

Ruth's Redeemer

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Date: 19 September 2021

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everybody. Good morning. Good morning. It's really nice to see you. If you are brand new with us this morning, my name is Aaron. I'm one of the ministers on staff.

I'd love to meet you straight afterwards. I won't ask you any weird questions or make you commit to anything. I just want to see your face and say hello. So we are in Ruth chapter 2.

Let me give you a quick catch up from Ruth chapter 1. So this little family leaves Bethlehem to go to this very pagan city called Moab to escape a famine.

All the men in the family die. So Ruth chapter 1 ends with this woman Naomi in a very desperate situation. She's lost her husband. She's lost her sons.

And she's returning to Bethlehem with one daughter-in-law, Ruth. We're also introduced in this first chapter to the main themes of the book, which are providence, the providence of God.

[0 : 5 9] And secondly, hesed, which is a Hebrew word which means loyalty or loving kindness or covenant love. It's translated lots of different ways.

And we'll see those two themes in this chapter. Okay. I was going to write quite a long introduction, but I think we should just get straight into it because it's just beautiful and rich. So we're just going to jump straight in here.

So Ruth chapter 2 begins, you heard Mark read it to us, with an introduction to Boaz. Like one verse introduction to Boaz. Apparently a really great guy.

And then it straight away, straight away goes to Ruth and Naomi. And so the listener is left thinking, well, well, well. That's quite interesting.

I wonder what role this man will play later on. So then we go back to Ruth. And Ruth says to Naomi, I'm going to go out and do some gleaning. So we might ask the question, what is gleaning?

[1 : 5 8] So in the ancient Near East, this was an agrarian, you know, sort of society. Families had land and they grew food. But what about the landless poor? Well, under God's law, Leviticus 19, after the landowners had gathered the harvest, the poor could walk through the fields and pick up the leftovers.

It was a wonderful provision. But getting food this way was living day to day. It was hard work. It was dangerous work. It was humbling work. It was, yeah, it was, it was, it was tricky.

The closest modern day equivalent would be picking up aluminium cans. Or, sorry, what is, what is, what is, I've got that one. Alumin, aluminum, aluminum, aluminum, aluminum cans.

So, anyway, that's gleaning. So, Ruth says to Naomi, I'm just going to have at it. I'm going to go gleaning. And Naomi says, okay, go for it.

Now we might wonder why Ruth doesn't, why Naomi doesn't go with her. And we just, we don't know. You might remember from chapter one that she told people, Naomi told people to stop calling her Naomi and call her Mara, which means bitter.

[3 : 11] Perhaps Naomi didn't join Ruth because she was immobilized by her grief. It happens, but that is a guess. So, off Ruth goes to glean.

And don't you just love her. Isn't she brilliant? I think she's brilliant. She's one of my most favourite people in the world, actually, right now. She is not, she is not sitting around waiting for a miracle.

She's out looking for work. And work is, it's a spiritual thing to do. She's out in search of an opportunity to provide for her little family. And verse two says she was going out hopeful of finding favour.

We'll come back to that. Verse three, listen to it carefully. So, she set out and went out and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz.

Did you catch that? She happened to come to this field. This she just happened line. In the original language, if you translate it literally, it would be, And chance, chanced, that she came across the field of Boaz.

[4 : 21] Or, as luck would have it, would be another way of saying it. Now, the writer of Ruth here is being very, very cheeky. Is being very ironic.

Because everybody listening to this story at this point would be like, Come on. There's no chance here. This is not a coincidence. This is the Lord.

The Lord was in this. And, of course, they're right. So, what I want us to do now is I want to just take a moment to consider and think about God's providence.

And what Ruth is teaching us here. Again, it's one of the major themes of the whole book. Providence says that God is in charge of everything. He is in control of everything.

There is not an inch of the universe outside of his care. And one of the things that Ruth teaches us, a very helpful thing, is that mostly it would seem God's providence plays itself out in the ordinariness of life.

[5 : 25] Just because you don't have these amazing epiphanal moments. Just because you don't see lots of miracles in your life. It does not mean God is not in control. God works in the ordinary.

And if you looked over your life, you might be able to catch moments. See moments where you see the fingerprints of God in a series of what at the time seemed like very commonplace events.

For example, I got a job at St. John's in 2008. It was my last year at Regent. I wasn't going to St. John's.

I didn't do Artizo. So I heard about the job because a friend of my wife called Joella, who's watching. Hello, Joella. I asked her permission. She lives in America now.

A friend of my wife called Joella called me up and said to me, I work at this great church, but I have to head back to the States. You should apply for my job. And I said, oh, that's weird. Anglican.

[6 : 27] But I wasn't meant to say that last bit. But perhaps the Lord is in this. Again, I was just finishing up Regent. I wasn't even sure if I was going to do pastoral ministry.

I did know, though, that my wife had said to me before we got married, Aaron, just so you know, the last thing I want to be in the world is the wife of an Anglican priest. So, sorry.

And just one more excursus on top of this excursus. This is a sub excursus. So I'm talking to this guy I met in the playground about a month ago. He was from Mexico.

And we were talking about, we haven't started talking about faith. And he said to me, we have a saying in Mexico. And it's, if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans. Thanks. But that's brilliant.

So anyway, where was I? I need to get back to the first excursus. All right. So Joella told me about the job. I applied for this part-time job.

[7 : 28] I got it to my great surprise. Now, how did Joella end up at St. John's a few years before that? Well, it was because of a relationship she was in. It ended and it was awkward being in the same church with this guy.

So she came to St. John's and ended up working here. All that to say. Why is it that I'm an Anglican priest standing in front of you now?

It's because Joella Erickson broke up with a boyfriend in 1999. And I am so grateful they did.

This place has been tremendously good to me and my family. Friends, I think we all have these stories if we look. As we reflect on our life, we will see the hand of God in situations that often, at the time, they just look like ordinary life.

And it's good to know, isn't it? It's good to know God is in control. It's really good to know. We're not bouncing around like a plastic bottle in the ocean. Your life is not determined by chance.

[8 : 39] God's providence is like this warm duvet you can pull over you at night and tell yourself as you go to sleep. God has ordered it all in His perfect wisdom.

And I can rest in that. He's ordered it all. The good things, the hard things, and the commonplace things. This is true. You know, unfortunately, I think sometimes Christians, we only verbalize the fact that God is in control when very good things happen to us, right?

We do it. And when we do that, we have turned God into fairy godmother instead of the master of the universe. We have these folks living in my basement suite who are Christians.

They're refugees from Syria. I think I might have mentioned them to you before. A year or two back, they got some really great news from immigration. And we were celebrating in the backyard. And I said, God is good.

Because I thought I'm a pastor. I should say something like that at the time, you know. God is good. And my friend said, no, no, no, no, no. He said, this is my friend Azar, who's the father. He said, even if I was still living in Syria in some bombed out house, God is still good.

[9 : 47] And it was a rebuke. And it was a good one. One more thing before we get back to our story. A question. Does belief in providence, might that cause us to live passively?

Or might that cause us to be over-anxious about every single little decision we make in life? And here we have the wonderful example of Ruth. Here is a woman who trusted in the Lord. She lived boldly.

She lived with initiative. She just got it there amongst it. I love her. We're going to say more about that in a moment. Let's move on. So verse 4, she's in the field.

And Boaz turns up. And he says, the Lord be with you to his workers. So the first thing we learn about him is that he is an Anglican. That's positive.

At the very least, it's an indication that he is a man who follows the Lord. Boaz takes an interest in Ruth straight away. And he says, who's this? And the servant in charge tells Boaz what's been happening.

[10 : 51] And you will remember from the reading that Boaz was incredibly kind to her. He says, stay with my people in my field for protection. It's a hint of the danger attached to this work of gleaning.

He feeds her. And he even tells the harvesters to purposely drop sheaths of food on the ground for her to pick up. Ruth heads back to Naomi with about 15 kilograms of food plus a doggy bag for dinner.

She gets home. She says to Naomi, this long explanation, and then says, I met this really great guy. His name is Boaz. Which Naomi blows your mind.

And she says, he's a close relative. He's actually a redeemer. He's the redeemer for the family in verse 20. So what is this redeemer concept Naomi is talking about? Well, a redeemer was a family member who had done quite well for themselves, who had wide responsibility to the extended family.

For example, they would buy back land for a family if the family had had to sell it for whatever reason. Or they would buy back a family member from slavery if that family member had had to sell themselves into slavery to free up, to pay for a debt.

[12 : 02] In the family of Elimelech, who Naomi's husband who had died, the redeemer job was Boaz. So it would seem things were turning around for Naomi and Ruth right then.

I mean, that's the basic story of chapter 2. It ends with Ruth and Naomi still living together. So it's not a full reversal, but it sounds quite hopeful, does it? But we're not finished yet.

Remember the two main themes of the book. Providence and Hesed. I think we've already had a pretty good crack at talking about Providence this morning. So let's just take a couple of moments and think about Hesed again.

Hesed. And we'll do that by looking at the two main characters for just a minute each. So where do we see Hesed, love, and Ruth in this chapter? Well, she was incredibly loving and loyal to her mother-in-law, Naomi.

It's actually the first thing that attracts Boaz to her. Verse 11 and 12. Do you see what he recognizes in her?

[13 : 26] And that last piece of verse 12 here. Ruth's trust in the Lord and care for her mother-in-law, that's what drove her care for her mother-in-law, was her trust in the Lord.

We also learn that she was a hard worker. And there was a special character to that hard work, which we'll explain here. The site manager had told Boaz that this woman had been working all day.

So she showed initiative. She was willing to get stuck in. She was just having at it. She wasn't waiting around for something to happen. She shows initiative. But it was an initiative that was willing to risk to provide for her mother-in-law.

There are a number of hints in our passage that this was dangerous work. But she was willing to put herself in harm's way because of that loyalty. If you've been to an Anglican wedding, when you get to the vows, for better for worse, for rich and poor, on sickness and health, the death's worth apart.

The final line is, this is my solemn vow. Jeremy Graham, who's doing the, what's it called? What are they doing this morning? He's doing the catechism class at the back there.

[14 : 44] Jeremy Graham has a 200-year-old prayer book in his office. And I've looked this up. I looked this up a couple of months ago. If you go to the wedding service and you go to the lines, the vows, the rich and poor, for better for worse, on sickness and health, the last line after that is not, this is my solemn vow.

The last line, does anyone know this, the last line? It's, I plight thee my troth. I plight thee my troth. Troth, troth just means vow. Plight, though, you know what that means, don't you?

It means danger. So you say your vows, and at the end of your vows, you say, basically, I am willing to walk into danger with you. Isn't that brilliant?

This is what hesed love looks like. It's risky love. It's risky loyalty. Ruth did hesed in those fields because her family needed food. She was out there hoping to find favor, but she went out there willing to do the hard yards, willing to risk.

It's risky love. This does not mean she was bolshy or arrogant. She was a humble woman. When Boaz first showed kindness to her in verse 10, she bowed down and says, Why have I found favor in your eyes that you should take notice of me since I'm a foreigner?

[16 : 00] She didn't go into these fields feeling like anyone owed her anything. She went in hopeful and humble. Humble. I read this week that humility is the opposite of a sense of entitlement.

I think that's brilliant. No entitlement here. Just hope, hard work, humility. Humble. Okay. That was a lot of information. What's my big point?

Here's my big point. When you know the hesed love of God in your life, it produces character. It changes you.

That's my point. It changes you. I had a mate of mine back in New Zealand called Jeremy Smith. And he used to like to give the lads advice on romance.

And it was good advice. He would say, when you're thinking about dating somebody, when you're thinking about a woman, when you're thinking about choosing a wife, if that's going to be your journey, he would say, don't put looks at the top of your list.

[17 : 02] He goes, looks fade. He would say, don't put personality at the top either. It was a surprise to us. Don't put personality at the top. Personality can change. He said, at the top, he said, put character.

He said, put character. Character doesn't change. He said, and it's a sign that she knows God. That God has remade her heart.

Hesed love changes us. As we experience the hesed loyalty, love, loving kindness, and whether you want to translate it, when you experience that from God, it changes us.

We see it at Ruth. Hard work. Humility. Not entitlement and arrogance. Where do we see it in Boaz? Very quickly. He was the family redeemer, but still, he could have ignored Ruth.

He could have kicked her out of the field. I read this week, there were legal loopholes for redeemers that they could have used to advocate responsibility.

[18 : 01] He didn't do that. Nor did he do the bare minimum. He was over the top. He was comically generous in his generosity, wasn't he? He knew the gleaning law, Leviticus 19, but he didn't go off doing a calculation, asking himself, what's the bare minimum I can get away with serving this woman?

He did the spirit of the law, not just the letter. The law for gleaning wasn't just about, I can tick a box now. I've helped a poor person. I can move on with my life. No. The point of the law was God was very concerned about the welfare of the poor.

We should do our best in caring for them. That's what he did. That's the heart of the law that Boaz was fulfilling. There's a lot more to say, but I'll summarize here. Boaz and Ruth.

God's hesed love had invaded their life, and it was bearing fruit in how they lived. That's how we know they believed it.

Let me finish up here. For those of you who like action points, here's a couple. Here's a few. Our lives can feel very unpredictable.

[19 : 13] Our lives can feel like they are solely contingent on our decisions. But friends, let me just remind you, God is sovereign over all, every inch of your life.

Perhaps you could remind yourself that. Perhaps you could look back, and maybe, I have no guarantees, but maybe you can trace the fingerprints of God in some very ordinary parts of your story.

Do that, and just marvel, and rest in that knowledge as you look towards the rest of your life. Next, perhaps you could ask God to soften your heart to his hesed love, so that it would bleed out in the way you treat others, in the way you live.

I mean, this is what I've been thinking about this. Like, how, this week, how different would my life be if I faced it knowing that God is completely loyal to me with a love that is shocking and exceptional?

How different would I face the world I really believe that in my bones? And finally, we cannot hear this talk of a Redeemer in this story without thinking about Jesus, can we?

[20 : 26] Without thinking about the ultimate Redeemer that this story points to, and I'll simply say this. Friends, we have a Redeemer, and we come to Him like Ruth and Naomi.

We come to Him empty, and He saves us. We have a Redeemer. Let's just be astonished by that.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.