

RUTH CHAPTER 2

2.1 Introduction

Looking ahead to the final chapter of Ruth, we read of a baby born in Bethlehem. One who many came to see and rejoice over. Once who caused the name of the Lord to be blessed. One who was named "Servant" and called redeemer and restorer. The cry of the women "A son has been born to Naomi" seems to sound much like the cry of Isaiah:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isa 9:6)

We are all familiar with the account of a child born in Bethlehem as it relates to the Christmas story, and the coming of Christ. But these events happened a thousand years beforehand and further illustrate how Ruth sits in the scriptures not merely as a historical narrative relating to events long ago but as part of the prophetic witness that testifies about Christ and speaks of his coming. And as such it is not just there to inform our minds, but inspire our hearts and instruct our walk as we live as the redeemed bride going out into the fields for the Lord of the Harvest.

God's will is that we who have received Jesus, not just as the baby in Bethlehem, but as the mighty risen Lord, should be able, like the women in Bethlehem, to bless the Lord because he has come and because of all that his coming means to us.

2.2 "The Lord bless you"

It is in this chapter that we are first introduced to Boaz. His name means "In him there is strength," and we are told that he was a worthy man - literally "mighty in substance." He was a real historical person, and the events that are told here actually took place. But again, we are not looking, merely at a historical account, but at a prophetic demonstration. Boaz, as Lord of the Harvest, as the redeemer, represents the Lord himself. It is interesting that chapter 1 ends with Naomi complaining that the Lord, for whom she uses the name "the Almighty", or "Mighty One", had brought misfortune on them, and chapter 2 begins with the introduction of another "mighty one" who arrives on the scene to defend their cause and pour our his gracious blessing on them.

The context of Boaz's arrival is also one of blessing; for the first words we hear from him are an exchange of blessings between him and his workers. Boaz declares a blessing of the Lord's presence with them, and they in return declare the blessing of the Lord over their lord.

The word for the verb "to bless" in the scriptures is in Hebrew *Barak*, (like the current U.S. president!) and in Greek *Eulogeo*. In both languages the root meaning is to praise or speak well of - to pronounce a good and prosperous word over. In fact the Greek word is where we get the English word *eulogy* from. It is a great shame that we associate eulogies with death, and an even greater tragedy that for many people the only time that someone will stand up and speak a good word over their lives is after they are dead!

Praise God that we don't have to wait until we are dead to be blessed in this way. Because the Lord continually blesses us. He is always speaking a good and prosperous word over our lives. Like Boaz, the first words out of his mouth whenever he comes to us is one of blessing. The first words of Jesus in his public ministry from the Sermon on the Mount were words of

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blessing. And when God blesses us we are truly blessed. For the good words that he speaks over our lives are not empty sentiments or trite platitudes - his word over us is not an "Aw bless!" But his words are powerful and creative. So when he speaks a good and prosperous word over our lives it comes with the same creative power that spoke the universe into being to do us good and make us prosper.

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. (Jn 1:16 NIV)

and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Heb 12:24)

So when God's word speaks that we shall prosper and be in health, it means just that. Whatever blessing God has spoken over our lives will surely come to pass. God's word over us is not a eulogy that only comes into effect after we are dead; our hope is not just for the next life; the blessing of the Lord means that we will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

2.3 "Bless the Lord!"

When we think of blessing it is natural for us to think of all the blessings that come to us from the Lord. But the Bible also speaks much about blessing that goes the other way - how we are to bless the Lord.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits... (Ps 103:1-2)

How can we, mere men and women, bless God the Almighty, who is all-sufficient and lacks nothing?

In many versions of the Bible the word is translated as "Bless" when the direction is from God to man, and "Praise" when the direction is man to God - but it is the same word, and the same meaning. To praise someone means to speak well of them, to speak a good word over them. We often think of praising God in terms of singing or worship, and rightly so, but at its root we are praising God by speaking (or singing) out a good word about God - declaring his goodness and greatness.

So we bless God by continually speaking well of him, by always having a good confession about who God is.

This is one of the transitions we see in the book of Ruth. For in chapter 1, Naomi does not have a good confession of who God is. She, by her own confession, is full of bitterness, and she has allowed the bitterness of her circumstances to cloud her vision of the eternal nature of God.

She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?" (Ru 1:20-21)

She comes out of Moab full of bitterness and raging against the Lord. Yet in chapter 4, many come to her and say "Blessed be the Lord!"

Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel!" (Ru 4:14)

So there is a transition from emptiness to fruitfulness and from bitterness to blessing. From one woman's complaint against the Lord, to many people blessing his name. It is as though, although she has already come out Moab back to Bethlehem physically, she has not yet completed the journey spiritually. There is part of her that is still back in the place of bitterness and emptiness that has not crossed over back to the place of fruitfulness and fulfilment. For this is what raging against the Lord will do; it keeps us in the place of bitterness. It is sign of folly that leads to ruin!

When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord. (Pr 19:3)

But here is the key, if we turn this on its head. For if raging against the Lord keeps us in the place of bitterness, blessing the Lord moves us back to the place of blessing.

Many people are waiting for their situation to change before they will bless the Lord, but we don't have to wait for the blessing to bless the Lord. This is how we are prophetic; it doesn't matter how bad our situation may seem, we can decide, like the Psalmist, "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" To forget none of his benefits, and to understand that nothing we are going through changes God's eternal nature one jot. He is always worthy of our praise. And in blessing the Lord we discover that we are actually moving ourselves back into the place of blessing.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! (Ps 100:4)

"Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labour! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married," says the Lord. (Isa 54:1)

2.4 "The Lord be with you"

"The Lord be with you" is the blessing that Boaz speaks out over his workers. This is the greatest blessing of them all! For what is the most significant way that we are blessed if it is not in the fact that God himself is with us. Not just with us in theory, or according to our theology, but his real tangible manifest presence in our midst. God's presence is the most important blessing of them all. God's greatest gift is his gift of himself in our midst. For God so loved the world that he gave... not just all the blessings we needed or wanted... he gave his very self. His one and only son Jesus, who is God himself in the flesh. There is no greater gift, no greater blessing.

What is our response to such a blessing? It is to bless the Lord, to declare again his greatness and goodness.

If we see the prophetic imagery in this passage we can see the transaction of blessing between Boaz and his workers in the same light. The lord comes amongst his workers and blesses them, speaking the greatest blessing over them, "The Lord is with you," and they respond by blessing their lord.

The Lord comes amongst us and declares "I AM WITH YOU!" and we respond with "BLESS THE LORD!"

2.5 Direction from the Lord

Boaz was just a man, a real historic figure, who although noble and just was no more than a mortal man. However, in recording this story in his eternal word, God has allowed us to catch an insight into his own nature and his relationship with us, the Church, through this man Boaz and his relationship with Ruth. Their first meeting is significant, as it composes a list of five commands that Boaz gives to Ruth - commands that have application to us too.

2.5.1 Don't go to another field

Ruth had found a good place, a place of blessing in the field of Boaz. Boaz's first instruction to Ruth is, having found the place of blessing, that she remain in it and not leave it to go somewhere else.

This, of course, was the tragic mistake her father-in-law had made. He started off in the place of blessing, but left it to go somewhere else, thinking he could do better in another place. He looked for his provision in another field, as he had ceased to believe that in the Lord's field he would be provided for. It was a mistake that cost him his life and brought tragedy upon his whole family.

It is important that we know the field - the place of kingdom activity - that God has called us to. And having found it, it is important that we stay there and do not allow ourselves to become distracted chasing after the activities that may be going on in other fields around us.

He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty. (Pr 28:19)

What was it that made Boaz's field a place of blessing? First, it was a place of family, Boaz was a kinsman. It was also a place under authority, Boaz gave the word and his servants obeyed, there was security and order as a result. It was a place where Ruth was cared for, and provided for, a place where she could belong. This is what we should find in the place that God has called us to - a place of family, a place where we are cared for under the authority of godly men who bring order and rule to our lives. A place where we can belong, and find meaningful activity in the kingdom purpose of God. We need to ensure that we continually keep ourselves in this place of blessing that God has provided for us.

In this command we also see an honest and open expression of heart. Boaz genuinely didn't want Ruth to go anywhere else. He knew there were other fields and other harvests, but he wanted her to stay in the place where *he* could make sure she was provided for and looked after. This is an expression of a true pastor's heart, and as such, a reflection of Christ himself who is the ultimate and chief shepherd. It's not being possessive or controlling for a pastor not to want any of the sheep under his care to go anywhere else, but an honest expression of the shepherd's heart who would leave the ninety-nine and continue to seek, rather than lose one of those entrusted to him. It's our heart that everyone who walks through our doors will find a place where they belong, a place where they can be blessed and find an expression of ministry that is a blessing to others. It's not our heart that any should feel they have to go to another field.

But there is a responsibility placed on Ruth herself. Boaz doesn't promise to make the field the kind of place that she would never consider leaving. It is as though he knows that even after all he has done, she will still be tempted to look around and see what else is out there! So he urges and instructs her not to. There are certainly valid and legitimate reasons to move on from one work of God to another, but sadly there are many more misguided and foolish ones. If we are just looking for where we will be "better off," then we have made it all about us. We have put our own desires at the centre instead of God's will. Also, many times when we spot a deficiency in the work we are a part of, it is not God telling us to move on, but the

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frustration is to stir us into action to be the ones who does something about it! If you ever find a church that has nothing lacking, then what can you meaningfully contribute? God has not called us to be church-hoppers, but those who find a place of blessing and stay there, getting rooted and established into all he would have us achieve in such a place.

2.5.2 Stay close to my people

Boaz's next instruction highlights the importance of fellowship. Although Ruth was a foreigner and a stranger, it was not the lord of this field's will that she should labour alone. He instructs her to work alongside others in his field who are doing a similar job. It is not God's will that any of us should become isolated or try to outwork his call on our lives on our own. That's not how God's kingdom works, and that is not how God has designed us to function. No one person can do it all, no one person has seen the whole picture of God's plan, nor can any one individual represent Christ accurately to the world. We need each other! Even the great prophet Elijah, when he claimed to be the only one left who truly followed God the way he desired, was told that he was not alone but part of a company of seven thousand!¹

There is a danger in becoming isolated, not just physically, but in our mentality. Outside of fellowship even the most zealous will eventually lose their spiritual fervour. A person outside of fellowship is like a coal taken out of the fire. When this happens we are less likely to be inclined to seek out fellowship, and so we can get trapped in a viscous circle. Each of us needs to take responsibility to cultivate good relationships with other members of the church outside of meetings.

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb 10:25 NIV)

2.5.3 Keep your eye on the field

The opposite error from withdrawing from fellowship with other Christians, is to retreat into a cosy Christian social club that has no contact with unbelievers. This also is not God's will for our lives. He wants us to keep our eyes on the harvest field. It was at just the right time that the Lord led Naomi and Ruth out of Moab - harvest time. God's purpose in saving us is not just so we can be blessed, but so that we can share that blessing with others who are still in Moab. To bring them the good news that they can come out too and come into new life in Christ. The Lord of the harvest will always continue to direct our gaze towards the harvest field he is sending us out into.

Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. (Jn 4:35)

A small but significant detail in the account recorded in Ruth is that every time she gathered the harvest we are told she took it back to the city. Since the city is a common illustration in the scriptures for the church (the city on a hill that cannot be hidden, the new Jerusalem, the city who's architect and builder is God) this reminds us that our duty is not just to go out into the fields and make converts, but to see that all who are led to the Lord, are followed up and disciplined to take their part in the city of God.

2.5.4 Do not fear any harm

It is interesting to note how many times in Scripture the Lord tells his servants not to be afraid. He said it to Abraham², Isaac³ and Jacob⁴, to Joshua⁵, Elijah⁶, to Mary⁷, to Paul⁸ and

¹ 1 Kings 19:18

² Genesis 15:1

³ Genesis 26:24

⁴ Genesis 46:3

⁵ Joshua 8:1

⁶ 2 Kings 1:15

⁷ Luke 1:30

⁸ Acts 18:9

many others. So if we are ever fearful in the light of what God calls us to do, at least we are in good company! Jesus frequently told his disciples not to fear. God does not want us to be bound by fear.

One of the reasons Boaz gives to Ruth not to fear is that he has commanded the reapers in his field concerning her. To unpack the imagery in this, let us look at a parable Jesus told.

He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels." (Mt 13:27-39)

God has given his angels charge over us to see that we do not come to harm.

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (Heb 1:14 NIV)

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. (Ps 34:7)

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. (Ps 91:11)

If it is comforting to know that we have ministering angels with commands to guard us, how much more should we have confidence in knowing that we also have the *Lord himself* watching over us.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (Ps 23:4)

2.5.5 Drink when you are thirsty

Boaz's invitation for Ruth to drink when she is thirsty, parallels the invitation that Jesus made to all those who thirst.

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (Jn 7:37-39)

The harvest work that God has called us to is something that we can only do with the refreshing and empowering work of the Holy Spirit.

2.6 The Place of Blessing

Whilst the harvest field is a place of hard work and activity, it is also a place of blessing and fellowship with the Lord himself. Boaz calls Ruth aside to sit with him and the other workers and to join them in having bread and wine. The bread and the wine are the same item on the table when we are invited to fellowship with the Lord and with each other around the Lord's table. We are not just called for activity but intimacy. God doesn't want us to just be his servants he also wants us to be his friends, his disciples, his close companions. To stay in the place of blessing we need to make sure that we are spending time with the Lord and not just filling our time with doing things for him. Not that there is anything wrong with being busy for the Lord, but even valid activity can become idolatrous if it takes the place of the Lord himself. This was the lesson that Jesus emphasised in the house of Mary and Martha.

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and

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listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." (Lk 10:38-42)

The cup of the Lord is a cup of blessing. We are blessed by drinking from it, in remembering the Lord, proclaiming his death and his coming, and strengthening our common covenant together. But it is also a cup that blesses us, for although we might not hear it, we come to a cup that speaks. It speaks a good and prosperous word over our lives.

And to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Heb 12:24)

The cup speaks that we are accepted, that we shall not be rebuked, that there is no longer any condemnation, for Christ has drunk the cup of God's wrath to the dregs. It speaks that we shall be fruitful and prosperous in the time of harvest. For it is a harvest meal; the timing of passover, which Jesus transformed into the new covenant meal, took place at the almost the same time as firstfruits which was at the start of the time of harvest.¹

The presence of the Lord is a place of abundant blessing, not just for ourselves but for others too. Boaz sent Ruth away from the place of encounter laden with provision. She had eaten all that she needed and still had plenty to spare - just like the five thousand who would come to Jesus to hear him teach. She went away with twenty-two litres of barley, which was probably all that she could carry.

When we spend time in the presence of the Lord, he never sends us away empty handed. God sends us back into his harvest fields, not just fully blessed but with an abundant blessing to give away. We are blessed to be a blessing.

¹ Leviticus 23. The feast of firstfruits was held on the day after the Sabbath following Passover. Jesus had his last supper at Passover, and rose from the dead the following Sunday. This means the resurrection happened on the feast of firstfruits. 1 Corinthians 15:20