

Do Good to All Men, Especially to Those of the Household of Faith

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 September 2009

Preacher: Alex Cowie

[0 : 00] Now let's turn back to the book of Ruth and chapter 2 and we may just focus our thoughts around verses 14 to 16.

Now Boaz said to her, that is to Ruth at mealtime, Come here and eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar. So she sat beside the reapers and he passed parched grain to her and she ate and was satisfied and kept some back.

And when she rose up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves and do not reproach her. Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her. Leave it that she may glean and do not rebuke her.

And if we were to give this passage, this study, a title, I think we'll just simply use Paul's words in Galatians, Do good unto all people, especially the household of faith.

And it's clear you see that in this passage, Boaz shows in a very practical way the genuineness of his own faith and he demonstrates it in his kindness to Ruth the Moabitess.

[1 : 32] And we are reminded in this in a very practical way that living faith in the Lord, true faith in the Lord is a working faith. It operates. It's not something that is just I have faith.

You remember how James in his little letter says, Oh you have faith. Well the devils have faith too. They tremble. They have their own recognition of the doctrines of the scriptures.

But their recognition of these doctrines doesn't influence them in any way that's good. But the biblical faith, the faith that is in the Lord Jesus Christ, whether it was before he came in the hope or since he came in the reality, in the accomplished work.

That living faith operates, it works. And we see it here, even in this lovely story, how Boaz in a very practical way shows a loving concern for Ruth the Moabitess.

Whom he knows has become a follower of the Lord God of Israel. We see that a little bit further back. Verse 12, the second part of it.

[2 : 52] He recognizes that she has come under the shadow of the wings of the Almighty. She's come to trust him, to rest in him.

That's a very vivid poetic expression for true trust in the Lord, living faith in him. So he recognizes her in this way.

And he does good to her. He bestows this favor on her. And in the New Testament, when you're looking at the way that faith works, or shall I say it outworks its inner reality, often the apostles, they draw their examples from the Old Testament scriptures.

They show the characters who live by faith in a very practical way. Hebrews 11 is your classic chapter, a whole chapter devoted to people who live by faith, and how that faith was worked out in their experience, how it operated.

It wasn't the only faith, that deadness. No, it operated in a very practical way. And as I say, when the scripture writers wanted to illustrate the reality of living faith, they often referred back to the biblical characters.

[4 : 17] Even Rahab, you remember the harlot, who received the spies when Joshua sent them out to suss out Jericho before they took it.

And she had come to believe she was influenced by God's grace and spirit to receive the report. Others in Jericho, probably most of the people in Jericho, trembled.

They were in terror of the Israelites. But she had come to true convictions about the God of Israel. That's why she hid the spies.

And James, in his little letter again, just to refer to him, uses the reality of Rahab's faith. He shows that it was a working faith.

That it operated in ways that affected other people. And hence our title, Do good unto all people, especially the household of faith.

[5 : 20] And I think we should be aware as we turn to this particular incident in the life of Ruth and of Boaz too. That the whole tone of it is really a very happy occasion.

This is harvest time. Don't forget. They're bringing in the harvest. It's a time of great excitement. A time of thankfulness, of praise to God for a harvest that is coming in by the day.

And so what we find is that in that context, Boaz invites Ruth to dine. And that's where we take our starting point this evening. This is the first step in a very practical way of doing good to her.

Verse 14. Boaz said to her at mealtime, Come here and eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar. And so on. Now, I'm entitling this first point, Boaz invites Ruth to dine.

Some have entitled it, Provision for the stranger in the gate. And that, of course, is based on the view that Ruth was a Moabitess.

[6 : 40] She was out with the Israelite community. And what he did was he treated her well. Even although she was, as she says in verse 10, a foreigner.

But it seems to me that we don't need to think about her in that context as a foreigner. Boaz didn't. And we know he didn't.

Because he already acknowledged her as an excellent worker. He had come to know. He had asked the chap who was overseeing the staff, so to speak.

Back in verse 6 there. So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered the question, Boaz's question, verse 5, Whose young woman is this?

And he gets a full report from the overseer, the man whose responsibility was to say, You can stay, you can work, or no, go away.

[7 : 45] He gets a full report. He discovers that she's honourable and hardworking. She is an asset to them.

He discovers that her mother-in-law has been well looked after by her. And he discovers too that she had come to trust in the Lord God of Israel.

We have already referred to that. But you see, in the context it shows us that he didn't regard her as a foreigner. He does good to her as a member of the household of faith.

And that's where charity, we were thinking this morning about the word behind charity, The Greek word agape, that love that is distinctly from God to the believer.

And charity begins at home. It begins among the Lord's people. And it goes out from there. And this is what we see in the context.

[8 : 50] He invites her to come and to dine with his workers. He's giving it a new standing among his workers.

And he's doing it, we're told, because she was now, by the witness that was born, one of the Lord's people.

It's interesting to notice in the passage that Ruth herself was quite unconcerned about what others were thinking.

She did what she had to do, as unto the Lord. She humbled herself in many ways. She wasn't putting herself in the frame to be exalted. No, she was exalted by the Lord in due time.

And Boaz himself, in a sense, confirms that. Because Boaz invites her to his table. Come here and eat.

[9 : 52] He exalts her, but back of it all, God is exalting her in due time. And that is a real rule of the kingdom.

Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, said Peter. That he may exalt you in due time.

There's something appropriate for the Lord's people in humbling themselves and making no account of themselves.

It's the way the Master went. And we are to follow it. And those who are taught of God will find that easier to do than perhaps they imagine.

Because God is working. God is teaching them to humble themselves. Knowing that they will be exalted in due time. And that's what we find in the passage.

Boaz says to her, come and dine. And eat of my table. And dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.

[10:53] He's allowed her to come into this somewhat exalted position. She's now one of the team. She's confirmed as one of his maidservants.

Stay close by them. And you see, there's an important practical lesson in this. We ought to be ready to humble ourselves.

In the sight of God. Waiting upon him to exalt us. And exalting us is not... And this is where often mistakes are made. When God exalts us, it doesn't mean that he gives us fame.

It means that he exalts us in ways that he sees appropriate. You remember the disciples had this obsession. Which was particularly manifest in James and John, the apostles.

They wanted a place, one at the right hand and another at the left, of the master at last. When he would come in judgment. But the others were annoyed that they were thinking like that.

[12:08] It doesn't mean they weren't thinking it themselves. Just that they had the temerity to say it. But that, you see, is all wrong. And the Saviour taught them.

That's not the way to think. Don't want to be like the Gentiles who lord it over one another. But humble yourselves in the sight of God.

Be prepared to do the little things. The very ordinary things. The insignificant things. As and to the Lord. It's fascinating and it's saddening too to watch some of what we see on the TV screen in the media context.

When they take us into different parts of the world. And you find when people get a little power. Even a little power. They get tyrannical. They begin to bully others.

There's something about human nature that's like that. Don't be like that, says Jesus. When God exalts you. Be humble about it.

[13:12] And we find that here. As Boaz invites her to dine. At his meal table. I want us then to move on to the second thing that flows out of this.

The Boaz serves his guest. He does this himself. So she sat beside the deapers. And he. I wonder if you notice that in the reading. And he. Passed parts grain to her. That's a little bit vague. It really means.

He took it upon himself. The boss served the servant. That's what's actually being said. And this again you see.

Is revealing about Boaz. And the nature of his faith. He was ready to go beyond just inviting her to the table. He actually took it upon himself. To be the servant.

[14:13] Now. The first thing to be said about the meal. It might be ordinary by. Standards of a good Sunday roast. And so on. But nonetheless.

It was no small thing. It was. You get the impression that. Well it was just. Roasted corn. And that wasn't much. But that was very. Satisfying to the people.

You know. Who were involved in the gleaning. You couldn't give them a great big feed. Or they wouldn't work. Would they? They would want to sleep. As we do ourselves sometimes.

They would want to sleep. No. No. It was a good. Satisfying meal. Simple yes. But adequate. And Boaz serves this. Liam Morris in his little IVP commentary on Ruth.

Tells us that Boaz prepared the meal for Ruth. And gave her this great heap of roasted corn on her plate.

[15:15] And it's interesting to notice that when she had eaten as much as she wanted. She was able to keep some. And we later find that Naomi benefited from that.

But the important thing in this second point is to notice Boaz's readiness to be the servant.

Although he himself was the master. He didn't have to be the master. He didn't have to be like this. But he was ready to do this. And there's a marvelous insight into the real heart of serving the Lord. Of being prepared no matter where we are in our own position in life. To be ready to do the menial task. Jesus did this didn't he?

Jesus emphasized it in his own ministry. I am among you as one who serves. The more we think upon him in the upper room on the night in which he was betrayed.

[16:22] And we think about him taking off his outer garment. And wrapping himself with a towel. And beginning to wash the disciples feet. He did what the very lowest of his servants should do.

The master himself did it. That's why Peter of course got upset about it. You're not going to do that to me. That's beneath you Lord.

You can't be serious. You're not going to do that. And Jesus rebuked him for it. But the point in this you see is that he was ready to lay aside his own position as master.

And become the servant. I am among you to this end to serve. And it was just a little insight into his whole way of thinking.

Into his heart. He had come to serve in suffering. That he would all too soon engage in. He had come to die. He had come to serve in that way.

[17:33] Having loved his own he loved them to the uttermost. He gave himself for them. And we get a lovely insight in Boaz's readiness to serve Ruth here at the meal table.

Himself. The master becomes the servant. And we hear our Lord Jesus Christ saying more particularly. I have given you an example which you should follow.

It is enough that the servant be as his master. That's the practical lesson of this. We go from Boaz. The master to Jesus. The master himself. And we learn from him. But the third thing we want to look at here is that Boaz provides a sufficient meal.

Now we have already observed that it was a good heap. And she was able to keep some of it. That would later be given to Naomi. You see it there in verse 18.

[18:47] So she took it up and went into the city. That's the gleaning. The bag of gleaning. And her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. Then it says this.

So she brought out and gave to her what she had kept back. In other words. I suppose we would call it a doggy bag. But it was more than a doggy bag.

It was the remainder of the meal. And a good portion it was. She took that for her mother-in-law.

Boaz provided a sufficient meal for her. Simple food as we've said. But more than adequate for the task that she was involved in.

I came across an interesting snippet. There was an American preacher. Dr. Taylor. And there's a little booklet I have on Ruth the Gleaner.

[19:49] And in it he quotes a Scottish minister. Who was a bit of a Bible land scholar. Called Thompson.

And in Thompson's book on the Bible land background. He notices that the corn was roasted on an iron plate. And that it constituted a most palatable and sufficient article of food.

That's a very quaint way of putting it. That's what it is. That's a quotation. And so it was something that was really simple and yet satisfactory.

It was sufficient. And of course with it, Thompson records, there was a dish of vinegar and olive oil for dipping into the bread.

So the meal was sufficient. So the meal was sufficient. And we may say that it was provided by Boaz who was seeking to do good first and foremostly to one of the household of faith.

[21:00] He was showing himself in this way to be a generous host. And the Bible teaches us of course that this is the way to operate.

Paul doesn't say in an offhand way, do good unto all men, especially those of the household of faith. This is at the heart of the way the Christian demonstrates the reality of that faith which is the gift of God.

But then we're told that once Ruth had eaten and was satisfied, she got up and she went back to the field. She wasn't afraid of hard work. And the Bible teaches us that there is a dignity about work. We feel that we're losing sight of that. The more we become secularized, people are losing sight of their dignity in work. It's what's best.

It's what's easiest. It's how can I get off with. But there is a dignity about it. And it's true, my dear friends, whether it is in the home or in paid employment or simply in voluntary work.

[22:14] There's a dignity about it we ought never to forget. Not that you'll be reading it, but for those who are interested in these things. Professor John Murray has a book called The Principles of Conduct.

And in it there's a most intriguing, interesting chapter on the sanctity of work. And in it he shows how that God gave work to sinless Adam to do.

And that has led theologians, and I think they're right in it, it has led them to think that because work was there in the original creation, in the pre-fall situation, and that there was a dignity and sanctity about work in the renewed heavens and the renewed earth, wherein the Lord's people will dwell forever, will not be loafing around, or will not just be praising God.

It will not be like an endless Christian gathering singing spiritual songs. We will be praising. But that there will be work of a kind.

That doesn't mean, I'm not contradicting the scripture that says they will rest from their labours. What we do here necessarily carries with a drudgery.

[23 : 45] There's a heaviness. We labour and we groan under the effects of sin. But that will be gone. And I think there could well be some truth, more truth than we realise in that.

God placed a special dignity upon work. He sanctified it. He gave it to sinless Adam to carry out. It only became difficult for him after he sinned and fell.

And then he had to work and earn his food by the sweat of his brow, because of the thorns and thistles, because creation was out of joint. So, to return to Ruth, we find her ready to be up and doing, to be busy.

And surely there's a practical side to this in terms of busyness. If it's right, and it is, according to the word of God, it's right to be busy, to have something to do meaningful, beneficial to others.

Then, first and foremostly, work for the Lord has a special place. Be ye steadfast, said Paul, and movable.

[25 : 06] All was abounding. He wasn't just talking to the ministers. All was abounding in the work of the Lord. For as much as you know that your labour, your work, is not in vain in the Lord.

And although it's nice and easy to parcel that up and apply it to the ministers, that's only part of it. We were thinking in the morning about the Lord's people and their witness.

We contemplate the revelation we have of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And as we contemplate that, as that is the object of our contemplation, we go on beyond contemplating to declaring.

We tell others about the meaning of that life. And that's work. Sometimes it's hard work. Because people don't want to hear it.

[26 : 11] They find all sorts of ways to avoid it. There are many other things we can be employed in, in the Lord's service. And Ruth points us in the right direction here.

We want to bring others into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we're in it ourselves, that must be uppermost in our minds.

How can I get so and so to think more seriously about the way of salvation? I must explain the meaning of the life of Christ.

Not just about who he is and what he became, but the meaning of what he became, as it bears on me the sinner.

That's work. Witness is hard work and often discouraging work. But it's work for the Lord. And I think it's fair to say then, in leaving the point, that both Boaz and Ruth point us in the right direction.

[27 : 19] Both of generous and diligent service as children of God. But then the last thing we want to look at here, and again it just flows out of the passage.

Boaz instructs his men to be kind to Ruth. Verse 15, And when she rose up to glean, she went back to the field.

Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her.

Leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her. Now we're supposed to keep their distance.

But let her come near. Let her get the best of what's coming away.

In fact, let grain fall purposely. She instructs them, first of all, to make sure that they look after her kindly.

[28 : 26] They're not to rebuke her and humiliate her for coming too near the gleaning. The reaping. And it is most probable, I think, that in Ruth's eagerness to make the best of her opportunity, she would be coming as close to where the gleaning was best.

We can understand that quite simply. And they were not to rebuke her. On Boaz's instruction, they were to let her get the most she could with the time that she had.

And I think we can say there's a godly sensitivity on the part of Boaz towards Ruth. Notice what I said there.

A godly sensitivity. I think if we're honest with ourselves, as those who profess the Lord, we often lack that sensitivity.

Sometimes we get told it, of course. But we can lack that sensitivity. We can let rip. We can say to this one or that one, we can just say what we think, and it's wrong.

[29 : 39] But no, Boaz has this sensitivity. He wants them to deal kindly with her. He's concerned. Jesus himself says as much, Learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.

Think about how Jesus dealt with people, even his own disciples, when he was correcting them for their errors. He could have let rip.

But he didn't do that. He helped them to see where they were wrong, and he brought them round, to think differently.

And Boaz has this sensitivity towards Ruth, that we can learn from. But lastly, he says to his servants, Provide for her.

Be generous. Make sure she gets the most that she can, for the work she's doing. Now, before we just round this point off, time's gone.

[30 : 48] I just want to pick up on something that, that it's right to pick up on at this particular stage. Isn't it a strange thing?

It's a strange thing for the Lord's people, that although we like to give to charity, and to charities, we're not keen to receive charity.

Somebody's smiling. Isn't that true? When we're given something freely, we go off and try to find it. I must give something to so and so for that.

Isn't that the way we operate? Right. But you see, ever think about it, someone gives you something, a child of God gives you something, your fellow Christian gives you something, not in order to get something back.

The whole heart of giving freely, you're not doing it to get something back. And I think we have to take that to heart. Here we listen to Boaz instructing his men to let Ruth glean close by them.

[32 : 01] He's being charitable. He's being generous with what's his own. He doesn't want anything in reward for that.

He's simply doing it because he's doing good into the household of faith. And it's charity at its best. Whether Ruth was aware of it or unaware of it, the fact is, he knew what he was doing and he was commanding his men to do things this way.

Back of it all, of course, God was working. The Lord was using one of his own to provide for two of his own.

For Naomi and Ruth. For Naomi and Ruth, who had very little, he was using Boaz to do this.

And that's often the way the Lord operates. And I think we've got to be sensitive to that. If we are given something or other by other Christians, we're not to register now.

[33 : 13] How can I pay that back? That destroys the whole business of the giving in the first place. Or at least it spoils it.

And we can learn from the way Boaz operated here. Of course we know, and I hear it. Of course we know, it's more blessed to give than to receive.

Therefore I say to myself, well if I receive, I'm going to give something back. But that's not the way to operate. We have to receive what we're given, as given by the Lord himself, through one of his own people.

And not to be looking to pay it back. Or to part pay it back. To receive it, as from the Lord.

Many is a story we have, so time has gone tonight for it, but many is a story we have about people who were moved by the Lord to give help here or there. Many is a story about folk who were students for the ministry or missionaries who had absolutely nothing and didn't know where they were going next.

[34 : 37] How were they going to go forward? And the Lord sent something by post from Canada or Australia or New Zealand.

And the wee story, the Lord moved me to send this so that you would be helped on your way. That happens. No use as reasoning, well how can I pay that back?

No, that's not the way. We receive it as from the Lord through his people. And if you think about it, if you're here tonight as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and you are accepted by God the Father, then it is not on account of anything.

Notice what I said, it's not on account of anything you've done to deserve it. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8, verse 9, you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, for your sakes became poor, that you through his self-impoverishment may become rich.

And that's the way we are to think about it. Because we have freely received from him the fullness of eternal life and of salvation and all that means.

[36 : 06] The forgiveness of sins and knowledge that we are right with God because of him. And it's all free to us. We simply receive it with the empty hands of faith.

My dear friends, you see what I'm saying? If we can receive the greater with the empty hands of faith from the Lord himself, we shouldn't feel we have to give back to another Christian something because they've given us help.

If we've taken the greater with empty hands and thankful hearts, let us learn to simply receive. And when we have occasion ourselves to do good to another, let's not be slow to do it.

So to conclude, let's then learn to use every opportunity to help others, especially the household of faith.

Do to them what you would want done to you when you're in need. And you'll not be far wrong. be humble as Ruth was and willing, yes and Boaz too, be willing and working as a servant of the Lord. [37 : 24] Always ready to do good and not to be weary in it, knowing that in due time we shall reap if we don't lose heart.

The psalmist said and we'll conclude with these words in singing, Set your trust upon the Lord and be thou doing good and so thou in the land shalt dwell and verily have fruit.

May he bless to us his own word. Thank you.