

The Lord Repay Your Work

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[0 : 00] Now we're going to just take a moment to pray and before we do that I just remembered that I should have mentioned that Ina brought along two sample boxes for the Blysewood Day Christmas Box Appeal just to give you a little bit of a sight of what goes into the boxes so I hope you'll take time on the way out just to look at them.

Well let's take a moment to pray. Blessed One, we come to you dependent upon your Spirit of Truth to guide us.

We know that he is the Spirit who quickens the mind and the heart and renews the will. We know that he is the Spirit promised, poured out in the fullness of time and we know that without him we cannot grasp and believe and rest upon the spiritual truths of the Gospel.

And so we covet his presence and power among us that the preacher may be guided and empowered by him so that what you want us to know and believe and do may be ours today.

We remember the friends who can't be with us. We commit them to you. Those who are frail and who are unable to attend your worship now, we commit them to you.

[1 : 40] Others who are hindered for one reason or another, perhaps health reasons, we commit them to you. We thank you for the measure of recovery you have given to Christine and we pray Lord that this may continue and that things may be managed at home.

Oh Lord we are conscious that in these frail frames we are so susceptible to all manner of affliction. And we just commit ourselves to you looking for strength equal to our days.

And grant to those of us who have a good measure of health that we may be sensitive and prayerful for those who have not. And so Lord we commit ourselves to you now asking your blessing upon us in Jesus.

Amen. Ruth chapter 2 then. And we are going to take this up where we left it some time ago.

Ruth chapter 2 and we are going to look at verses 11 and 12. And hopefully that will put us back into the groove from where we were, as I say, a few months back.

[3 : 05] The words of Boaz to Ruth. First of all we may just read verse 11. And Boaz said to her, Come for refuge.

And the Lord will come for refuge. Particularly verse 12. Where we look at the subject of Ruth and the Lord's reward. The Lord repay your work and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel.

Now, casting our minds back for a few moments, you may recall that when we were looking at this earlier on, we saw that Ruth excelled in diligence as a worker.

And her employment wasn't in terms of wages. But whatever she gleaned, she was allowed to keep.

But her ability and her dedication allowed her to be promoted by Boaz. And we were reading about that earlier on.

[4 : 41] She was allowed into the team of women workers, the servant workers. He says to her, stay close by my maidservants, my servant girls.

Verse 8. But then Boaz tells her in verse 11 that he had become acquainted with all that she had done as a devoted and faithful daughter-in-law.

So, Bethlehem was a relatively small place in those days and word got round. And word reached this wealthy farmer that this Moabitess, Ruth, the daughter-in-law of Naomi, had been devoted, loving and kind and caring.

And that Naomi had benefited from all that she had done. And so he tells her that. And we read it there. You see, she's wondering, verse 10, why on earth she was being favored in this way.

She didn't know that Boaz was a near kinsman until Naomi tells her.

[6 : 01] And she's wondering why she's been treated like this. Well, Boaz tells her, verse 11, It has been fully reported to me all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and so on.

So he was well acquainted with the kind of person he's now dealing with and pronounces this benediction on verse 12, which we'll look at in a moment.

But what I want to do before we get to looking at the benediction of Boaz upon Ruth, the Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel.

What I want to do is to look at what is being said here. And to ask the question, what is the meaning of what Boaz is saying here? Were her works meritorious?

Should she obtain a reward from God on account of the good works she did? This is a very crucial, critical question in relation to God.

[7 : 10] Is Boaz saying, the Lord repay your work, you deserve it, and he should give you a full reward? Because you deserve it on account of your works?

Was Boaz saying God is constrained to pay you for all that you've done for Naomi? Well, these questions that we've posed are, as I've said, important questions.

They're important questions on the whole matter of salvation and how we are accepted by God.

And you see, they're important because there are many within the broad church, within the church universal, who firmly believe that if they do their best, God will repay their best efforts, and he will grant them a place in heaven.

And much blessings in this world, too. I can't say too much, and I won't mention denominations, but many's a time when I was on the doors on the south side, and over five or six years of fairly intensive evangelism, spoke to thousands of people about the Savior.

Followed up the leaflets that we used to be doing. And sometimes I would meet elders, and when I would begin to talk to them, they would tell me that they hoped to have a place in heaven.

[8 : 52] Because of all the good they did in the church. And when I would try, as best I could gently, and sensitively I hope, to tell them, you see, this is actually not the good news.

This is not the gospel way. Sometimes they become angry about it. Sometimes they immediately defended their corner, and they were ready to take their chances.

One can recall vividly that turn of phrase, I'll take my chances. My dear friends, that's not the gospel way.

And this view of things makes God a debtor to man. Think about it. If Boaz is saying, the Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, because you deserve it, and he should pay.

If that's really the business, that contradicts the gospel. It contradicts God's free grace.

[10 : 10] It contradicts the free of chargeness of what Christ has done. It contradicts so much of the teaching of scripture.

It may sound good to the ear of someone who feels somehow they're entitled that God should accept them because they're good people.

So let's look. You've obviously got the message that I'm not going along with the view that God should pay them. They're entitled to a reward.

But we're going to look at this a little bit more deeply and extensively and hope that we can come to a better understanding of what exactly Boaz is saying.

And so what I want to do is take this in two parts. First of all, to look at Ruth's standing before God. Verse 12. And then to look at Ruth's work and reward.

[11 : 17] First of all then, Ruth's standing before God. Now Boaz acknowledges, and this is important, Boaz acknowledges in verse 12 that Ruth has already come to trust in the Lord.

See that? Under whose wings you have come for refuge. That's not just saying she ditched her Moabite connections, her family religion, and she opted for the religion of the Jews.

That's not what it's saying. Think about the figure that's used under whose wings you have come for refuge.

This is a wonderful picture, and I suppose every one of us here has seen this. In reality, you've seen the little chickens run to Mum, and she's opened up her wings, and she's let them in there, and they've run in there for shelter.

It's a wonderful, simple, yet profound illustration. Jesus used it when he wept over the Jerusalemites.

[12:40] How often he said, would I have gathered you together as a mother hen gathers his chicks, but you were not willing. You find it there in Luke 13, 34.

You find it in Matthew 23, 37. You were not willing. You didn't even have the sense of the little chickens to run for cover, to take refuge in me.

And you see, the point that Boaz brings out here, whatever the Lord repay you, and a full reward be given you. Whatever precisely that means, we'll come back to it.

The point we're making here first is her standing in God's sight was a standing on the basis of her having taken refuge in Him.

She had come to see there was no refuge or safety in herself or in any other but the Lord alone. He is my refuge still.

[13:50] Now think about this because the backdrop to this, the backdrop to taking refuge in the Lord is about our own awareness that things are not right between us and God.

That is especially true for those of us who have been brought up under the Gospel. We've been affected by the Word of God. We know the business, as they say.

And we're aware that we're vulnerable in relation to God because we know His justice is absolute. We know, as the psalmist says, your justice is like great mountains and your judgments deep as floods.

or as the psalmist says, and we often sing it, Lord, if you should mark iniquities against us, O Lord, who shall stand?

Psalm 130, verse 3. David himself, the king, the offspring, so to speak, of Ruth.

[15:05] It says in Psalm 143, Lord, no living person can justify himself in your sight.

He knew that. He had come to know that. In other words, there was no acceptance with God on the basis of good works or good standing in the community.

No, we must look to the mercy and the truth of God. Mercy and truth are words that speak of Jesus, the promised Messiah.

And the promised Messiah was not unknown in Israel, even in the days of Ruth. The message had been going forth through the prophets.

They had some scriptures already concerning the promised seed who would come, concerning the promised prophet, priest, and king.

[16:15] And sometimes he was referred to as mercy and truth. And it is in him that people were to find refuge.

And so, Boaz's words have to be understood in the context of covenant teaching, of Old Testament teaching, about the grace of God.

You'll not know this, but I'm sorry to say that the Jewish rabbis have turned grace on its head, so to speak.

They've turned it upside down. They've totally distorted its meaning. Grace to the rabbis means that God accepts you on account of what you are.

But the word grace is all about God accepting us on his terms despite what we are. That's what grace is about.

[17:18] When somebody is freely pardoned, they're freely pardoned not because they're entitled to be pardoned. It's precisely because they're not entitled to be pardoned and grace is exercise.

A freedom is given that's not deserved. It's not deserved. And strictly speaking, God alone can do that.

we've all been turning and twisting in our minds the whole business of was McGrachy really entitled to be set free?

Was it justice that he should have been set free? Was it really right? Should he really have been allowed? Was compassion the thing? And there's no easy answer that you can look at it from all sorts of angles, but strictly speaking, God alone can freely pardon.

He has the right to do that. And grace is about free pardon. Grace is about God extending his favour to the undeserving.

[18:35] And for all that Ruth was an exemplary person, she wasn't entitled to a standing with God that was accepted in his terms.

She wasn't entitled to it. She received it freely. That's the way grace, the grace of God operates.

And so the expression under whose wings you have come for refuge is a pregnant expression that speaks to us of the grace and goodness and mercy of God in his promised Messiah.

Now you see, strictly here again, Ruth was an outsider. She was a stranger to the covenants of promise. She was brought in by the grace of God.

I wonder if you thought about this today. It's always good when you're singing the Psalms to think theologically. Blessed is the person whom you cause to approach you that he may dwell in your house.

Which Psalm did that come from? It came from Psalm 65. And it's a psalm we ought often to go to because there in verse 4, the language is unambiguous.

[20 : 07] God causes us to approach him and to dwell with him or in his house. And he does that and he did that for the Old Testament believers for those who came under the shadow of his wings.

He does that freely and sovereignly by his grace. And he did it for the Old Testament people because the promises held forth that Messiah would come who would be their savior.

And they believed them. They received them from God. And this mother, if we may call her that, mother of David, the king, believed the teaching that she was given.

She had come under the wings of the Lord God of Israel for refuge.

And Boaz's words, therefore, must not be understood in this way, that the Lord was willing to receive you on account of your good life.

[21 : 29] God of love. No, absolutely not. But he made her willing as a sinner, cut off from safety, under judgment to come, he brought her near freely by his grace.

He brought her into that trusting position of which we can say refuge in the shadow of his wings. and therefore, her standing with God was on the basis of grace, of the exercise of God's favor freely to her.

It was all of grace, and it was all of God. And if you think about this, I've mentioned this in the past, and it's worth mentioning again, because to me it's a crucial insight into God's operations in grace. In Romans 4, Paul is dealing with the whole question of how it was that Abraham was justified in the sight of God, how he got that right standing.

And if you look at Romans 4, 1-4, Paul argues that not even Abraham's faith was meritorious, in the sight of God.

[22 : 56] Some people, some scholars, some people within the broad church have tried to argue that way, that you see it wasn't his works, it was his faith, the work of faith of course they would say, that entitled him to a right standing with God.

But Paul levels that, and he levels it right where it matters, in the father of the faithful in Abraham. And he shows us that if Abraham's faith was meritorious, if God would accept him on the basis of a meritorious faith, then God was a debtor to Abraham.

You see? But God is no man's debtor. And the message of the good news is not that God's a debtor and he'll pay us because we're good.

The message is God is no man's debtor and wonder of wonders. He brings us into a right standing with himself on the basis of the work of the Messiah Jesus.

And we simply receive that. And that's what Abraham did. He simply trusted in the Lord. He took him at his word and he was blessed.

[24 : 16] And you see, the whole burden of the gospel is that the Lord puts to our spiritual and moral account all that the Messiah is, all that Jesus is.

And so it's not about finding refuge and safety in ourselves or in someone else, unless that someone is Jesus.

No refuge or safety in self could I see, said old M'Chay. Jehovah said Kenneth, my Savior must be. So let's be clear and settled in our minds that Ruth standing with God was on the basis of the sovereign grace of God.

Freely she received and she simply trusted. She had come under the shadow of his wings for refuge.

[25 : 21] And the last thing we want to look at is Ruth's works and reward. reward. And I want to think about two things under this heading. First of all, her works were not that of the unregenerate person, the non-spiritual person, those who never experienced the saving grace of God.

And we can talk in that language even about people like Ruth living in the distant past, because the saving grace of God was operating then. life.

And what was also true then, though it hadn't been expounded as much then a days as it became in the New Testament, I agree.

But what was true then too was that the non-spiritual, even within the religious community, were living according to the principles of the sinful nature.

Paul calls it living according to the flesh. Now we're going to watch here because the principles of the sinful nature are not always apparent.

[26 : 33] We may not even mean to live by them, but we do if we're non-spiritual, if we're unregenerate.

God and Paul argues in Romans 8, that those who live according to the rules of the fallen nation, the appetites and the principles of the fallen nation, cannot please God.

Romans 8. 8. And you see, this teaching is consistent with what the Old Testament teaches.

You go to the Psalms, and the Proverbs, Psalm 14, comes to mind, 1 to 3, that there is no one righteous, no not one. We are all gone out of the way.

You find Paul arguing that in Romans 3, from verse 10. There is no one who does good so as to please God and be accepted.

[27 : 34] You see, that's really the point. No, there's no one like that. And therefore, those who operate on fleshly, on fallen nature principles, are, even if they don't realize it, are in opposition to God.

And the reward they are due is not life everlasting. It's not acceptance with God. It's the wrath of God.

It's to be separated from God. It's death in all its aspects. And therefore, let's lay to heart that Ruth's works were not that of the unregenerate, of those motivated by the principles of the fallen nature.

You know, when you read this and really read it, there's almost a simple naivety about Ruth.

There's no kenning. It's apparent.

She didn't think, oh, this is a wealthy farmer. I'll keep in with him. I'll do all right here. There's none of that. There's a simplicity about her. There's, I say, a naivety about her.

[28 : 50] She marvels. She falls down on her face and said, why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?

Her heart was in the Lord and the principles she operated on were not that of the unregenerate.

And that's what I want to look at secondly, concerning her works and reward.

Ruth's works were that of the regenerate, of the born again. Now, I agree with those who are theologically astute, that the doctrine of the new birth in the Old Testament period was not highlighted as it was in the new.

There's no argument with that. But to say it didn't exist is wrong. because all those godly people, men and women of the Old Testament period were as born again as any in the new.

The emphasis in the new was needed because where did the gospel come first of all? It came among the Israelites, it came among the Jews.

[30 : 11] The time had come for Israel to hear the Messiah had come. And such a lot of rabbinical clutter had been overlaid on the message of salvation.

Many things had to be clarified and much rubbish had to be removed so that there was a big emphasis among other things on the doctrine of the new birth.

Do you remember what Jesus said to that almost chief rabbi Nicodemus he was a master in Israel he said to him are you a teacher in Israel and you don't know these things except a man is born again Nicodemus born from above he cannot experience the kingdom of heaven this was like it was new to Nicodemus and why was it new to him because of the huge amount of clutter that had been overlaid over centuries among the Jews don't forget 400 years had passed from the last word Malachi spoke to the first word of John the Baptist 400 years and most of that time rabbinical clutter had been laid upon the gospel way the preaching of the prophets so what

I'm saying here to go back to it Ruth was operating not on the principles of the unregenerated the fleshly way but by the spirit of God her works were done out of her spirit alive to the Lord her heart was in what she did yes gleaning was different because it was as into the Lord many as the Christian lady I've met along the way who's told me about the wee placard they've got above the kitchen sink or in the kitchen emphasizing that the kitchen is different in this house because what's done in it is into Christ as into the Lord and her gleaning was done as into the

Lord her heart was in what she did because she loved the Lord she had come by his grace to trust him in New Testament language which is perhaps more helpful here she had come to love him who first loved her and she loved the people of God and she loved to work diligently because of her love

for God and you see the emphasis here is on works proceeding from a heart in which the love of God dwell it's not that her works her gleaning was perfect and meritorious it's that she had come to love the Lord and she worked diligently and faithfully whatever she did she did to the glory of [33 : 49] God to use Paul's turn of face but then the question can still be asked before we finish why then does Boaz say may you be richly rewarded by the Lord God of Israel may he repay your work well we've tried to show that Boaz could say this because he himself knew the grace of God and he wanted God to favour her as one who had come to freely receive the salvation of God in other words he wanted her to freely receive some blessing because of her diligence not that she deserved it not that it was payment but that she would simply receive it freely now this is not unknown in the Old

Testament or the New for example if you go to Psalm 20 verses 3 and 4 David says concerning the people to whom he writes and that is even us as we sing the Psalms let him remember all your gifts accept your sacrifice grant you your heart's wish and fulfill your counsel wise that's a metrical version of it but notice the words may he may he remember all your gifts and grant you your heart's wish Psalm 18 verse 20 when David was spared from Saul's attempt to murder him and when David later spared Saul so he could have killed him he says this in verse 20 of Psalm 18 the Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness in other words my right action and the cleanness of my hands

Nehemiah says in Nehemiah 13 31 O Lord remember me my God for good because of all the reforms I've carried out now it's not remember me and pay me because I'm entitled to it it's the believer speaking within the framework of the grace of God he has been freely received by God and he may according to God's way of working he may receive good from the hand of the Lord for what he has done for the Lord Jesus himself talks about this at the last when he talks about enter in to the joy of your Lord well then what does he say well then good and faithful servant enter into the joy of your

Lord that doesn't mean well then good and faithful servant it's payback time I'm going to give you the reward that I'm indebted to give you not at all you received my salvation freely you walked with me all the days of your life by my grace and now you're going to enter into the rewards of grace that I bestow but the point I'm making here is that even in this world he will bestow good upon his people we're never the losers Lord we don't serve him to gain God forbid but we know that in serving him we never lose out he is faithful who promised he never rewards us on account of our works he rewards us according to them done by hearts that are changed and the principles are the principles of the born again works that are done out of love for him who first loved us who has brought us on to a standing with himself that is right and who according to the principles that he operates by will give us freely the rewards he chooses you see the fact of the matter is and the believer should know it we should all know it here today

Jesus said it in Luke 17 verse 9 he said it to the disciples when you have done all that is in your power to do say we are unprofitable servants and we have only done what was our duty to do my dear friends let us embrace these things by faith and let us be enabled by the grace of God as I hope we will to say this that we have come by his grace under the shadow of his wings for refuge Amen