreigner? The poor? The homeless? Even those ones from whom the world turns away. Perhaps those ones which we might even cross the street from, so that we are not confronted personally with the reality of their circumstances and situation!

You know, this is a really challenging question, because it forces us to hold the mirror up of both Boaz and Ruth's actions to ourselves. And of course infinitely more importantly, the mirror of the actions of Jesus! Luke 10:25-37: "On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher", he asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life? What is written in the law?" He replied, "How do you read it?" He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and, love your neighbour as yourself." "You have answered correctly", Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live". But he wanted to justify himself

so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was, and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. And he took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. "Look after him", he said, "And when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have". Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him". Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

And friends let's remember the context of the word neighbour here. In Leviticus 19:13, and 15-18 we read, "Do not defraud your neighbour or rob him. Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight. Do not pervert justice, do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly. Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbour's life. I am the Lord. Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbour frankly so you will not share in his guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord."

Friends, when Jesus confronts this expert in the law with the question in Luke 10:36, He confronts the man with the hypocrisy of his declarations of religion! Yes He confronts this man in the area of his own expertise. And Jesus shows him that his profession accounts to nothing, because his heart is closed to the true intention of the commandment of God! V36 "Which of these was neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" And notice, that so despised were the Samaritans by the Jewish people, (and particularly so by the religious elite) that this expert cannot even say the word Samaritan! V37 "The expert in the law replied, the one who had mercy on him." And of course, Jesus words to him "Go and do likewise."

Again brothers and sisters, these are very personally confronting things, because they challenge us to look deeply into our own hearts. Do we, as Jesus not only commands but also shows us by His example, truly have compassion like Boaz to Ruth, expressed in practical ways? Giving up our time in a food kitchen or shelter. It may not be Christian, but we do it overtly in the Name of Christ. And if we can't give of our time, if we are able, we can provide financial support.

Now I'm not going to presume to tell any of you how and when you should respond to such things, that is between you and the Lord. But as those who profess to follow in His steps, we do need to be personally confronted with such things. And why? Well before we came to Christ, we were the outcasts. We were the unwanted, regardless of our station whether it be high or low. Because we are the sinners! Romans 5:8 "For God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

Can you see? That this story unfolds under the sovereignty and plan of God, but it plays out largely because two people see a need. We might even call it Providence for ministry. Yes they see a need and they do what they can to meet that need. As I've said before, they have in their hearts what Jesus teaches His followers to do. Love one another!

When Darlene and I were overseas years ago, these kinds of things were really rammed home to both of us. As there were so many people on the streets begging, sleeping in shopfronts, and carrying their whole world around in shopping trolleys. Now I know that sadly we have the same kinds of things in Australia, but in Ulladulla at least, we are not so much confronted with the realities of the lives of the homeless and the downcast! That horrendous story years ago of a homeless woman trying to give her child away because she couldn't take care of it. And that poor little girl ended up being murdered by her father. Unfathomable! Beloved, these are the tragedies and

realities of many people's lives. How do we as Christians deal with such things? When we are the ones who are confronted with them, or by God's Providence they touch our lives? That's the question. Do we cross the road to the other side? Or do we go to where the person is and help in whatever way we can? Because that's what Jesus has done for us. Because when we are ravaged by sin, He comes to where we are, and picks us up and washes our wounds with His Blood. And then bandages us up in His mercy and grace. While leaving ample payment with the Father till He comes to take us home!

Yes for us, Jesus is the Good Samaritan. Despised by that world (even by ourselves) which He comes to save! Well mealtime comes, and no doubt Ruth sits on the outer rim of the circle alone. Perhaps with very little to eat. When Boaz again extends the hand of Christian love saying come over here. "Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar." So he in effect spreads the table of his own meal before her with choice delicacies. And I guess with much reluctance, she comes and sits with the men. It must have been extremely intimidating for her. But Boaz continues to make her feel welcome. Special. "He offered her some roasted grain and she ate all she wanted and had some leftover!"

Now we could read over this very quickly and not think much of it at all. Because all of us most times have so much to eat. Three meals a day and as many snacks as we like in between. But the Bible commentator explains, that for someone who has very little or even nothing to eat, to have their fill was really something. But to then have leftovers for later, unbelievable! And although to us these things might not sound like much, as I explained earlier, apparently they were real treats! But Ruth is not resting on her full stomach. It appears that she is the first to get up and get back to work.

You know, I just continue to be struck by this young woman's work ethic. And friends I believe, that Boaz's kindnesses to her have spurred her on and encouraged her for the rest of her days labour's! Words of affirmation, words of encouragement brothers and sisters, are even as precious gems which we should use and share more often. Not only to the underprivileged and downcast, but also simply to one another when needs be. Because we all need to be lifted up at times.

Yes life can be extremely difficult and hard at times. And particularly so, for Christians living in a world which not only denies the existence of the living God, but is increasingly at enmity and war against us, if we are indeed seeking to unashamedly stand up for Jesus! And notice what he says as he secretly keeps watch over her. Basically, it's even if she gleanes where she shouldn't "don't embarrass her." I tell you, "pull out some stalks from the bundles and leave them for her, don't rebuke her."

Imagine what the men were talking about when they got back to work. Surely it must have been words of their increasing admiration of this man for whom they laboured. How good is the boss boys; he cares about everyone. And though Ruth be unaware of these things, Boaz's actions testified again to his men, as to who he really was at his core. Which should also be who we all are; Someone who lived out what he believed! And though he be of the highest and she of the lowest of standings, as I have mentioned before, these two people by God were equally yoked. He was a selfless man; she was a selfless woman. He was a caring man; she was a caring woman. He was a giving man; she was a giving woman. And most importantly, both of them loved and feared the Lord, and sought to serve Him in their own way!

Verse 17: "So Ruth gleaned in the field till evening." Now let's think about this. Surely she was out the door not long after light, let's say, 6:00 o'clock in the morning. And "evening" is let's say, 6PM. So it's been a 12 hour day, and now the job of threshing the grain from the stalks and the husks begins. I don't know how long this took but surely it wouldn't have been a speedy process! Well after all of this is done she bags it up and heads back home, back into town, however far that is. So she has gleaned, she's threshed, and she's bagged what amount to an "ephah" of grain, that's about 22 litres

worth. It's between 15-25 kilograms of grain. That's a bag of concrete mix! And here's the thing: that's enough grain to feed two people for around two weeks!

James 1:27: "Religion that God our father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." It's a great word "polluted." The old Collins defines it as 'being defiled, corrupted, contaminated, desecrated, made foul or unclean.' And according to James this takes place by believers having too much of an interest in the people and the things which the world has to offer. We read in James 4:4-5 "you adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think scripture says without reason that the Spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely." And did you notice? How James describes that such interests, (such relationships we might say) in the eyes of God are actually acts of adultery. As we give our hearts and our bodies over to them both spiritually and physically. Whether they be either people or things. Yes when we do this in God's sight we become defiled, corrupted, contaminated, made foul, unclean!

As we have seen before from Matthew 6:22-23, Jesus speaks of "having good or bad eyes." The New Testament Greek word for good is *aploous*, meaning simple or single eyes. And it means to be focused, to be one eyed in our devotion and affection toward God. Not tossed from this thing to that thing, or this person to that person, as they lure us away from who our first love should be. God, through Jesus!

You know, a real test of our faith would be to ask ourselves the horrible, perhaps even unthinkable question: If the Lord took away my wife or my husband or my children, would I still have faith in Him? Would I still be coming joyfully along to worship each Sunday? Would I still be praising Him and praying to Him?

Because let's remember that this is Naomi's situation. She has been going through an extremely dark time. Her sadness and bitterness toward God had overwhelmed her. But God, (as he does with all of us) has been orchestrating His plan around her and now He's about to lift her back up, as Ruth heads home carrying her wages with her. V18: "She carried it back to town and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough."

Friends, call me horrible, but Ruth's lunch was hours ago. If it were me, I'd be thinking the leftovers would have been a great snack on the way home. Naomi was never going to know. Ruth had brought a big load of food home for the pantry, a couple of weeks' worth. But again, she was a giver you see. And she had written in her heart what Jesus teaches "that it is better to give than to receive." No she would carry her wages home as well as those treats from Boaz's table! And you know what it was? She was excited to make her mother-in-law proud of what she'd achieved.

Yes Beloved, "it is better to give than to receive." And particularly so when those things flow out of hearts which want to please and serve our King! This is why Boaz acted the way that he did, and this too is why Ruth acted as well. As she has been raised up by God as a blessing of service to her mum!

Friends, if we see the things which we in effect do for Jesus as chores, as burdensome, there is no blessing and there will be no blessing in them. If we give to the Lord's Work begrudgingly, God is not pleased, nor does He accept those things from us as gifts of the heart. But if like Ruth and Boaz, we see our labours as Providence from God to be a blessing to others, then our labours will be sweet, and in those things we too will be blessed! Listen to her words: "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you." Can you see, that Naomi's heart has now been lifted up by God? She is no longer Mara, that bitter woman angry at the Lord, even counting Him as her enemy, she is again Naomi. Yes pleasant, joyful Naomi. "Blessed be the man who took notice of you." Yes she pronounces a prayer of blessing from God down upon the head of

that one who had shown both Ruth and herself such kindness, even not yet knowing who he was. No she cannot believe what Ruth has come home with and is carrying upon her shoulders. She can't believe her eyes. How can one woman, in the midst of all of the other women, gather and thresh so much on her own? And in just one day? What is going on here?

Well what we have before us is the spirit in the teaching found from Paul in his letter to the Philippians. We read in Philippians 4:12-16: "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Yes it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only, for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need."

Can you see? It really is that spirit of giving to those in need. The Philippians saw to Paul's needs, Ruth saw to Naomi's needs and Boaz saw to both Ruth and Naomi's needs; and of course, Jesus saw to the needs of them all! And again, notice her words as she returns to God in recognition as being the One who blesses. "Blessed be the man who took notice of you."

And then finally it all comes out. "The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz", she said." Yes finally the penny drops. Now it all makes sense. Who would show such kindness to an outsider, even from the despised nation of Moab? None but kindly, generous Boaz. "The Lord bless him Naomi said." And we will deal with that verse next time. But the question which remains today brothers and sisters is: Do we cross to the other side? Or do we go to them and meet their needs, in whatever way we can. Because that's what Jesus has done for us! He finds us in the ravages of our sin, treats our wounds with His suffering and blood. And leaves sufficient funds to pay for our keep with the Father until He comes to take us home! Yes will we cross to the other side? Or will we go to them in Christ's love?

Let's pray!