

RUTH 2:14-23

(Reading: Leviticus 25:8-55; Ruth 2:1-23)

The Lord's Doing It!

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

The thing that stands out most explicitly in the verses 1 till 13 of this second chapter of Ruth is the faith of Ruth.

We note the faith of Boaz too but Ruth is the one who stands out here in a special way.

Boaz is certainly impressed by her.

Verse 14 clearly indicates this.

For what we see happening here is Boaz doing everything he can to answer his prayer for Ruth in verse 12.

In the words of the first aspect to the text this afternoon, **BOAZ DOES EVERYTHING POSSIBLE FOR RUTH.**

How do we see this?

Well, the harvesters have their meal break.

And when there was such a break there would be clear differentiation between the employers of the landowner and the poor and alien who picked up what was left behind and on the edge of the field.

They would eat apart.

There was naturally a reason for this.

Those employees would be sharing their meal together.

A meal provided by their boss.

So when Boaz invites Ruth by saying, "Come over here," it's not to be with him personally but to join in their group.

It's interesting to note what they ate together.

You will still find similar meals eaten in the Middle East.

And something similar has become popular in western countries also.

You might have heard of it.

It's called 'dukka'.

This is basically when you take a piece of bread, dip it in oil and dab it in a mixture of spices and nuts which have been crushed up.

And this would mean everyone sharing in this then would be seated in a circle with this vinegar and the bread and the roasted grain in the middle.

The vinegar referred to here should not be compared with the plain white vinegar we use.

This is a beverage of vinegar mixed with oil.

Known as 'chomez' it's a refreshing taste and popular in that area.

And likewise the roasted grain would have been very tasteful.

This was done through some of the best ears of the barley being tied into small parcels and held in a blazing fire made from dry grass and thorn bushes.

Not quite marshmallows over the camp fire but pretty close!

For Ruth to join in this group and share in this food was a mark of special favour.

Indeed, Boaz makes sure Ruth is given so much of this food that she has some left over.

Naturally that's what she'll bring home to Naomi.

Yet there should be something else we note about Ruth's participation in this meal.

Have you picked it up yet?

Perhaps I need to alert you to what the practice of the Jews was in our Lord's time.

And particularly when those zealous Jews ate with foreigners, or gentiles as they called them then.

Because there was no way they would eat with them, was there?

Acts 10:28 makes that clear.

Now, it may be said that as a proselyte Ruth has become part of the covenant people.

But that doesn't stop a number of references throughout the rest of this book to 'Ruth the Moabitess'.

So it's clear she is an alien.

And an alien of a very lowly regarded race!

But Boaz has already gone beyond the provisions of the law for Ruth.

In fact he has dug down deep to bring out the spirit of the law – the love of God.

And isn't that the first and most important commandment, anyway?

This is what we are going to keep seeing.

I mean, look at what Boaz is next doing for Ruth.

He gives specific instructions to his men not to upset her in any way.

Even if she came a bit close to where they are working.

There can be safety issues involved here, with those sickles being quite sharp.

That would be a reason for keeping away from the harvesters.

But there was also the distinction we already noted between the two groups shown at the meal time.

So Boaz was again enforcing Ruth's special status.

Notice that Boaz personally addresses his workers, not through the foreman.

He trusted Ruth not to put herself in danger but he especially wanted that she be free to work there and glean much there.

In fact, to make sure this is so Boaz goes on in verse 16 to tell his men to pull stalks out from their bundles so she does pick up extra.

Boaz knows Ruth is a hard worker, and why she's working hard.
He knows she will be richly rewarded, in the spirit of his prayer.

And so it is that we come to the second aspect from these verses this afternoon.
For the verses 17 till 20 declare to us that **THE LORD BOUNTIFULLY SUPPLIES IT ALL.**

Ruth comes to the end of a long day of gleaning.
She has gathered her own bundles.
And, so, before she goes home she threshes these bundles to knock out the ears of barley.

That she has done well is quite evident in the amount she goes home with.
Verse 17 ends with telling us it was an ephah.
In the old imperial measurement this was more than four gallons.
Nowadays we would estimate this to be about 22 litres.

You try carrying that home!
And yet she would have balanced it on her head and body in the way women of those lands do it.

You can imagine Naomi's gasp!
And then Ruth brings out what's left over from the lunch as well!

It's no wonder we have the reaction of Naomi in verse 19.
"Where did you glean today?"
"Where did you work?"

If you wondering if she repeats herself, you're actually quite right!
She is blown-away by this.
And the author, with obviously very good sources for this story, tells it just like it was!

What we especially see here, though, congregation, is the faith of Naomi.
While we might have thought she would have been bitter and twisted through her bad circumstances, here there's no shred of that.
Because she was always looking to the Lord!

Indeed, she recognises that whoever has done this is the Lord's!
"Blessed be the man who took notice of you!" she exclaims.

And isn't Ruth so transparent?
She is as honest and sincere as they come.

She gladly tells her mother who that man's name is.

"The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz," she said.

It was just a man's name.

I mean, couldn't it have been any man's name?

Definitely not!

This man had to be a believer.

But even more Naomi knows he is an agent of the covenant God Himself!

That's why verse 20 sees her vocatively using that very name for God.

"The LORD bless him!" says so much in so few words!

This brings us back into that whole picture of God's sovereign control that is throughout the book of Ruth.

Here we're reminded of God's intimate concern for His people so that through them the Messiah would come.

Congregation, the Lord is seen obviously working out His will through the people in this book.

And when His people are open to doing His will, as we see here, then through them His grace overflows.

Boaz is such an agent of grace.

Having true faith in the God who has saved him, means he shows that same God to those around Him.

We've seen it in his relationship with his employees and now we see it in what he does for Ruth and Naomi.

As David Atkinson says, "There is no sense, in the book of Ruth, of those in power using the underprivileged as political pawns for personal gain.

"No, the mood is rather that faith in the gracious provision of God is matched by a concern to express that grace in personal dealings with others, and in particular, with care for the disadvantaged."

Congregation, our lives and our relationships have to mirror God's life and God's relationships.

And that's exactly what Naomi sees!

"The LORD bless him!" she declares.

Now we may say that this is self-evident.

The Lord is obviously blessing Boaz because we see the care he is able to give here.

But listen to the rest of what Naomi says.

For she says of the Lord, "He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead."

Here we come to the third aspect in our text this afternoon.

Now we see NAOMI & RUTH STAY IN BLESSING'S WAY.

You see, this word 'kindness' we've met before.

It's the expression of covenant love.

It's the care that is the most involved and committed for someone else.

There are many examples of this love shown throughout Scripture.

Each one of them reflects on earth the love the Lord is working out for us from above.

We find one such example in 2nd Corinthians chapter 8.

There the apostle is exhorting the Corinthians about their giving to the Lord.

And to help them focus on their motivation, Paul mentions the example of the Macedonian churches.

In the verses 2 till 5, he writes, "Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

"For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.

"Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to that saints.

"And they did not do as expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will."

Of course, the supreme example of this Christ Jesus Himself.

That's why Paul can go on in that same chapter of 2nd Corinthians to say, "you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."

Now you will be wondering here.

These examples are about those who had very little materially.

Boaz is obviously a rich man.

But earthly wealth has got nothing to do with it!

It's how you love the Lord back for all He's done for you that this is about.

And going right alongside that is the way you love the Lord by loving His own.

You look out for the household of faith.

Those Macedonian believers did that, and so does Boaz.

That's why we have the reference by Naomi to the Lord's continued kindness to the living and the dead.

Through what Boaz is doing he's respecting the dead by helping those of their families still living.

Those who could least look out for themselves – the widows and orphans – are those everyone else should be looking out for!

That's covenant love.

That's truly sacrificing, because that's saving!

Whenever there's been true biblical revival this true mercy is always shown.

Then there are schools built, orphanages set up, city sewerage systems developed, and just laws passed.

What Naomi adds here brings that redeeming into clear focus.

She tells Ruth that Boaz could actually be the Lord's way to truly give them a place amongst His people.

"This man is our close relative," she points out.

Indeed he is so close she says, "he is one of our kinsman-redeemers."

Congregation, we have seen the importance of family in ancient Israelite society.

And along with the tight kinship ties we also saw the vital connection to the land.

Each family had their divinely appointed place in the promised land.

But without a male head, you would lose that.

Unless the next male relative in line would marry the widow, their place in the land would be gone.

And that helps us understand the depth of grief Naomi went through in the first chapter.

Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 25 describe the law in this regard.

A family name could continue, but only if there was immediate family willing to do that.

As we know from Judah's sons that didn't always happen.

But here we see even more Naomi's faith.

For what was **she** thinking now?

She who had nearly cut off her family line by trying to leave her two son's widows behind in Moab.

Mind you, the Lord had used her to bring out the true faith in Ruth!

Whatever Naomi was thinking she was quick enough to realise the Lord's doing.

She's alerted to this by what Ruth says in verse 21.

There her daughter-in-law says, "He even said to me, 'Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.'"

By this we know here is no temporary arrangement.

This is not only to help a few fellow countrymen down on their luck.

This was a commitment that Ruth and Naomi will be provided for until the end of the harvests.

Note the plural.

Because after the barley harvest there would be the wheat harvest.

And by the time that finished there would be several months gone.

It meant there would have safety, security and supply guaranteed.

In fact, the way they were going they would be well stocked for the rest of the year until the harvests came around again.

That's why what Naomi says in verse 22 seems quite logical.

If you're on to a good thing why stop it.

But there's also the hint here that to not keep accepting this kindness, by working in another field, would not look good.

And I think Naomi also seeing something more.

Knowing Boaz is one of their redeemer-kinsman means she's seeing that something else may come out of this.

As much as she loves and appreciates Ruth she can already see Boaz being drawn to her too.

And so verse 23 tells us of Ruth's continued commitment to working in Boaz's field and living with her mother.

It doesn't indicate that Naomi told Ruth what she hoped might happen.

But then she didn't need to, because Ruth would continue faithfully working there.

Congregation, we noted that the verses 1 till 13 had God's fingerprints all over them.

Well now we see His working so clearly it's got His footprints all over it!

The story's tension is increasing.

There's an underlying passion which we can't help but see coming through.

And, you know, that's got nothing to do with either Boaz, Ruth, or even a scheming mother-in-law!

This has got God's Spirit written all over it.

He's the One you can't help but notice.

But sometimes we do, don't we?

How often haven't we quenched that Spirit's work in our lives?

We aren't always open to his leading.

Yet He should be there for all to see.

He should be obvious through you and me.

That's the lesson we see in this passage.

God is obviously working.

But so are His people too.

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O Lord God, You the loving Heavenly Father who thought so much for us You sent Your One and only Son for us; we come humbly before You now in Jesus' Name.

Do stir us by Your Spirit.

Stir us in the way of Your Word.

And then may many more come to see the Living Word.

May they then meet the ultimate kinsman-redeemer who paid the ultimate price for us in His sacrifice on the cross.

In His Name, the only name by which men may be saved, the name of Jesus, we pray, Amen.