

## (2) Kindness under the wings of God

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Preacher: Mark Jackson

[ 0 : 00 ] The first of today's reading is Psalm 36, which can be found on page 558. Psalm 36 on page 558.

Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart. There is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.

The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit. He has ceased to act wisely and do good. He plots trouble while in his bed. He sets himself in a way that is not good.

He does not reject evil. Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens. Your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God.

Your judgments are like the great deep. Man and beast you save, O Lord. How precious is your steadfast love, O God.

[ 1 : 08 ] The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

For with you is the fountain of life, and in your light do we see light. I will continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your righteousness to the upright in heart.

Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away. There the evildoers lie fallen. They are thrust down, unable to rise.

The second reading today is Ruth chapter 2, verses 1 to the end. Now, Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

And Ruth, the Moabite, said to Naomi, Let me go into the field and glean among the ears of grain after him, in whose sight I shall find favour. And she said to her, Go, my daughter.

[ 2 : 13 ] So she set out, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech. And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem.

And he said to the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered, The Lord bless you. Then Boaz said to his young man, who was in charge of the reapers, Whose young woman is this? And the servant, who was in charge of the reapers, answered, She is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.

So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest. Then Boaz said to Ruth, Now listen, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field, or leave this one. But keep close to my young women. Let your eyes be on the field, that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn.

[ 3 : 12 ] And then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, Why have I found favour in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner? But Boaz answered her, All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land, and came to a people that you did not know before.

The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wing you have come to take refuge. Then she said, I have found favour in your eyes, my Lord, for you have comforted me, and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants.

And at mealtime, Boaz said to her, Come here and drink some bread, and dip your morsel in the wine. So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain.

And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. And also pull out some from the bundles for her, and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her. So she gleaned in the field until evening, and she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an effer of barley.

[ 4 : 32 ] And she took it up, and went into the city. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also brought out, and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied.

And her mother-in-law said to her, Where did you glean today, and where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you. So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, The man's name with whom I work today is Boaz.

And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, May he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead. Naomi also said to her, The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.

And Ruth the Moabite said, Besides, he said to me, You shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest. And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young men, lest in another field you be assaulted.

So she kept close to the young woman of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and the wheat harvests, as she lived with her mother-in-law. Thank you very much, SJ, for reading the passage to us.

[ 5 : 41 ] Do please keep your Bibles open there on page 268, as we look at Ruth 2 together. And let me pray for us, and ask God to speak to us. Let's pray.

Father God, we do thank you for the book of Ruth. We thank you that through it you speak to us about your loving kindness. And so we ask that you would continue to do that today from chapter 2. Please enlarge our vision to see the full extent of your kindness. Help us to appreciate even more the loving, kind God you are, that we may praise you for it. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Have you ever doubted whether it's worth being a Christian? It might be a regular thing, it might be a rare thing, it might have been a one-off.

But have you ever found yourself doubting whether following Jesus Christ is all it's cracked up to be? So it could be that a friend or colleague asks you the very question, tell me, what's it like to follow Jesus?

[ 6 : 46 ] What's the difference it makes to your life? Is it worth it? And you can just reel off the answer, yeah, yeah, it's great. Knowing God, relationship with God, purpose of life. It's brilliant. But then as you hear these words coming out internally, you're thinking, is that really true?

Is he really worth following? Is being a Christian really worth it? If you missed last Sunday, then we started a new series looking at the book of Ruth.

And the main character, a woman called Naomi, well, she was having these doubts. And if you'd asked her last week whether it's worth following God at the end of chapter one, well, you would have got the following.

Following God, it's bitter, it's empty, it's calamitous. You can see for yourself some of Naomi's comments on the top left side of page 268.

The Lord has dealt very bitterly with me, verse 20. The Lord has brought me back empty. The Almighty has brought calamity upon me. It's not worth it.

[ 7 : 58 ] But you ask Naomi the same question at the end of chapter two, whether it's worth following God, and you get a very different message. So look now at verse 20 of chapter two.

Naomi says to her daughter-in-law, may he be blessed by the Lord, the Lord whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead. The Lord is kind to the living. The Lord's kind to the dead. Praise the Lord.

Yes, it's worth it. We end chapter one with bitterness against God, not worth it. We end chapter two with praise towards God. Yes, worth it.

So what's made the difference? The short answer is God's overflowing, abundant kindness. Naomi has come to see for herself that God really is kind.

He is worth following. Chapter two, we're going to see, is overflowing with God's abundant kindness to Ruth and to Naomi through a guy called Boaz. So abundant, so generous, so obvious is God's kindness that even Naomi, bitter Naomi from last week, even she can see it.

[ 9 : 07 ] And the question for us this morning is, can you? Do you see how kind God is to those who trust in him? Because if you do, that's all the evidence you need that yes, it really is worth following God.

God wants us to be absolutely clear about this, about his kindness towards us in the Lord Jesus. A kindness so abundant, so generous, so overflowing that all of us, no matter how bitter we may be or how much we're doubting it, actually all of us can see just how kind he is, just how marvelous it is to follow God.

Why it is worth it, infinitely so, to follow Jesus Christ. Now what we're going to do is we'll go through the chapter looking at God's overflowing kindness and take some time to do that before thinking about how it applies to us as Christians.

And then secondly, we'll see that this overflowing, abundant kindness is not automatic, but only for those who trust in him. And if you turn to the back of the service sheet, you'll see a handout, which is where we'll be going.

Drop down notes. If you'd like to, if the Lord particularly speaks to you, or to write any questions for the question time at the end. First then, let's look at this overflowing, abundant kindness from the Lord.

[ 10 : 29 ] Verses 1 to 7 set the scene for us. So in verses 1 to 2, Naomi and Ruth need to eat. Remember, they're poor, they are widowed, they need food. And knowing about God's provision in the law for the poor, and I've put some references on the sheet there for you, Leviticus 19, Jude 24, talks about the poor being able to glean leftovers in the fields.

Knowing that, Ruth sets off and just happens, verse 3, to come to Boaz's field. Boaz himself is a godly man. The Lord be with you, he says to his workers.

And they reply, the Lord bless you. Imagine that at work tomorrow, wouldn't that be great? Then in verse 5, Boaz notices this strange woman in the field, in his field, asks who she is, and discovers that she is Ruth, the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. Now that's just by way of setting the scene. Let's pick up the action in verse 8. Then Boaz said to Ruth, Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women.

Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn.

[ 11 : 46 ] And she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, Why have I found favour in your eyes that you should take notice of me since I am a foreigner? What kindness being shown here from Boaz.

This is a kindness way beyond the norms of the day, even the law of God itself. All it required was that if someone had a field, a farmer, that he had to leave the gleanings, couldn't sort of reap up to the edge of the field.

But Boaz, kindness here stretches way beyond that. It's abundant, generous kindness. Did you notice first the way he addresses her? My daughter, in verse 8. Even though Ruth is an outsider, a foreigner, looked down upon in society, yet he addresses her personally and caringly.

My daughter. Secondly, his kind protection. Stay in my field. I have charged the young men not to touch you. Dangerous work for a young widowed woman to be gleaning in the field by herself, but Boaz promises to protect her.

Thirdly, his kind provision. When you're thirsty, go to the vessels. Drink what the young men have drawn. This is remarkable in a culture where normally foreigners drew the water for the Israelites or women drew water for the men and here is both a woman and a foreigner with free access to this water drawn by Israelite men.

[ 13 : 12 ] A kind greeting, kind protection, kind provision, abundant kindness and it leaves Ruth gobsmacked. Why? Why me? Why such kindness?

Why take notice of me? It's abundant, overflowing kindness and it doesn't stop there. So we've moved down to verse 14 and they stop for lunch and Boaz invites Ruth to eat with him.

So imagine the CEO of your company inviting the janitor to have a power lunch with him and that's what's going on here. Boaz gives her bread and wine, Boaz passes her roasted grain, she eats and eats until she's satisfied and at the end of verse 14 she had some leftover.

This kindness that knows no bounds, literally overflowing. Carries on, verse 15, when Ruth goes off to glean again, Boaz tells his men to let her glean among the sheaves.

So that's no more gleaning just among the leftovers, this is sort of taste the difference quality. But there's more. Boaz then goes on to tell his workers to pull out some of the sheaves from the bundles and leave them on the floor for her to pick up.

[14:19] It's just getting silly now. It's lavish, it's generous, it's abundant kindness. Boaz just keeps giving and giving and giving. Now in our affluent society with Tesco's in every town, it's perhaps difficult for us to appreciate the kind of generosity going on here with barley and gleaning.

I'm not sure if verse 17 helps for you, Ruth ends up going home with an effer of barley, which the footnote says is 22 litres. It's equivalent of being given half a month's wages.

So tomorrow morning, not only do you get the Lord be with you from your boss, you get half a month's wages too. This is the sort of abundant generosity we are talking about on display here. These verses are just bursting with Boaz's kindness to Ruth.

Overflowing, abundant, lavish kindness. But as Naomi herself makes clear in verses 18 to 23, this kindness is not merely on a human-to-human level.

This overflowing, abundant kindness is from the Lord. So in verse 18, Naomi sees Ruth, probably staggering home because of the sheer quantity of food she's carrying.

[15:31] And Naomi knows something amazing has happened. Where in the world did you glean today? Verse 19. Where have you worked? Which field? Whose field was it? Ruth tells her the man's name is Boaz.

And then the penny drops for Naomi. She exclaims, verse 20, May he be blessed by the Lord, the Lord whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead.

Naomi knows that this is God's doing. We've said that ultimately the hero of this book is God. Ruth didn't just happen to come to Boaz's field as if by chance.

In God's world there's no such thing as chance. Nothing ever happens to us without God allowing it, whether good or bad. Now this is God's doing. It was God ending the famine in chapter one in the first place.

God bringing Ruth back to Bethlehem with Naomi. God making sure Ruth ended up in Boaz's field, one of their redeemers, which we'll see more about next week. It is God who is being abundantly kind through Boaz to Ruth and to Naomi.

[16:39] God's kindness and Naomi can see it now. She can see God's loving kindness at work. God's kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead.

God is kind, abundantly kind, overflowingly kind and her bitterness has lifted. The praise begins. It is worth following God.

This is overflowing, abundant kindness from the Lord. God. And I hope you see God's kindness here in these verses.

This God of abundant kindness, of overflowing generosity, this God who protects and provides. I hope you see God's kindness because this is not just the God of Ruth back then, this is the God of today, the God you and I follow.

Remember last week we said that the book of Ruth, it's not just simply a wonderful story from 1,200 years ago but rather it's a brush stroke we said. A brush stroke in the masterpiece of God's plan of salvation.

[17:49] Why don't we just turn again to the end of the story. This time we'll look at chapter 4 verse 21. This genealogy at the end is really key for us for applying the book to ourselves as Christians.

So chapter 4 verse 21 we read Salmon fathered Boaz there's Boaz Boaz fathered Obed Obed fathered Jesse and Jesse fathered David.

From Boaz to David from King David to King Jesus the book of Ruth is not only about God's abundant kindness to Ruth through Boaz but points us forward through King David to King Jesus to God's abundant kindness to the whole world through Jesus Christ.

Christ. And so we get to the Gospels and we read of another man from Bethlehem so worthy is this man he lives a sinless life perfectly following God.

We read of this man speaking to outsiders foreigners poor widows welcoming them in showing them kindness way beyond the norms of the day. We read of him feeding the 5,000 people being satisfied and there being some left over.

[ 18 : 59 ] We read of him offering water to a foreigner drink this you'll never be thirsty again overflowing kindness abundant kindness and as we read of him dying on the cross we see him giving and giving and giving to the last giving up his own life so that we might not die in poverty spiritual poverty but have life itself with God abundant overflowing eternal life.

As we said last week it's through Jesus Christ that we see this overflowing abundant kindness to us today an overflowing kindness that has rescued us from spiritual poverty sin death hell an overflowing kindness that has brought us back into the abundant relationship we have with God but it doesn't stop there because Jesus also speaks of a kindness whereby God will never leave us or forsake us he will protect us Jesus speaks of a kindness whereby God's mercies are new every day he will provide for us a kindness whereby one day God will invite us to eat with him at the lavish abundant banquet that is heaven do you see God's kindness people may let you down there may be problems at work at the family God's still there never leave you or forsake you feeling betrayed insecure alone

God's still there may go to bed after a dreadful day harsh words you said the stupid things you did the guilt the anxiety the frustration at yourself and yet tomorrow is a new day God's mercy is a new no sin too great for God's grace to cover there's always forgiveness in Christ there's always more may feel weighed down by the constant fight with sin struggling with the effects of living in a fallen world you know one day it will all end dining with God in heaven perfect new world no more sin abundant kindness and yet even then God's kindness to us won't end just look at the quote I put there from Ephesians 2 verse 7 in the coming ages he that God might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus God's kindness will continue into eternity as we spend forever appreciating this immeasurable riches of his kindness to us in Christ will be satisfied perfectly satisfied and there'll be some left over immeasurable kindness do you see how kind God is do you see his abundant overflowing kindness in Jesus

Christ this is the God of the Bible and hopefully you can see this is your God well that leads us on to the second thing that God wants to tell us from Ruth chapter 2 that this overflowing abundant kindness is only for those who trust in the Lord that is God's kindness it's not automatic a decision to follow him has to be made so have a look at verses 11 to 13 we skipped over these verses before in verse 10 Ruth is gobsmacked and says to Boaz why why take notice of me and then Boaz responds verse 11 all that you have done for your mother in law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before the Lord repay you for what you have done and a full reward be given you by the Lord the God of Israel under whose wings you have come to take refuge why this kindness because Ruth has taken refuge in the

Lord she's taken refuge under his wings she's trusting God she's trusting in him and God is abundantly kind to those who trust in him we see from Boaz his own lips that it is indeed God who is the one being kind here the Lord repay you the Lord give you a full reward God showing this kindness to Ruth through Boaz why because she has taken refuge under the wings of God she'd made a decision and we saw it last week in chapter one didn't we your people shall be my people Ruth said your God my God she took refuge she trusted in God even though it meant leaving her family her sister her country behind in Moab she'd made the decision to follow God to take refuge under his wings and now she is experiencing the fruits of that decision what a wonderful picture it is too under the strong wings of God when

[ 24 : 10 ] God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt he describes himself as an eagle I bore you up on eagle's wings and brought you to myself God the powerful eagle Rufus helpless baby eaglet and seeing her take refuge shelter protection under God's strong caring wings not sure if you see eagles hovering above you as driving up the M1 majestically in the sky fiercely strong mighters of birds and yet passionately protective defensive of their young if you're a little eaglet you know you're safe you know you're going to be looked after under those strong powerful wings and this is what Ruth had done she had trusted her life and her future to God she had made a decision and now as a result she was experiencing God's protective care God providing for her every need this overflowing this abundant kindness is for those who trust in the Lord we saw a similar thing when Psalm 36 was read out our first reading people again taking refuge in the Lord because of his steadfast love the same word his loving kindness and as a result feasting on the abundance of his house the verse said drinking from the river of God's delight the Bible is clear that from start to finish if you trust in the Lord if you take refuge under his wings you'll experience spiritual comfort spiritual

security spiritual provision of every need not every want but every need for this life and for the next following

God is worth it if you make a decision to trust in the Lord to take refuge you will know this abundant overflowing kindness a kindness which we've said rescues from sin from the horror of God's judgment a kindness where God brings you to himself wraps his loving protective arms his wings around you an overflowing kindness which brings all the things we saw in point one everything you need now in this life and one day enjoying a heavenly feast with God and his people so take refuge God's kindness is not automatic a decision needs to be made will you make it will you trust your life your future to him to God's protective care and given what we've seen in Ruth 2 God's kindness God this powerful eagle why wouldn't you some of the saddest words we hear from the Lord Jesus was when some of his own people refused to take refuge in him this is Jesus speaking in Matthew 23 Jerusalem Jerusalem the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings but you would not the religious leaders at the time they would not trust in Jesus the scribes the Pharisees thought they were alright with God thought they were good enough for God trusting in their own righteousness and tragically they missed out on Jesus' overflowing abundant offer of eternal life they missed out and ended up spending eternity regretting their decision if you are someone looking into the Christian message please don't make the same mistake look at Ruth look at her taking refuge under God's wings look at her receiving

God's overflowing abundant kindness trust in the Lord God is not a miser he will not disappoint if you turn to him he is worth following take refuge God's overflowing kindness is for those who trust in the Lord now for those of us who have taken refuge in the Lord well I hope this chapter is a marvellous encouragement to us it is worth following God just look look at his kindness amidst the frenetic pace of London life it is easy to lose sight of God's kindness but it's vital that we don't as we said at the start the narrator wants us to see God's kindness to see it like Naomi to praise God for it to be able to answer yes it's worth following God yes it makes a difference yes it's worth following Christ and really believe it when we give this answer to our friends to our colleagues the first hymn we sang this morning was praise to the Lord

I hadn't planned this but the second verse seems so pertinent to what we've seen today let me just well you can turn to it if you want to I'll read it out to you praise to the Lord above all things so mightily reigning keeping us safe at his side and so gently sustaining have you not seen all you have needed has been met by his gracious ordaining the question sounds rhetorical doesn't it have you not seen mighty God powerful eagle keeping you safe at his side mighty God gently sustaining you have you not seen God giving you everything you need do you see it could be that it's a good thing this suggestion to take some time out today even if it's you know just ten minutes to reflect upon God's overflowing kindness to you in the Lord Jesus take some time to think about God's kindness to you in rescuing you from sin from death from judgment think about what it means to be forgiven now no guilt no condemnation no hell take some time imagine what it would be like life like what life would be like now for you without God's kindness to you reflect upon

[ 30 : 12 ] God's kindness in bringing you into his loving arms his protection his provision his mercy is new each day think about the answered prayers think about the tough times he's got you through consider the way he's grown you in godliness in fact he'll never leave you or forsake you he's always there guiding you the guided wreath so that you happen to meet that person that church that bible verse that seems so pertinent into the future think about God's kindness to you in the future ultimately enjoying this heavenly banquet with your creator and redeemer spending eternity enjoying and appreciating his kindness towards you perfect satisfaction and yet still more to come take some time out count for yourself all the many examples of God's overflowing kindness to you in Christ in your Christian life so far give thanks praise God for it say sorry for the times you take it for granted where you miss it and as the list grows give more thanks be overwhelmed by God's kindness to you like Ruth like Naomi praise God for it and know for certain that it really is worth following Jesus

Christ let's pray together Father God we praise you once again for your overflowing abundant kindness to us in the Lord Jesus praise you for your protection your provision everything we need now for life and the promise of one day enjoying the feast of heaven with you for eternity your kindness knows no end we are so grateful sorry for when we forget how much you've given us in Christ sorry when we forget your ongoing kindness towards us Father we admit at times it's difficult

we struggle to realise it to appreciate it so help us to do so help us to see your kindness help us to know you better as the kind loving God that you are make us more thankful more joyful more appreciative we pray for Jesus sake Amen