

God's Sovereign Kindness

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[0 : 00] To help us make the most of a chapter like this, what we really need to do is get behind the scenes to see what's going on underneath. Last week, I started to do that by showing you or giving you some background as to where the book of Ruth fits in the Bible, because it's only four chapters long and it's very easy to miss.

In fact, you'll find it hiding behind the book of Judges. And that's important because the problem in Judges was that there was no king in Israel. And so everyone did what was right in their own eyes. And that results in an endless cycle of sin and judgment. You can see that at the top of your handout. I printed it. An endless cycle of sin and judgment.

And it's a slide on our screen. And let me show you how this works. So Israel sins and then God judges them. And then Israel repents.

So God raises up a deliverer or a judge. And then they get peace. And things are fine for a while. There's peace. But Israel sin again.

[1 : 06] And so God judges them again. And then they have to repent again. God has to raise up another deliverer who brings them some measure of peace for a while. Until Israel sin again.

And then God judges them again. And then they repent again. So on and so forth. There's an endless cycle of sin and judgment. Do you ever notice that when you read the Old Testament? You see Israel.

Things are going fine for a while. Someone does something stupid. And then the whole country gets it. And then God judges them again. And it goes round and round and around. And it forces us to ask, Who will break this cycle?

You see, how can Israel enjoy a promised land? Any of the blessings of Abraham. When they're only a little bit of stubbornness. A bit of sin.

Some hard-heartedness away from God's judgment again. Something has to break this cycle. And I think that's what the book of Ruth begins to do. Ruth follows the cycle of sin and judgment.

[2 : 09] But at the end of Ruth, something very special happens. Something very different happens. I'm trying not to give away the ending. But let me show you what I mean. Follow with me through the book of Ruth.

See how it tracks through that cycle of sin and judgment. So Ruth begins with the time of judges. So in other words, moral chaos. There's the sin. The husband, they leave Moab.

The sons marry Moabite women. There's the sin. God judges the land. There is a famine. There's death as well. But then remember, Ruth and Naomi, they spent the whole chapter returning to Israel.

Repenting. It's the same word in Hebrew. Returning, repenting. Do you remember that last week we said, run to God in your pain? And that means, according to that diagram, that the very next thing we're to expect on the cycle is a deliverer.

And that's exactly who we meet in verse 1 of our passage. Now, Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a man of standing from the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

[3 : 15] And notice this. As soon as he's introduced in verse 1, notice in verse 2 and 3, he disappears again. And the story goes back to Ruth and Naomi. It's like the author is just introducing us to a heading.

Here's the deliverer. Just so we get our bearings as to where we're at on the cycle. And so to help us understand what we're to expect today.

You see, on the surface, this is a story about Ruth and Naomi and Boaz. But if you look behind the scenes, God will use this ordinary family to bring about an end to the cycle of sin and judgment and sin and judgment that has plagued his people.

And so please keep your handouts ready. We're at verse number 2. Thanks. I don't need that anymore. Verse 2. You remember last week.

You remember how impressive Ruth was. Remember she gave up everything to come to a foreign country and look after her mother-in-law. Today, she takes the initiative again.

[4 : 35] She gleans in the fields because they must find food. Gleaning, in case you don't know, gleaning is the Old Testament command where God said to the farmers, don't harvest right to the end of your fields.

Just leave the edges of your fields for poor people to come through and gather some grain. But in the time of the judges, when it's every man for himself, you'd struggle to find obedience to God's commands.

Much less any care for the poor. In fact, there's no telling what will happen to a single young female alone in the fields in rural Israel at a time like now.

Verse 3. As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. And even though Ruth doesn't know who this man is, she knows exactly where she stands in his society.

Boaz's own workers, in verse 6, they call her a Moabite from Moab, which is not a very nice thing to say. In fact, she's called a Moabite two other times in our story today, just to remind us that she's got no privilege in the land of Israel.

[5 : 49] And I think that's why she asks in verse 10, Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me a foreigner? And normally at this point, the Old Testament story, or this point of an Old Testament story, the Bible would make a comment on how beautiful she was.

That the bloke is utterly besotted by her, and that's why he's done all this good stuff for her. You see, that's what happens with Sarah and Rachel and Rebecca and Tamar, all these women.

But the thing that catches Boaz's eye is Ruth's character. Look at verse 11. I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, how you left your father and mother and your homeland, and came to live with a people you did not know before.

You see, it was Ruth's character that knocked his socks off, not her external beauty. And that reminded me of the 1 Peter passage, which Sue read for us.

There's a slide, there it is on your screen. I've highlighted some bits there. But when you look at the orange bits, doesn't that remind you of Ruth from our story today? A gentle and quiet spirit, it says, as Ruth acknowledges her low status with Boaz.

[7 : 09] At the bottom, it says, not giving way to fear. And there she is in a field by herself, gleaning because she's desperate to get food, doing what's right. She's trying to feed her mother-in-law.

You see, when Boaz looks at Ruth, he sees Ruth the way God does, her inner beauty. And isn't that a relief that that is how God sees his people?

The rat race of outward appearance, of external performance. It matters to God so much less than what's on the inside, our inner selves.

Martin Luther King, he famously had a dream that one day he would be judged not by the colour of his skin, but by the content of his character.

Isn't it a relief that that is exactly how our God sees us as well? Can you imagine if God judged us based on our outward appearance? The rat race of trying to keep up with the Joneses, of beauty and all that sort of palaver there.

[8 : 17] It is a relief that God looks at the inner self. And for Ruth in our story, twice today, someone calls her daughter, Boaz and Naomi.

But the question is, whose daughter is she? Well, one Peter seems to think that Ruth is Sarah's daughter. And of course, that is a scandalous thing to suggest.

A Moabite from Moab could be the daughter of Sarah. But that's only if you judge Ruth based on her outward appearance. But to God, she's very special because he's looking at her inner self. Boaz comments in verse 12 that she's taken refuge under the wings of God. That's a very odd phrase, taken the wings of God. In fact, it's only ever used one other time in the Bible by Jesus himself on the screen.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you. How often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. And you were not willing.

[9 : 23] You see, God wanted his people to take refuge in them under his wings. But they were not willing, not willing in the time of Jesus.

And certainly not in the time of the judges, where it's every man for himself, except for Ruth. See, Ruth seems to be the little chick of God.

The true daughter of Sarah. The true child of Abraham. Through whom all blessings flow. And that is remarkable to suggest that a Moabite from Moab can be more part of God's family than the Jews from Jerusalem, Jerusalem.

But this is the gospel, even way back then, to sinful Moabites from Moab. That no one is too far from being included into God's family.

Isn't that a relief that God looks at our inner self? Isn't it remarkable that the true children of Sarah and Abraham are the people of faith?

[10 : 31] Which, in our passage, means taking refuge under his wings. If Ruth is a very special woman, then she meets her match with this very special man.

That is Boaz. Last week I asked you, does anyone know someone called Ruth? Someone in your family. Does anyone know someone called Boaz? We all do, don't we?

There's Esther, Boaz's mummy at the back. In case you don't know, there's a little boy. He's actually somewhere in the building. There's a little boy, a member of our church family, called Boaz. And he's half Asian, he's half Australian. He's got little sandy coloured hair, so he's very cute. But I bet Esther in the back, I bet his mum hopes he grows up to be more than just a cutie, but a man of standing.

Just like his namesake in our story. And just like Ruth, after you see Boaz in action, I hope you too will wonder why more little boys aren't called Boaz these days.

[11 : 37] Just so you know, Boaz, he's a good Anglican. In verse 4, he gives the greeting of peace. Verse 4, he says, The Lord be with you, and the harvesters say, And I'll say with you.

Now they say, The Lord bless you, which I think that's exactly the same thing. You see, like Ruth, Boaz has a worthy character. You can tell, he obeys God's words, because he's happy to have people gleaning in his fields.

In verse 5, he says to the harvesters, he says, Who does that young woman belong to? In other words, Who is taking care of Ruth? The answer is, No one. And so Boaz takes it upon himself. Why? Because he is the deliverer. Remember? Look at verse 8. My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field, and don't go away from here.

Stay here with the women who work for me. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you.

[12 : 42] You see, it's not that Boaz fancies Ruth per se, but he's trying to protect her. It's not a safe time. Notice also that he's trying to provide for her.

Verse 14, At mealtime, Boaz said to her, Come over here. Have some bread. Dip it in the wine vinegar. He also offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. Ruth, she was allowed to glean the leftovers according to the law. But Boaz arranges that the good stalks be accidentally left just in front of her, so she could gather them too.

Verse 17, She gathers up as much as an ephah, which in new money is about 13 kilos. Ever walked home from Woolies with 13 kilos of flour?

I don't know how keen you are, but consider that some homework. 13 kilos of rice or flour, whichever one you want. See how heavy it is. That's how much Ruth was given that day.

[13 : 45] See, Boaz not only kept the letter of the law, he kept the spirit of the law too, abundantly providing more than she could carry. You see, Boaz has not only protected her, he's provided for her as well.

And that's basically what Ruth tells Naomi when she goes home that evening. Verse 19, Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she'd been working.

The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz, she said. Ah, the Lord bless him, Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, he has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.

She added, that man is our close relative. He's one of our guardian redeemers. Boaz prayed that Ruth would be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel.

He had no idea that God would use him to answer his own prayer. You see, the arrival of Boaz on the scene is good news for the women. He is the deliverer.

[14 : 45] But as Bible believers, we know what's going on behind the scenes. It just so happens that Ruth happened to be in the one field that Boaz owned.

He just so happens to be a man who's standing to protect her. Boaz just happens to be one of Naomi's relatives, a guardian redeemer, no less. All Ruth wanted was some grain and to get home safely that evening.

But there's been an unusual kindness following Ruth everywhere she's gone all day long. It is a picture of God's wings wrapped around the one who takes refuge in her.

Do you see that? If the big idea in chapter one was return to the Lord with your pain, the reason why is chapter two, because he carries and cares for people who take refuge in him.

He covers you with his wings. Do you see how those two chapters work together? Remember last week, Naomi, she said, call me Mara, call me bitter.

[15 : 53] She was struggling in her pain. She thought the Lord was against her, but today her sweetness has returned. Verse 20, she's a picture of joy.

The Lord bless him. He has not stopped showing kindness. Verse 21, he even said, stay with his workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.

And that means the women have got a few more months of grain, a few more months of food. And that means God has brought these women to a time of peace, a time of rest.

Remember at the time of her pain, Naomi thought God was against her. She couldn't see that he was providing for her the whole time.

She still can't see how all these things are working. She still can't see how the guardian redeemer will work itself out. But stay tuned for that next week.

[16 : 49] But here's the thing. Despite God's provision today, Boaz deliverance today, harvests eventually end, don't they?

Our chapter actually finishes on a very sobering note. See, verse 22 hints at danger. There is still danger for young women who are alone in the fields.

In fact, the very last line is quite ominous. The very last line says, she lived with her mother-in-law, which does not mean they lived happily ever after. It actually means we still have two widows.

Two widows. Remember Boaz? He asked, who does that young woman belong to? Who's taking care of Ruth? The answer is at the end, no one. We still have two widows.

Life is on the edge for them. Israel is still a dangerous place. And while we don't want to discount the way God has cared for them in the passage or the way he's provided their daily bread, these ladies need much more than just a few months worth of grain.

[17 : 59] Yes, God's provision, generous, abundant, but at the end of the day, their peace is only temporary because harvests eventually end.

They're only safe until the next famine strikes, until the next lot of sin in Israel, until the next family member dies, until they next run away from God in their grief. These women need a provision.

They need a security that will last. Otherwise, they're on an endless cycle of sin and judgment and sin and judgment with temporary peace at best.

And God's answer to the endless cycle of sin and judgment is a king. I don't know if you know that. God's answer is a king.

You see, a king means order and the rule of law. A king means longevity because it's succession and dynasty and monarchy. A king can lead people back to God.

[18 : 56] He can lead them in the ways, in God's ways, so they walk rightly in his ways rather than every man for himself. That was the problem in Israel.

There was no king there. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Without a king, at best, any peace, any rest will be temporary. And you get what you see right throughout the Old Testament. It's great for five minutes until they sin again. And then it all goes badly. And I'm trying desperately hard not to give away the ending of Ruth. So, I know you probably all know how it ends, but don't read ahead.

But I guess as Christians, in a way, we've already read ahead, haven't we? We know how the whole big story ends, don't we? You see, if Ruth points us back to Sarah, then Boaz points us forward to Jesus.

Could you see behind the scenes today? Could you see Jesus' fingerprints? Could you see the similarities between Jesus and Boaz in our story?

[20 : 00] Jesus, he also protects the vulnerable. He calls them sheep without a shepherd. Jesus also looks after a foreign woman. He also calls her daughter.

Jesus also provides bread abundantly. Now, 5,000 people, no less. He also provides them more so they've had their fill as much as they can handle.

Jesus is also a man of standing. He is also a deliverer. He is also a redeemer. But unlike Boaz, only Jesus' death pays for our sin.

Only Jesus takes our judgment. Only King Jesus breaks the cycle of sin and judgment. That is the reason that we are not judged or condemned as we deserve, as our sins deserve.

Do you ever wonder, why is it in the Old Testament they do something wrong and God whacks them straight away and we continue to do things wrong and nothing happens to us? It's because someone has broken the cycle of sin and judgment and taken those things for us.

[21 : 09] The answer is a king, a King Jesus. And sure, if we look at everything we have, we have more than our daily bread.

God has given us more than he asked for. The picture in the passage is one of wrapping someone in God's wings. But these provisions will fail eventually.

Our health won't last. In Jesus, there is something different, something longer, something more permanent. In Jesus, there is a future.

That's what the guardian redeemer was supposed to bring when you hear about it next week. In Jesus, you get forgiveness and reconciliation, relationship, new creation, a secure future, all of which will outlast all of these material blessings that we have.

When you see the ending of our passage today, you see two women alone and vulnerable in the world. Their precarious position reminds us of what Jesus has broken us out of.

[22 : 20] An endless cycle of sin and then judgment, sin and then judgment. When we look at these women, it pushes us to ask, what is God doing about a king?

And as the story goes on, please watch how God uses this very little, very ordinary family to bring about the origins of a king. I'm going to pray now.

There's enough there for us to pray with. Father God, we trust you.

We trust you enough to run to you with our pain. We thank you that you're the one who hides us under his wings. Father, we praise you for all the protection, all the provision you've given us.

We praise you that you don't look at us the way the world does, but you look at our inner selves.

Father, we thank you for King Jesus, a proper deliverer. And we thank you that Jesus breaks us out of this cycle of sin and judgment.

[23 : 25] And when we look at the precarious positions in the Old Testament, please, Father, would it remind us of how much we have in Jesus. We pray these things in his name.

Amen. Amen.