

The Wings of Refuge

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[0 : 00] Okay, we're in week two of a four-week series in Ruth. Let me just give you a catch-up on chapter one of Ruth.

Ruth has four chapters, one chapter a week. Week two, chapter two. Let's talk about chapter one first. Okay, so in Ruth, chapter one, it's all about this...

At the start, it was all about this woman called Naomi who was really, you know, beaten up by life. I mean, at some point, her life was probably very good. She had a husband, a couple of kids, boys, which back in the days, that was what you wanted because it was through the men that you kept your land and sort of the family name, et cetera.

And she lived in Bethlehem, which is apparently nice. Bethlehem, I think, means bread basket or something along those lines. It was apparently a very fertile place, so things were looking pretty good.

And then a famine came, and it all went sideways for Naomi. Her hubby, because of the famine, her husband, moved her whole family to Moab, which is a pagan country, which was...

[1 : 09] It's a bit dodgy, moving your family to a pagan country. And then the husband died. The boys... You remember... What were their names?

Sick and Annihilation is the English translations of their names. They got married to local girls, which is kind of a bit dodgy as well. But anyway, they got married to local girls. They were married for 10 years and no kids, which, again, is a bit of a disaster in the culture of the time in terms of carrying on your family name, keeping your land, et cetera.

Right, no kids. And then the boys died. And then the boys died. So Naomi was left in this incredibly vulnerable position, by-self, pagan country, no male heirs.

And so she wanted to send her girls home. And one of the girls said, no, I'm going to stay with you. I'm going to stick with you. So there was some hope. There was some hope in her life.

The famine in Judah had ended. She'd heard about that. And she had this really devoted daughter-in-law called Ruth, who had decided she would go back with her.

[2 : 15] But despite all these really good things, well, two sort of good things, Naomi, at the end of Ruth, was quite bitter. In fact, she said, you know, God is against me. God's hand is against me.

She was so bitter, she couldn't see some of the good stuff that was actually going on. All right, in chapter 2, we'll see that this family is blessed in such an amazing way that even Naomi can't miss this this time.

So let's have a lookie. It would be helpful to have the Bible open. Okay, verse 1. And Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of a clan of Amalek, whose name was Boaz.

Yes. Okay. In this chapter, Naomi sort of fades into the background a little bit. It's more about this guy, Boaz, and Ruth, her daughter-in-law. And so chapter 2 introduces Boaz kind of pretty early on. So we're going to get a bit of a feel for who the guy is. Verse 2. And Ruth, in my bite, said to Naomi, let me go in a field and glean among the ears of grain. Okay. What's that all about?

[3 : 22] In the ancient Near East, it was kind of, it was pretty agrarian, right? People had field, grew stuff, you know, ate it. But if you're poor, that's a problem if you don't have land.

You can't grow your own food, right? Now, there was a law, one of God's laws was about gleaning. And what it meant was that you could go after the people who owned the land or went through the field and, you know, took the stuff.

Whatever was left on the ground, poor people could come through and they could pick it up. So that's good, right? Let me actually read the passage from Leviticus 19 because it's pretty cool.

Verse 9. When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to the edges, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare,

neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard.

You shall leave them for the poor and for the sows. I am the Lord your God. So this is a way of getting food if you don't have land. But it is living day to day and it is dangerous work and it is back-breaking work and it is humbling, humbling work.

[4 : 36] And Ruth, wanting to provide for Naomi, said, I'm going to go and glean in a field. Is that okay? And Naomi said, yes, okay, go my daughter.

And it must have been very hard for Naomi to say that, knowing kind of how hard it was going to be and the risks she was taking. Verse 3. And she happened to come, that's Ruth, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who is this worthy man who was a relative of Naomi's dead husband.

Okay. Now Ruth didn't know that he was a relative. It says she happened to come to the part of the field. That's a pretty awesome happening. I mean, later on, the woman realized that this was the provision of God.

But it was just kind of this, I'll talk more about this soon, this kind of like, that's a field, I'll kind of, I'll go to that one. I remember when I've, I graduated from Regent College about four years ago, I think.

And when I first started thinking about Regent College, I was in New Zealand, I was visiting a friend of mine who'd been to Regent College, and there was, she said, oh, show us some photos of the campus.

[5 : 51] You know, the campus, right? It's just like, it's about the size of this building, really. And so I'm looking through these photos, and in the photos, there was this quite pretty girl in one of the photos.

And I said, who's that? And my friend Sue said, that's a friend of mine called Amy. I went to school with her. You know what? I think she still lives in Vancouver.

You should look her up when you get to Vancouver. So, I mean, that's my wife. Just cut a very long short, right? That was a pretty good happening.

That was a pretty good, oh, it's kind of weird how that all turned out, didn't it? That turned out pretty good for me. But it was God's providence, right? It was God's providence. And providence is a really big theme in Ruth here.

According to the Bible, this is what providence means, okay? According to the Bible, God did not just wind up the universe like a little Japanese robot toy, right? And just set it going and just sort of see how it all went.

[6 : 58] No, providence means that God enters into a relationship with his creation. Providence means God guides history to bring about his purposes, his intentions.

This does not mean we don't have free will. This does not mean we are controlled. The Bible teaches that God is in control.

It also teaches that we have free will. God is in control. We have free will. And how that works out is kind of like this. Right?

I have no idea how that works, basically. That part of... Have you ever seen those really old maps? You know, like maps from the 1700s or something. And you can see they've got Europe pretty good because Europe kind of knew what was going on. And then you've got like America, you know.

[8 : 00] And then you go to the South Pacific where I come from. It's just kind of like... There'd be like one coast or something. And then it's all kind of... There's nothing. It's all blurry. They kind of know...

They know that there's something going on there. They just don't know really what's going on there. There are some parts of theology which are like Australasia, okay?

On a 17th century map. You kind of know something's going. You just don't quite know how it works. It's a mystery, right? But the Bible just... The only way we can think about it is this. It affirms both free will and it affirms that God is in complete control.

And I think that should be a comforting thing to us. Let me make a few more observations about God's providence. One, it looks like ordinary life. Most of the time.

You will have amazing epiphanal moments where God tells you to do something or doesn't tell you to do something or tells you not to do something. But most of the time, God's providence just looks like ordinary life.

[9 : 04] And it's only in retrospect, when we look back, that we can see God's fingerprints all over it. Two, providence does not mean good times. Folks, as we go through Ruth, we will see God's providence is affirmed when things are going really terrible.

And we will see God's providence affirmed when things are going great. When there was a famine, when Ruth lost her husband and her kids, there was this, yeah, God did this.

She wasn't happy about it, but she said God did that. This was, God was in control of the situation. And then later on when, you know, Boaz is out as a, you know, a relative and it's all really cool. It's like, yep, God, this is God. God did this. And I think that's how we should view it. We should view... We should view as God being in control in the good and the bad of our lives.

And that is hard sometimes, I know. That is difficult. But if we verbalize the idea that God is only in control when good things are happening, we've turned, you know, God is the fairy godmother, right?

[10 : 16] That, you know, pops in for the occasional positive sighting in our life. This is not the God of the Bible. This is not the master of the universe. I can't sugarcoat that for you.

That is just what the Bible teaches. And it is good. Because it would be awful to think that God was only in control when good things are happening. Because it would mean that God is absent in the dark times in your life, which he is not.

Okay, let's move on. Verses four to seven. Just slide your eyes over that. So Ruth is in this field. And Boaz turns up.

I like to matchmake my friends. And I've got a good feeling about these guys right here. Ruth and Boaz. So Boaz turns up. And you'll see in verse four, he says to his servants, the Lord be with you. So he's an Anglican, which is good. I mean, it's just right there. I mean, I don't know how. There is no way for you not to come to that conclusion. Well, at the very least, Boaz is somebody who follows God.

[11 : 34] So he takes an interest in Ruth straight away. We don't know why he takes this interest in Ruth. Perhaps Ruth was beautiful. I think it's probably more that God's providence. God, something happened in Boaz's heart and he took this very special interest in Ruth.

So the servant, so Boaz says, who's this girl? And the servant in charge explains it. And we learn a couple of things about Ruth. We learn that she's very humble. You know, she didn't just assume she could glean.

She says in verse seven, please let me glean. And that she was there all day. She was a very hard worker. Verse seven again, she said, from early morning until now, except for a short break, she was working like a dog, you know.

And she's also a very courageous woman because she did this at great risk. It would seem that her commitment to Naomi's God and trusting in him meant, well, did not mean that she would live passively that.

For her it meant, if you're living quite boldly. All right, verses eight to 16. Slide your eyes over there. Scan that, would you? You can see now, this is kind of like Boaz's speech to Ruth.

[12 : 41] And here Boaz says some cool stuff, really beautiful things to Ruth. He says, he goes, okay, you can stay here and glean. Don't go anywhere else. And he's saying that because he wants to protect her.

Okay? So stay here, stay in my field. He also says, listen, why don't you hang out with the girl servants? It'd be nice, but a community, have some conversations. He says to the guys, Boaz says to the guy, the guy servants, he says, listen, leave her alone.

And I can only assume because the risk of, you know, sexual assault was quite, was quite big. And then he says to the guys who are, who are doing the harvesting, because they'd like, you know, cut the sheaves and put them up into bundles in their arms, right?

And he says to them, listen, just grab a few chunks every now and then and just, out of your bundles, like the good stuff, you know, just chuck it on the ground so that she can, you know, she can get it afterwards when she's cleaning.

This is, oh, and then he invites her to sit with her, sit with him for lunch. You know, this foreign woman, because it keeps repeating that she's a Moabite, this foreign, strange woman who probably didn't belong at his table.

[13 : 47] He says, come and sit with me, you know, dip your morsel. This is great. We're all family here kind of thing. The, the letter of the Levitical law here, Leviticus 19, which talks about gleaning,

Boaz didn't just sort of like make sure he could tick the box, right?

Like he was over the top. He was crazy, over the top generous here. He makes sure that she is safe, that she has tons of food and that she's got some community. His, his godliness is apparent and real.

It's, this is a man who is not just following the letter of the law. This is a man who doesn't just know this kind of rule and goes like, oh, you know, kind of just, oh, ah, this is, oh, you know, he's not just, you know, he's not just kind of letting it happen because he kind of has to.

This is a guy whose, whose faith, who's, has invaded his life. This is, it's kind of like, it's kind of like when young people come and talk to me about sex sometimes, right?

Stay with me here, folks. Here is a question that people ask. How far can I go before I get married?

[15:14] It's a very reasonable question. However, if that is your major concern within this area of human sexuality, in terms of how you conduct yourselves, if that's your major concern, you have missed the point of God's gift of sexuality.

If the owner of land begrudgingly allows a poor person to glean, they have completely missed the point of God's law here.

The point of the law is clearly is, is that we have a God who is incredibly concerned about the poor, about the landless, about the widows.

And he wants you to share that concern, to live out that concern in your lives. And this is what we see in Boaz. He's not just living out the law kind of mathematically.

He sees the heart of the law and he's fulfilling that. So Ruth is incredibly overwhelmed by this, right?

She stammers out, like, you know, like, why are you doing all this for me?

[16:30] I don't understand. This is verse 11 and 12. And he says, listen, I've heard about all the stuff you've done for your mother-in-law and how you've sought refuge under the wings of God.

Which is such a beautiful line, eh? You've sought refuge under the wings of God. It's kind of unique in the Bible, actually, because it portrays God and the feminine as this, like, this female, this mother bird who's protecting her chicks under her wings.

I think it's interesting that Boaz interprets her journey as a faith journey and not as this kind of just wandering Moabite woman who's trying to make ends meet, you know? He interprets it as a faith journey.

And that's a cue for us to interpret Ruth's journey as a faith journey and not just a story of kind of human loyalty. And then he talks about, in verse 12 there, he talks about God repaying Ruth and Naomi for their loss.

And it's, he's saying that, you know, I pray that God will restore you what's been lost, what's been taken from you. I pray that God's going to restore that to you.

[17:34] And at this point, he doesn't realize that he is going to feature majorly in the answer to that prayer that he's praying. To all this, Ruth says this, she goes, you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I'm not one of your servants.

Let me say that again. You have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant. I think this is the first hint of Ruth grieving as well. You know, up until now, she resents as pretty brave and courageous, et cetera.

Naomi has gone a little bit off the rails in her bitterness kind of early on and Ruth is just pretty staunch. And here I think we just get this tiny, tiny little window, right? And to her heart.

And it's a heart that is grieving. It's a heart that's shaken. You know, this whole thing's been really hard for her. Verse 17 to 22, Ruth heads home with a massive amount of food.

Huge amount of food. Months worth of food. And Naomi must have been worried sick, I think, because in verse 22 she says, it's good, my daughter, that you go out with this young woman lest in another field you be assaulted.

[18:41] I remember when I got my driver's license when I could go out late at night and, you know, I'm like, in New Zealand you can get your license at like 15 and there weren't any restrictions.

You know, I could drive a, you know, a truck full of babies around the country at 2 a.m. or something. You know, you can just do whatever you want, right? So, you know, you get your license, you're kind of free, you can go out and visit your friends.

Whenever I'd come home, no matter what time of the night I'd come home, my mother's bedroom was at the front of the house and the light was always on, right? No matter what time it was always on and as soon as I put the key in the door the light would go off.

She'd just wait up until I was home and I was thinking about that when I was thinking about Naomi here that this assault is a major concern for her. It must have been very hard for her sitting at home waiting for Ruth, wondering what's going on.

Now, Ruth explains what happened all day, tells the big story and says, Boaz drops the Boaz bomb and Naomi's like, Boaz?

[19 : 47] I know that guy. For some reason she forgot about Boaz and this other relative as we learn in chapter 3. She forgot about Boaz so high fives all around because this is somebody that can help them.

This is a relative this is what's called a kinsman redeemer. We'll talk about more that next week, right? And then in verse 20 she says, May he be blessed by the Lord whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead.

Kindness, that's that hesed word again we talked about last week. That loyalty word. We'll hear more about that next week. Now the passage ends on a pretty it's kind of a it's sort of it's down chapter 1 it gets huge in chapter 2 and right at the end of chapter 2 I feel like it kind of like drops off a little bit in terms of its happiness factor.

Verse 23 So she kept close to the woman of Boaz gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests and she lived with her mother-in-law. So these guys have experienced the mercy of God right?

Great generosity of God. But it's not a total reversal of fortunes is it? When they are still women alone living in a very patriarchal society they're still at risk of abuse and assault they can't keep their lands family lands they have no male ears which means that the threat of familial extinction is still hovering over their heads like the sword of Democles right?

[21 : 38] You know hovering over your heads for the classics people. It's not I mean it's probably you shouldn't use Greek mythology in a sermon by the way to affirm your point but you kind of know the story of the sword hanging over the head right?

And this guy was being punished right? Anytime that God said I'll drop the sword or the axe or whatever it is. So it's kind of the subsistence day to day living for these guys. Okay some final thoughts.

Let me make an assumption as I wrap up though. If Ruth has the assumption Ruth is a microcosm of the gospel okay? The big story of the gospel. This is why I say that.

These guys the story of Ruth from chapter 1 to chapter 4 is the story of transition right? From a story of great reversal from the threat of family extinction family name family land gone to this miracle child this amazing child who will be the great grandfather of David.

From a famine to an excess of food from desperate times to great security. So Ruth is a story of great reversal and that's a fabulous way of describing what the gospel is.

[22 : 54] You know from death to life etc. We learnt about that when we studied Ruth you remember. So if Ruth is a microcosm of the gospel then this is the point end of chapter 2 this is the point where I think we live.

We are end of chapter 2 people. We are living with our mother-in-laws. We have been saved from death haven't we?

We're saved from death like Ruth and Naomi because of the work of Christ on the cross we have saved from death but life is hard. We haven't experienced a full and complete reversal.

This is going to come for these guys. for Ruth and Naomi. Boaz is going to marry Ruth. That's a spoiler for the next couple of weeks. Their life is going to be great.

They'll get the mail in. There will be a complete reversal of their fortunes so it's going to come for them. Our complete reversal of fortunes will come when Christ returns and makes all things new.

[24 : 01] And we pray for that right? But like I said we're not there. We're chapter 2. We're living with our mother-in-law people. So how do we live?

How do we live as chapter 2 people? I'll finish with three sentences. Three sentences. How do we live as chapter 2 people? One, well, live like Naomi who sees the goodness of God in her life.

Folks, look for the providence of God and see it in ordinary things. So live like Naomi.

Two, live like Ruth. Live boldly. Live courageously. Live humbly. Work hard with an expectation, with a knowing that God is loyal to you.

But knowing that that does not mean that life is easy. So live like Naomi, live like Ruth, and finally live like Boaz. When you think about the laws of God, when you think about the life that God has

called you to do, don't sort of mathematically try and fulfill those laws.

[25 : 10] See the character and heart of God in them and ask the Spirit to help you live your life participating in God's great reversal.

Amen.