

Refuge

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Date: 12 July 2020

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[0 : 00] It's great to be with you again. My name is John Lau. I'm one of the interns here. We're in our second talk in the Book of Ruth.

Last week, Steve, our senior minister, pointed out as Bethlehem, God's promised land, meaning the house of bread, suffered famine because they disobeyed God.

A family went to Moab. They were planning to stay there for only a short while. But ended up staying for 10 years with their husband and the two sons died.

Naomi, with her daughter-in-law, Ruth, had now come back to Bethlehem to be a refugee in her own country. They came back for a better life, looking for a place where they can have security, sympathy, and support.

They found out that God knew they needed more than that, more than just a temporary refuge, and have a permanent refuge prepared for them in Boaz.

[1 : 06] God also knew what we need in our life and has given us Jesus as a permanent refuge for us. Please have your Bible open to Ruth chapter 2.

If you have access to our app, there will be an outline in there with my three points today, which is the refugees, the rich man, and the refuge.

Naomi and Ruth came back to Bethlehem. The whole town was stirred because of them. The people welcomed them with a homecoming party, and the next day, Ruth said to Naomi in verse 2, Let me go to the field and pick up the leftovers.

Leftover grain behind anyone whose eyes I find favor. I wonder where she got those ideas from, because she was referring to a system that God has set up to take care of all people in Leviticus, a system where during harvest, the harvester is not to go back to the field again.

They are to leave leftovers for the poor and the foreigner. Maybe it was during the welcoming party that they had talked about it. Here and there is a system, but not confident about how it worked and not sure it was true or not.

[2 : 34] What would be the best action that Ruth can take? She got up and went out to try to find the answers. Last week, we saw Ruth's faithfulness shown through her loyalty to Naomi.

This week, we will see a few more qualities of Ruth's faith. Firstly, she has a tried and tested faith. Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Ruth's faith is a willingness to take a step into the unknown, even into what is seemingly dangerous and futile. Ruth could have been harmed, as Naomi later told us.

But she went. Based on what she heard, Naomi did the same last week in Chapter 1, heading back to Bethlehem, based on hearing some good news.

Most refugees also left because of some good news. They went to a foreign place, hoping for a better life, somewhat wild thing for their lives.

[3 : 48] Based on the information about what God had promised all people, Ruth went out looking for a way to sustain herself and Naomi. Had you stepped out into the unknown, into uncertainty, hoping for a better life?

What was the promise that you were holding on to or trying to test out? How do you feel each step of the way? Let's see what happened to Ruth.

She went to a field, and that very first field belongs to her relative, Boaz. She asked the overseer to let her glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.

And they let her. As she said to Naomi, she asked to follow along with the harvester. The system that God had set up was for the poor and foreigner to wait until the harvester finished for the day, then they can pick up the leftovers.

But she seems to be doing all she can do to get to the best position, not waiting for the end of the day. Maybe her survival instinct kicks in.

[5 : 04] I believe trying to get to the best position is why so many refugees and their children do better in life in a new country. They knew what it means to survive, and they were willing to try.

They were willing to ask questions that seem to be opportunistic or even offensive sometimes. If you want to be safe or stay alive, physically, but more importantly spiritually, we need to be sure that we are on the right way and the best way that we can get there and to ask questions and investigate.

God did not just put her in the right field at the first try. God put her in the best field, experiencing his full kindness.

Boaz allowed her to stay and get enough to take care of herself and Naomi. He did not rebuild the overseers and stop her from falling behind the harvester.

Instead, he had a conversation with her that offered more than food for survival. He offered what a refugee would want, security, a chance to improve herself, recognition and approval, and most importantly, a refuge.

[6 : 31] God knows we need those things, and he used Boaz to give them to Ruth. In verse 10, at this, she bowed down with her face to the ground.

She asked him, why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me, a foreigner? He explained it was because of the great things you had done for Naomi.

He finished by saying in verse 12, may the Lord repay you for what you have done. may you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

Then she replied, saying in verse 13, may I continue to find favor in your eyes, my Lord. You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant, though I do not have the standing of your servants.

He just gave her a high praise. Instead of thinking of how great and worthy she is, not patting her on back for how much she had sacrificed for Naomi, Ruth acknowledged instead that Boaz and the God of Israel were far more important and far more significant.

[7 : 52] That brings me to the second quality that I want to highlight, is Ruth has a humble and realistic faith. She was humble because she acknowledged that there was someone more significant than herself.

Ruth accepted her status as a foreigner or a servant who needed mercy from others. No matter how great her achievement was, she knew how she stands with others and with God, the ultimate provider.

Ruth has an other-centered heart that keeps her humble. Knowing what she did for her mother-in-law was approved by everyone, but approval is not worth her motivation.

She did it out of deep concern and deep care for Naomi. And her faith was realistic because Ruth gave Naomi the leftover after she had eaten enough.

She did not let herself go hungry and unable to work. She ate as much as she needed to keep working. And at the end of the day, she collected a ephah, which is 13 kilograms of grain.

[9 : 15] Ruth went out to confirm whether what she heard about God was real. She came back with food and a promise from Boaz. God gave her something substantial and tangible to hold on to when she set out to find out if what people said about God was real.

God gave her certainty in things that she could not see, not just for herself. God guided Ruth to experience his blessing and through her brought his blessing to Naomi.

Often, when someone stepped out in faith, it would end up not just that person got to experience the greatness of God. they would bring blessing to those that needed the reassurance from God more than them.

As Ruth went out, she got to experience God's word come true because God put her where she needed to be. But what about the other refugees?

The other refugee in the story was Naomi. Back in verse 2, when she told Ruth, go ahead, my daughter. did she intend to join her?

[10 : 34] We could not be sure of the reason or the reason why she did not, but we knew she stayed at home. Ruth had such a great experience by going and God blessed her tremendously.

Naomi did not go, but God still can bless her. God still can confirm what she believed about him. Naomi needed to restart on her faith journey after a series of family tragedies.

God used a different way to open her eyes to his merciful purpose. As if God is saying, even if you don't leave the house, I will bring you the proof that I am who you have always believed me to be. When she saw Ruth with the grain in verse 20, she said, Naomi's faith towards God had a jump start.

It was dead and had become back to life again. She saw the mercy of God because of Ruth. She was reconnected with God who had not stopped showing his kindness to her.

[11 : 56] Ruth. Those were the story of the refugees from Ruth. Now we look at the rich men. In first one, when he introduced Boaz, he said Boaz is a man of standing.

What did he do to get such a title? A man of standing can mean a man of great wealth, but it also translates as a nobleman.

Can this two coexist on someone? Can someone be a rich man? Can a rich man also be a nobleman at the same time?

In first four, it says he came to the visit. What would you expect to see? Was he there to just check on his workers to make sure they meet their quotas for the day?

Like many of our boss would do. Let's read on, it say when he came to visit, and when he arrived, he greeted the harvesters, the Lord be with you, and the Lord blessed you, they answered.

[13 : 07] I can only imagine from this interaction that they have excellent relationship. Then no one when he arrived ran away. And he seems to know his workers enough to notice a new young woman was working in the field.

after he had spoken to the overseer, Boaz spoke to Ruth. In a conversation, he told her to drink from the water jar if she got thirsty.

It's said in verse 14, at mealtime, Boaz said to her, come over here, have some bread and dip it into the wine vinegar.

When she sat down with the harvester, he offered her some roast grain. He seems genuinely kind and not anything we would expect from a boss.

I guess Boaz's daily life could be like this. Get up in the morning, make bread, go to a well, get the water. When everything's ready, he'll head out to the field to get there just before lunchtime.

[14 : 15] When he gets there, he grates everyone, and then seeing what they have to harvest, he get the barbecue cranking, and then start roasting grain, and when everything's ready, he'll tell everyone to stop work, come and eat.

He'll hand out the food to everyone to eat together. When he told Ruth to drink from the jars, I think it's because he actually just brought the water there, so he know where the jars is, and he offered those water to her.

When he offered the roast grain to Ruth, as if he was just handing it out, if Ruth joined the man alone to eat, it would be very awkward.

So every man and woman must be eating together already. And after lunchtime, he stayed and worked with them, because Ruth said to Naomi in verse 19, the name of the man I work with today is Boaz.

Boaz was such a kind and merciful man, kind and merciful person. We will see more of what he does for Ruth next week.

[15 : 25] he exhibited someone greater than himself as he took care of others that were in need. He let God use him as a refuge to refugees that needed to experience God's kindness and God working in their life.

For some, it should provide physical need, others spiritually. For some, a journey starter of their faith and for others maybe like a jump start to get their faith going again.

Boaz was a refuge to all the refugees. So my question for you is what about Boaz? Would the rich man like Boaz, a man of standing, need a refuge too?

What kind of refuge would he need? What kind of refuge would you and me need? There are only two kinds of refuge, a permanent one and a temporary one.

A temporary one is like what we saw in Ruth chapter one, the country of Moab. In Ruth chapter one, one, a limonet took his family to Moab to leave for a while during the famine.

[16 : 54] He might think to go there to ride out the famine. After all, Moab was only on the other side of the sea. But what happened when he got there?

He died. Then his two sons, Marlon and Kilion, married more by woman. Why didn't they go back when their father died?

Would it be because Bethlehem was still in famine? Maybe they had good lives. You know, Marlon married Ruth, Cleland married Oprah.

Both daughters-in-law got along well with their mother-in-law. Your spouse got along well with your partners or parents. What more could we want?

I guess for someone that would be closer to experiencing heaven on earth. But what followed? Marlon and Cleland died also.

[17 : 59] There was a system established in Israel to look after the poor and we have a man of standing like Boaz. Why did Elimelech still decide to go to Moab?

I wonder would it be because he had the mean to move his family over to Moab and did not want to use his wealth to help others.

If he followed God's requirement in Ephesians to help his fellow Israelites so they can continue to live, his wealth could disappear in matters of days.

He could not impoverish his own family to sustain his fellow Israelites. The Lord also said when they lent to their fellow Israelites they could not charge interest which is in Ephesians 25 35 to 37.

I own a business and have some savings as well. What Unlimit did with his moving was the most sensible thing to do for a businessman.

[19 : 12] It's only for a short time. Let other people help do the helping first. He might have thought if I stay in Bethlehem I cannot charge interest or make any profit from helping others.

Which is the best time to make profit. You know when people are down and out you can exploit them for their situation. He might say I may as well go to Moab.

The country of Moab is a place of foreign God. Their God will have better business sense. I wonder would those be the reason Eliminate moved to Moab.

But I was convicted that I could think of so many justifications for Eliminate because I have been living like him.

I have been justifying all my words and deeds to make sure I look righteous in the eyes of others. No one had any terrible things to say about me.

[20 : 24] They may have some inkling here and there. But overall, John Lyle is very hard working, nice, a rich man, who is faithful, loyal, and humble.

But God had been telling me again that I am not. Unlike Ruth and Boaz, I live for my own reputation instead of the life of others.

I keep a smiling face instead of being honest with myself and God and be broken like Naomi. I am righteous in my own eyes, always comparing myself with others, looking for loopholes in God's requirement to do the bare minimum to gain praise and approval.

I do not live as I am a foreigner or refugee on this earth. I live like an eminent as I am the king of my own life. Whatever is our most sensible solution to what we are facing will most likely be our temporary refuge.

And it could lead to death. Our most sensible option, our intention, no matter how justifiable they were, are tainted by our own sinful nature.

[21 : 53] They will always end up glorifying ourselves instead of God. That is the challenge I face and the challenge I have been convicted.

Paul says in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 56 that the state of death is sin and the power of sin is the law.

Eliminate and his two sons died after they went to a temporary refuge which became their permanent grace. we were not told the exact cause of their death but one thing we saw they died while they were out of the promised land.

But what about Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz who were inside God's promised land? Did they escape death? The fact that we are reading their name in biblical history shows that they did not.

None of us can. this body that we are in is temporary, is not permanent, and we will all have to die one day. We all need a permanent refuge that only the one conquered death can give.

[23 : 18] And the one person ever conquered death was Jesus Christ. He came from the little town of Bethlehem and we got to meet Jesus through Boaz's words and deeds.

When he greeted the workers saying the Lord be with you, Jesus' name was Emmanuel, means God is with us. When he took notice and knew all his workers, Jesus our shepherd knows all his sheep.

When he told Ruth to listen and not be afraid, Jesus said the same thing on many occasions. He told her to drink the water if she is thirsty.

Jesus told the woman by the well, he is the living water that will quench her thirst. He offered, Boaz offered Ruth food that was more than satisfied her.

Jesus provided food to thousands and they ate and they were leftovers. And he said, I came to give life and give it to the food.

[24 : 34] Boaz gave Ruth bread to dip in wine. On the night before Jesus' death, he took bread and dipped it in wine to hand to his disciples and told them to keep remembering what he had done by going to the cross to pay the penalty of their sins.

Boaz's last word was stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain. Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 9 verse 37 to 38 God gave Ruth her faith so she will help Naomi to restore her faith.

God gave Boaz plentiful so he can help others in great needs. Jesus came to bear our sin to die in our place so that we can be in God's permanent refuge.

He did not save you just for yourself. He saved you so you can be a fisher of men to bring salvation to all corners of the earth.

Will you be his workers to the harvest field? To be with Jesus is not just about where we go after we die. It's about having a permanent refuge in our heart where our life is being renewed every day where we no longer need to be afraid we experience what it means to live to the full.

[26 : 31] We got to live our life where we are confident of God's everlasting kindness to us where happiness and joy will never cease.

We read earlier in John 14 1 Jesus said do not let your hearts be troubled.

You believe in God believe also in me. My father's house has many rooms. If that were not so would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be there where I how have you been living your life?

Are you feeling uncertain about your future? Are you suffering the consequence of your sins of disobedience? Have you been holding back on using what God has given you for the goods of others?

[27 : 40] God has offered us Jesus as our permanent refuge where we can call home. He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.

So come to Jesus. Come and stay with our merciful God. Let God take you to where he wants you to be. Let God use you to show his merciful kindness to those who need it most.