

The Book of Ruth

In Ruth 1 & 2, we see a certain naivety and risk-taking that accompanies youth, being tempered by the wisdom and concern that comes with life experience. Naomi knew that, without a husband and sons, she had no one to protect or provide for her. She told her daughters-in-law to return to their mothers and to find another husband, knowing full well that they would be regarded outcasts in Judah and, as Moabites, had no marriage prospects and future there. When Ruth asked for permission to glean for food, Naomi did not stop her. But the words of Boaz highlight that he saw that Ruth was putting herself in harms way, by stepping into the fields and following the reapers. He saw that she was vulnerable and risked being molested, reproached and rebuked by the local men. His actions demonstrate a concern for her wellbeing on many levels. He supplied her needs for food, water and grain to store or sell. He created a workplace culture which enabled her to experience physical and emotional safety and protection. While she could easily have become a target for racial discrimination, he overlooked her ethnicity and publicly affirmed her for consciously leaving behind her family and country, in committing herself to care for Naomi.

GETTING STARTED: A couple of months ago, we looked at issues of unconscious bias and how we can tend to discriminate against people who are different to us. It might take the actions of just one person, speaking up and either calling out certain behaviours or setting the culture in an organisation, to bring major change in the way particular groups of people are treated. Have you ever been in a situation where adults were behaving in a way that bullies, belittles or discriminates against others? How did you respond?

READ: RUTH 2:1-23

🗨️ What did you notice/ what things stood out, as you just read the passage?

🗨️ What things did you take away from the sermon this week?

🗨️ Read the following words from Ps 57:1-3. The sub-heading attributes these words to David, when he was a refugee, hiding in a cave, being chased by King Saul. What do these verses tell us about the nature and character of God? What do they tell us to do, when we face fearful circumstances?

*Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, until the destroying storms pass by. 2 I cry to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me. 3 He will send from heaven and save me, he will put to shame those who trample on me. Selah. God will send forth his **steadfast love** and his faithfulness.*

🗨️ Now consider the words of Ps 57:7-11. Last week, Steve introduced us to the Hebrew word **(C)hesed** which we find here in v3 and v10, translated as “**steadfast love**”.¹ When we take refuge in God, especially during tough times, does it mean that we stop being afraid? What are some of the things that flow from this posture of trust in God’s ‘steadfast love and faithfulness’?

*My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast. I will sing and make melody. ⁸Awake, my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn. ⁹I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations. ¹⁰For your **steadfast love** is as high as the heavens; your faithfulness extends to the clouds. ¹¹Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth.*

❗ In Ruth 1, Naomi had told her daughters-in-law to return home. She gave them a blessing, that God would reward their kindness to her and their husbands, which included the hope that God would give them the security of another marriage. As a single woman, Naomi could not guarantee or promise them any form of security, even back in her home country. However, Ruth ‘clung’ to her, making a conscious decision to put behind the security of her birth family and her ‘gods’, to accept Naomi’s people as ‘her people’ and Naomi’s God, as ‘her God’.

🗨️ Put yourself in Ruth’s shoes. She had migrated to another country, where she had to learn different customs. The immediate need was to get food, so she took the risk of walking up to one of the servants, asking permission to glean in the field (Ruth 2:6-7) and worked flat out. How do you think she felt, when the boss – Boaz – turned up to inspect the harvest work and found her in his field?

¹ <http://www.danielakin.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/08/psalm-57-praising-god-among-the-nations-manuscript-ds.pdf>

❗ In his sermon, Phil highlighted the response of Ruth in v10. “*Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favour in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?”* (NRSV) There was no sense of entitlement, any expectation of his favour or of being deserving. ‘There was no self-assured arrogance that blessing should come’. Instead, there was gratitude and humility, acknowledging that she was in no way deserving of his grace, protection and provision.

💬 When we became Christians, we may have been overwhelmed with gratitude, recognising that amazing mercy of God. Yet, maybe some of us have ceased to respond to God with that attitude and maybe we believe that we are somehow deserving of his grace? Where are you ‘at’, right now, in your attitude to God’s mercy and grace? Is it something you take for granted? Or something that continues to blow your mind and drive you to your knees, in gratitude?

💬 For Ruth, her devotion to her mother-in-law was seen in her actions, not merely her words. John Piper notes three aspects about Ruth’s character in chapter 2: her initiative to care for Naomi, her humility and her industry: “she is an amazing worker. Verse 7 continues, “She has continued from early morning until now without resting even for a moment.” Verse 17 goes on to say that she gleaned until evening and then before she quit, she beat out what she gleaned, measured it, and took it home to Naomi.”² Do you have a work ethic like that? Why? Or why not?

❗ When Boaz arrived at his field, there is an exchange of verbal blessings between him and his workers. Phil noted that this indicated that his life was God-saturated. I would go one step further and see that Boaz had a self-image, whereby he saw himself as a person who knew that his role in the world, was to be a person who blessed others. Listening to a sermon by John Dickson recently, he defined the word ‘humility’ as: “the noble choice to forgo your status, redirect your resources and hold your powers for the good of others before yourself.”³ Boaz was a man of status, respect and wealth in his community – and he knew that. But he was also a man of great humility.

💬 Read the words of Boaz in Ruth 2:8-9, 11-12, 14-16. What things had impressed Boaz about Ruth? What were the practical things he did, to provide for her and protect her? In what ways did Boaz demonstrate and exercise humility, while also providing strong leadership to his workers?

❗ In Ruth 1:8, Naomi pronounced a blessing on Ruth and Orpah: “*Go back each of you to your mother’s house. May the LORD deal kindly with you (show Chesed to you) as you have dealt (shown Chesed) with the dead and with me.*”⁴ In Ruth 2:20, Naomi acknowledged that Boaz demonstrated this *Chesed* or loving-kindness towards both Ruth and Naomi, by the way he acted towards Ruth and provided for her. “*Blessed be he by the LORD, whose kindness (Chesed) has not forsaken the living or the dead!*” After unquestioningly allowing Ruth to go out to the fields, Naomi finally admitted there was some risk involved, if Ruth gleaned in another field. (Ruth 2:22)

💬 Boaz had a family obligation to look after Elimelech’s widow, but, as will be seen in chapter 4, not all family members took that obligation seriously. In what ways were the actions of Boaz beyond what was expected of a family member, especially in his treatment of Ruth? In what ways do the actions of Boaz, foreshadow and depict the actions of God, in extending his grace to us?

❗ In Ruth 2:1, we discover that Naomi had a close relative called Boaz. But it is only in Ruth 2:20, that Naomi announces to Ruth, that Boaz is a close relative. In Prov 16:9 we read: “*The human mind plans the way, but the LORD directs the steps.*” For Naomi, it was no coincidence that Ruth ended up in the field belonging to Boaz. God is sovereign and has plans for his children. (Jer 29:11)

FOR REFLECTION: In Psalm 63, the Psalmist pronounces that “your loving-kindness” or “your steadfast love” is better than life – and responds to the generosity and mercy of God, with gratitude and praise. May I encourage you to do the same.

¹ O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. ² So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. ³ Because **your steadfast love is better than life**, my lips will praise you. ⁴ So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. ⁵ My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips ⁶ when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; ⁷ for you have been my help, **and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.** ⁸ My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

² <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/ruth-under-the-wings-of-god>

³ [Undeceptions.com/library/humilitas](https://undeceptions.com/library/humilitas)

⁴ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/ruth-theology-of.html>