

## Ruth 2:20-23 God Is Always Good!

Last time we looked at Ruth 2:13-19 'Will we cross to the other side?' We saw that like God's blessings to His people, Boaz's kindnesses to Ruth continue to pour forth. And I asked the question: How do we deal with the downcast, homeless and poor? As we looked at the parable of the Good Samaritan and we were challenged by Jesus into asking ourselves: Do we cross the road to the other side? Or do we go to where they are, and bind up their wounds and seek to meet them in their needs?

Ruth, Boaz, and of course our Lord's actions, cause us to hold up that mirror of God's Word and ask ourselves: Do we even see these people? Do we turn away? Or are we reminded and moved to action as we remember that apart from Jesus, this is who we are, in the sight of God!

Romans 5:8: "But God demonstrates his love for us in this, that while we yet sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus comes to us where we are, in the ravages of our sin. He washes our wounds with His Blood. He lifts us up upon the cross with Him paying the price for our sin, and places our eternal souls in the Father's hands, until He returns and takes us home! In v14 Boaz spreads his table before Ruth, invites her in and she eats her fill, then gets back to work. A 12 hour day. Then the threshing of the grain and hauling of the bag of concrete mix's worth, back to town to Naomi!

James 1:27 "Religion that 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." Yes "being polluted" That idea of having too much of an interest and love for the things and people of the world. So that we are lured away from Him who should be our first love. God, through Jesus! Matthew 6:22-23: We need to have good eyes, "aploos" eyes. That one eyed focus in our love for God.

Well with the spirit of Jesus' words in her heart, "that it is better to give than to receive," Ruth goes home hoping to make Naomi proud. Then finally the darkness from Naomi's heart begins to lift. "Blessed be the man who took notice of you today." And she prays a blessing down on this man's head. And then it's revealed who this person is!

And so now we continue in the narrative: Ruth 2:20-23 'God Is Always Good!' "The Lord bless him," Naomi said to her daughter-in-law." Naomi is finally beginning to see God's Hand of Sovereignty and Providence in all of her sufferings. *Why* Ruth had begged to go with her. *How* Ruth had gone out to find food through her work. How God had led her to just the right field. That field of blessing and safety. And how that field belonged to none other than Boaz. The man of standing, the man of integrity, the man of kindness and benevolence, the man of God! Who just happened to be Naomi's closest relative. One of her "kinsman-redeemer's."

Now just briefly, to explain the idea of a "kinsman-redeemer" in Jewish culture. You can read all about it in Leviticus 25:25-55. Firstly, as we all know to redeem something means to buy it back. If a family fell among hard times they could sell their land (or even themselves into servitude) but in Jewish culture, the land would continue to remain the property of the husband's family line. And if it hadn't been bought back, every 50 years all properties would be returned to the ones who owned it in the year of jubilee. But if the husband died, and the widow was left behind, the nearest of kin, "the kinsman redeemer" either, (as in Naomi's case), could purchase from the widow herself, or from the one in whose hands it was then found. But in so doing, they would also in affect acquire the family. And they would have the duty of providing a male heir for the widow or daughter through marriage! So the man's name didn't disappear from under heaven as it were. The "kinsman-redeemer" was the nearest male relative who could buy back those properties, while also providing a male heir for the dead husbands family through marriage.

And that's who Boaz was to Naomi! Remember, not chance happenings, because God leaves no thing to chance. But He is (Proverb s 16:9) "determining the steps of His people for His purposes" and ultimately, their blessing!

Now the commentator points out that these words from verse 20 "He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead," can be understood in two ways. Firstly, as it appears at first glance that Naomi was calling God's blessing down upon Boaz, as she had already done once before, for his tremendous generosity and care for both Ruth and herself in their time of need. The problem is of course the words "to the living and the dead."

Where do we find the evidences of such things? Well we can't, so we don't attribute these words to Boaz. No, what Ian Duguid explains, is that these words, "he hasn't stopped showing kindness to the living and the dead" are grammatically ambiguous, meaning, that they could be referring to either Boaz or to God here. And since Boaz has had no dealings whatsoever with the family over the past 10-15 years while they have been living in Moab, we must understand these words that she is using here as pertaining to God Himself.

This is really interesting because it sheds so much light on the changed heart of this woman! Do you remember her words in chapter 1:21-22? "Don't call me Naomi, call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me. The almighty has brought misfortune upon me." Four times in these two verses she attributes her tragedies and bitterness's to God. But now her words, "He has not stopped showing kindness to the living and the dead.

Can you see? We do get a real insight into what she has been thinking here. And she has been thinking brothers and sisters, of this there is no doubt. And it does appear, that slowly but surely since arriving in Bethlehem, the Almighty has been changing her heart!

Dear friends, isn't this how it is for us as well at times? Let's be honest with ourselves. We too can fall into the trap at times of feeling that we have been hard done by, by God. We can feel like He has forgotten us. Or has left us behind somehow. And like Naomi we can become bitter and angry at God.

David did, when Uzzah reached out to steady the ark and God struck him down dead! In 2 Samuel 6:6-10a we read, "When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the Ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because of his reverent act, therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the Ark of God. Then David was angry because the Lord's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah. David was afraid of the Lord that day and said; How can the ark of the Lord ever come to me? He was not willing to take the ark of the Lord to be with him in the city of David." And yet overtime, as we learn from Psalm 24 of the deep pondering of the king, God in His mercy had changed Davids heart!

And again we read in Psalm 24:1-6 "The earth is the Lords, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it, for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. Who may ascend the hill of the Lord, who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Saviour. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob." Like Naomi here sadly, there are times when we too can even count God as our enemy! Yes our circumstances can cause us to even doubt His very love for us.

But Beloved, like God with our sister Naomi here, our Lord is merciful. He is patient. He is kind. And He is long suffering with the ones he loves! Exodus 34:6: "And he passed in front of Moses proclaiming the

Lord, the Lord. The compassionate and gracious God slow to anger abounding in love and faithfulness.” And from Jeremiah in the book of Lamentations 3:19-23: “I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gaul. I remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope, because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed for his compassions never fail. They are known every morning great is thy faithfulness.”

And v38-40: “Is it not from the mouth of the most high that both calamities and good things come? Why should any living man complain when punished for his sins? Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord.” Yes “the mercies of God are new every morning.” We need only remember the words of Jesus from the cross, as He hung there taking our punishment for us, so that God's wrath would be turned away, to be reminded of God's daily mercies to us. “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

As we examine Naomi's words the spirit of all of these things is flowing through her heart. As she confesses, that despite her and Elimelech's foolish decision to leave the promised land of God for Moab, (even losing their trust in Him to provide for His people, as though he were not able) yes in spite of all of this even through the loss of her husband and sons, she now realises that “God had not stop showing His kindness” to her and her family!

Beloved, though it be extremely difficult, and painful, it is good to be confronted with our sin and ingratitude. Because it brings us off our high horse of self-sufficiency. There is no room in the Kingdom of God for those who think they can stand alone. This, among other things is the painful lesson which Naomi had learned. And with this realisation before her she confesses Lord, “you have not stopped showing kindness” to me and my family. Even though we turned our back on you!

The psalmist writes in Psalm 73:1: “Surely God is only good to Israel,” meaning that when He brings us low it is for a reason and a purpose and ultimately, for our own good! And she confesses, “that man is our close relative, he is one of our “kinsman redeemer's.” How amazing Ruth. How clear it is from God that you find yourself in his field my daughter. “Ruth the Moabitess said, “He even said to me stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.”

And friends, as we read between the lines of her words here, the commentator explains that in her stating the obvious, Naomi is actually revealing something about herself here. She is basically saying, ‘Oh yes Ruth, only a foolish woman would wander from the safe fields of God's provision, to go looking for greener pastures’. Listen to her words: “Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, “It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with his girls because in someone else's field you might be harmed.”

So what is she really saying? Be wise my daughter, and learn from my mistakes. I was a fool Ruth. Yes, Elimelech and I were both fools. How could we have ever thought that leaving God's land and Providence could have worked out well? Though the times were difficult when we left, if we had of trusted in Him and hadn't tried to sidestep His rebuke of that famine upon Israel for sin, yes the people's waywardness and rebellion, then perhaps the men might still be alive! And even now my dear daughter I can finally see His hand of mercy and Providence in all of these things. And I am so grateful to Him for you. You are indeed my gift from Him and I don't want to lose you. So yes stay in Boaz's fields. Don't make the same mistake that we did!

V23: “So Ruth stayed close to the servant girls of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished.” And the footnote being, “And she lived with her mother in law.” Or in other words Ruth had no husband!

You know it's interesting, that as we read earlier from James 1:27 "Religion that 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 doesn't say "orphans, widows" and widowers. And may I suggest that what James is speaking of here is the most vulnerable people in Jewish society. As most places were and many are still today, this was a patriarchal society. In most cases, males wielded the authority, as it was indeed intended to be so by God in the beginning.

And of course in the hands of sinful men, that authority was and is misused and abused! We know that with regard to divorce in Matthew 19, Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the religious elite, as they had adulterated God's command, concerning such matters as divorce for marital unfaithfulness, To divorce for any and every reason! So looking after "the orphan and the widow" in such a society was true faith, with like Ruth and Boaz, a faith that had hands and feet. The kind of faith which acts, as we have seen before!

So in making this statement, "and she lived with her mother in law, the writer is basically declaring, that at this point in time at least, (as a Moabite woman living in Israel, she had no prospects of marriage, or a future with children and a family of her own. And for a woman in that culture, this was no small thing!

And what further compounded her problem was that she had been married before. So her prospects of a future weren't good and her daily labours were hard, but she put one foot in front of the other each day in her newly found faith in that chapter 2:12 "the Lord, the God of Israel under whose wings, she had come to take refuge."

You know, sometimes in the life of the Christian we can seem to have a clear purpose, and a clear direction. There may even be a clear goal to that we are working toward, and that's a good thing, a comforting thing. But what if that direction and purpose we don't know is God's will at all? What if it's only our own will and desire? What do we do? How can we be sure? Well what we do is wait upon the Lord! Yes wait upon Him to clarify the course we are to take. But what do we do while we are waiting upon him? Is there some kind of formula which we need to use to discern His will and the direction we are to take?

Well dear friends may I suggest, that there are three things which we may do. Firstly: Pray, as we examine our own motives, and reasons for pursuing the course that we are on. Secondly: Daily seek God's counsel out in His Word, and prayerfully so. Not simply seeing what we want to see and hearing what we want to hear. And thirdly, Do as Ruth does here. Go out the door each day in faith! As I've said before, actively pursuing God's provision and guidance, as we wait upon him for answers!

As this chapter comes to a close, when we pick up the text next time in chapter 3:1, approximately eight weeks will have passed. Now we know that God had this amazing role for her to play in the salvation of His people, even being great grandmother to King David as she is engrafted into the line of Jesus. But she didn't!

The question is often asked, What is God's will for me or you in any given situation? Now I may be wrong, but the finer details of God's will for us, I believe we only know after the fact. Spiritual hindsight I like to call it. But to be 100% sure, that we are doing God's will 100% of the time is actually very simple. Yes, simple obedience to His Word! Can you see? Ruth was a stranger in a foreign land not knowing what lay ahead. She was new in the things of God's people. She had no theological education. But one thing she did have which the Almighty would use in wonderful ways. Simple, obedient, faith! She would seek to honour the Lord in the task which He had set before her. So she worked in the fields in the hot sun every day for eight weeks not knowing what lay ahead. In effect waiting upon the Lord!

Beloved, let's seek to do the same. Not being impatient. But let us wait to see and look with anticipation, at what God will do!

Let's pray.