

Redeeming Love

Studies in the Book of Ruth

1 – God is Working His Purpose Out

I was on holiday with the family in Wales some years ago, and we were spending some time on the beach. One of my sons began to dig a hole in the sand. He went down quite deep and to his great surprise found a coin that must have been buried for months. It wasn't long before he was off to the shops to buy some sweets. That was quite a find on a dry sandy beach under a hot summer sun. That is what we have here in the Book of Ruth. The story of Ruth is a treasure found in a dry period in the history of Israel. It is a coin in the dry sandy beach. It is like a diamond in the rough. The time period for Ruth is stated in chapter one and the first verse. We read there, "In the days when the judges ruled." This period began in 1390 BC. It lasted three hundred and forty years to the crowning of King Saul in the year 1050 BC. So sometime during this period the event we read about in this lovely book of Ruth took place. In the order of the books of the Old Testament, Ruth follows immediately after the Book of Judges. These were dark and dismal days in the history of Israel. Someone has referred to them as "the distressing days of the Judges."

The history of the Book of Judges goes round in ever recurring circles. There is a pattern to all that happens. First the people of Israel wander away from God, then God sends an enemy as an instrument of his judgement. Israel cries to God for help and God sends a judge or deliverer. This pattern continues throughout the book. Some of the judges are well known. We have Gideon, Samson, Deborah and Barak, each one called by God to set the Israelites free from their enemies. There were many others. These were times of God's faithfulness in times of Israel's unfaithfulness. The Book of Judges reminds us that God will chastise us for our sin. So keep close to the Lord in faith and obedience. We read in Hebrews chapter twelve, verse six that "The Lord disciplines those He loves, and punishes everyone He accepts as a son." We must never think that God will ignore sin and disobedience.

The Book of judges deals with major national and international events. God is at work in both. In his sovereign might He organises rulers and nations to do his will. Great national concerns and deliverances are at the forefront of the story. I wonder have you ever asked yourself the question, "I wonder is God interested in me and my personal circumstances, problems, hopes and fears?" You may think that God is totally preoccupied with international affairs. He is concentrating on the big world leaders and all that is going on in the places where important decisions are made. You may be thinking that the Lord is not really interested in you and the circumstances of your life. I have encouraging news for you! You can think again! The Book of Ruth tells us that in all the turmoil of national and international unrest, God has an interest in you wherever and whoever you are. The first verse of chapter one of Ruth tells of "a man together with his wife and two sons went to live for a while in the country of Moab." In verse two we are told that this man's name was Elimelech and his wife was Naomi. The names of their two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. Verse two goes on to say, "They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah."

While ruling this great universe, God takes note of one man. He is just one individual. Elimelech is not one of the best known of Bible characters. Not much is said about him, but God knew him and he is recorded in the Bible along with his family and personal circumstances. The Bible is full of examples of the Lord God speaking to and dealing with individuals. He is the God of the individual. This wonderful fact is found in the New Testament, too. In The Gospel of John chapter ten verse

fourteen the Lord Jesus Christ tells us the same thing: “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” The word “know” in the original Greek does not simply mean that He knows about us, or that He is aware that you exist in this vast universe. It has the idea of perceptive knowledge. He knows you in detail. He knows your personality, your needs and the circumstances of your life. The Lord Jesus said, in Luke chapter twelve verse seven, “Indeed, the very hairs of your head are numbered.” That is how well God knows you!

God knew that this man was married. He knew that he had a wife called Naomi. God knows whom you are with. He knows whether you are single or married. God knew Elimelech’s family and was fully aware of the difficulties they were facing. There was a famine in the land. Here was a family facing starvation. Let me remind you that while God was raising up judges, and ordering national events for Israel, He was equally aware of this one man and his family. The Lord knows your personal and family needs. He wants to work in your own unique circumstances. He has a purpose to fulfill in your life and that of your family. The encouraging thing is that this same God, who is sovereign and powerful, is concerned to show this power and might in your special situation.

A Christian writer, A.W. Tozer, was meditating on the care of God for his people. He said this, “With the goodness of God to desire our highest welfare; the wisdom of God to plan it, and the power of God to achieve it, what do we lack?” We are reminded of Paul’s words in Romans chapter eight verse thirty-one, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

As we shall see in a later study, Elimelech did not make the right decision when he took his family to live in the land of Moab. But even then God worked out his perfect purpose and will. God knows our mistakes. He delights to turn them around for his glory and our advantage in the end. This does not mean that we should not be careful and not try to avoid making mistakes. What it does mean is that when we do make an error of judgement God can work things out in the end.

The world has its own international problems and struggles. God is at work in them all to fulfill his plan. You have your own personal struggles, and God knows about them too. Continue to trust in him and look to Him in your time of need because He knows, He loves and He cares about you.

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2 – Trusting God in the Hard Times

We continue to look at the Book of Ruth and the lessons we can learn from it. So far we have seen how Elimelech and his family have left Israel and gone to live in Moab. Elimelech too his wife, Naomi, and his two sons Mahlon and Kilion. Their home town was Bethlehem. Why did Elimelech decide to move from Israel and go to Moab? After all, Israel was still the land of promise. It was there that God had done great things during the course of Israelite history and even in recent times.

There was a practical reason for moving. This is found in chapter one verse one, "There was a famine in the land." That should not surprise us. At this time in history when the Judges ruled, the nation had been constantly attacked by the surrounding nations. They plundered the land and stole the crops. This experience was the result of Israel's sin. We read in the Book of Judges chapter six verse one, "Again Israel did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years He gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Again in chapter six verses three to five: "Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the countrythey ruined their crops....they invaded the land to ravage it." This happened on many occasions and Israel could only cope with it for so long. They were often left destitute.

Things were clearly very bad as far as Elimelech was concerned. In a sense you can understand his worry and his concern for his family. You might even say, "Well under the same sort of circumstances I probably would have done the same thing. After all, you have to think of your own family's well being and provide for them the best way you can." Most of us might reason like that. But there is a problem here. Elimelech lived in Bethlehem. Bethlehem means "House of Bread". The very name of his home town speaks of promise. The real reason for Elimelech leaving Bethlehem was that he panicked. He lost confidence in the God of Israel, and the God of provision, who could make Bethlehem the "House of Bread" again even though for a time it was left without a crumb. Elimelech had become weary with this vicious circle of planting, sowing and plundering that seemed to take place as regularly as night follows day. He assumed that the only way to stay alive would be to head for Moab. So he packed his belongings and headed off to the north east of the Dead Sea and settled in that land. He seems to have forgotten that God had always raised up a deliverer who dealt with the problem whenever Israel cried out to Him in repentance.

When we lose our trust in God then we try to resolve problems in our own way and in our own strength. Abraham did the same thing. When he lived in a place called Gerar he told the people that Sarah his wife was his sister. He did this out of fear. What he said was partly true because Sarah was in fact his half-sister. Because of this the king of Gerar decided to take Sarah for himself. However, God came to him in a dream and told him that Sarah was really Abraham's wife. We read in Genesis chapter twenty verse eleven the reason that Abraham gave when he was challenged about this. He said, "I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.'" Abraham had stopped looking to the Lord. God had said to him, in Genesis chapter twelve verse two, "I will make you a great nation and I will bless you." This had not happened yet but Abraham should have believed that he would have lost nothing by being honest. The Lord would have protected him in that godless city. The amazing thing is that this was the second time that Abraham had told this lie. He said the same thing to Pharaoh when he stayed in Egypt. Both Elimelech and Abraham failed to remember the promise of God. Abraham needed to recall that God

would nor forsake him because He had promised him personally a great future. He would become a great nation. Elimelech needed to recall that God would never utterly forsake his covenant people. He still had great plans for the future of the nation. The problem in both cases was their inability to believe God and their attempt to solve the problem in their own strength and according to their own human wisdom and plans.

How do you react when you face a problem? Isn't it true that we are more like Abraham and Elimelech than we ought to be? Very often we face a difficult situation and we take the matter into our own hands instead of leaving them in God's hands and trusting Him. The Christian writer F. E. Marsh once made this challenging observation: "When we leave God out of our reckoning, difficulties will daunt us, temptations will triumph over us, sin will seduce us, self will sway us, the world will warp us, seeming impossibilities will irritate us, unbelief will undermine our faith, Christian work will worry us, fear will frighten us, and all things will wear a sombre hue. But when God is recognised as the One who undertakes for us, then difficulties are opportunities to trust Him, temptations are the forerunners of victory, sin has no attraction, self is denied, unbelief is ignored, service is a delight, contentment sings in the heart, and all things are possible." As soon as we do what Elimelech and Abraham did and lose our faith-focus on God, then temptation will triumph over us. The key to facing the problems you face is a spiritual mind. You must remember, if you are a Christian believer, that at all times God is with you to be your helper. We read in Hebrews chapter thirteen verses five and six, "God has said, 'never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So we may say with confidence, 'the Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'" Never think that in your trials God has left you to fend for yourself. In the dark He is there. When the sun does not appear to be shining He is there beside you to help.

The early American Indians had a method for training young braves. On the boy's thirteenth birthday he would be trained to hunt and fish. The final test was for him to be blindfolded and led out at night into the dark forest. He must spend the night alone. The blindfold would be removed and he would stand there in the pitch black, dense forest. Any sudden noise was terrifying as he imagined a wild beast ready to pounce on him. Throughout the night he would hear the rustling of leaves and twigs snapping. Eventually the dawn would break and light would shine. He would look and see trees and flowers and a pathway. And then, there sat on a rock a few feet from him, a man armed with a bow and arrow. It was his father who had been up all through the night watching over his son.

Trust God in the dark. Lean on him and not on your own understanding. Don't panic, because when there is a famine in the land He is still able to turn things round and restore the house of bread.

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3 – When Trials Come

We are told in the opening verses of Ruth chapter one that Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and his two sons Mahlon and Kilion had moved to the land of Moab. They went there because a severe famine had come to Israel. Elimelech took his family there to avoid starvation and death. We saw last time that this was a decision based on a lack of trust in God. The Lord was able to deal with the famine and provide for Elimelech and the whole nation of Israel. The famine was caused by God's judgement on a disobedient nation. This is implied in chapter one verse six where it says: "When she heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of the people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughter-in-law prepared to return home from there." During the times of the Judges, when the events of Ruth took place, God would discipline the nation through invading armies. They pillaged the land and took the harvest. When Israel repented God would send a deliverer. Once again God had shown mercy to Israel and come to their aid.

Ironically, Elimelech had died soon after his arrival in Moab. In chapter one verse three we read, "Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died and she was left with her two sons." The two sons married Moabite women named Orpah and Ruth. Then tragedy struck again because after they had lived in Moab for about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and so Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. Women in those times had no right to inheritance, so Naomi was in a serious situation. She was left destitute in a strange land and away from her family and friends in Israel.

Have you ever been through a traumatic time in your life? Perhaps you are in such a time just now. You may have had to move home, and now you are living away from close family and friends. Possibly you have experienced bereavement and lost a loved one. Are you experiencing turmoil in your life and you feel confused and uncertain? Could it be that you have doubted God's goodness and his wisdom? Maybe you have wondered, "Where is God in all that I am going through? Sometimes we experience these dark hours of the soul when everything seems bleak and black. We can be left emotionally exhausted. In the first chapter of the Book of Ruth we see the darker side of providence. By providence I mean God's activity in our everyday lives and circumstances. Sometimes God permits difficult times for us. There are times when the pain seems unbearable and our circumstances unfair. We may have many questions but no answers.

Several years ago I moved to a new pastorate. This involved moving house and leaving the area where we had lived for many years. At the same time my father died and my wife went through a time of serious illness from which I am pleased to say she has now recovered. Someone in the church came to me and said that he had been reading a book on psychology. In it was a stress factor guide of 1 to 10 on which you gauged your potential stress level according to what you were experiencing in life. 1 was a low stress potential and 10 was high. He said I scored 10 out of 10! How do we cope in these situations? How did Naomi cope? It was through faith. Naomi's faith had been battered and buffeted by what she had experienced. But in all the problems she faced in Moab, she never lost her faith. We know this because of the way she referred to God even though the way was tough for her. In verse eight she says to Orpah and Ruth, "May the Lord show kindness to you." Her trials had not made her bitter. She still held on to the truth that God is essentially kind. In verse nine she says, "May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband. Naomi still believed in the God of goodness and provision.

Sometimes you hear people say, "I used to have faith until I lost my husband, or until I lost my wife", or "Until I suffered a serious setback in my health, then I lost my faith." All sorts of other problems are mentioned as reasons for the loss of trust in the Lord. The Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe said, "A faith that can't be tested, can't be trusted." As much as we feel for people like that, it has to be said that the faith they professed was never really there to lose in the first place. A Christian man I know nursed his wife for fourteen years. She suffered with Alzheimer's disease and eventually she died. A social worker came to see him and noticed his library full of Christian books. She said, "I am sure the events of the last number of years have affected your faith. What do you think about God now? Do you still have faith?" "Oh, yes," he said, "in fact my faith has grown stronger. It has been through these sad and difficult times that I've proved God's strength and faithfulness." True faith rides the storms and proves God's grace in the furnace of affliction. Real faith opens up opportunities for witness as we testify to God's love in the turbulent storm. God allows us to pass through problems and difficulties for the same reason. They are times of testing. It is during these times that we see how strong our faith is, or how weak it may be.

In Mark chapter four we read that the disciples of Jesus were in a boat on Lake Galilee. In verse twenty-seven it says, "A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped." The disciples panicked and went to Jesus who was asleep in the stern of the boat. They woke him and said, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and commanded the sea to be calm and said to the disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" I we are honest, we are just like those men in the storm. We panic and start to question God's goodness and care for us. We must pass the test of life's storms and show that we have a firm confidence in God that He knows our troubles and is able and willing to keep us through them.

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4 – Faith's Witness

Naomi was left in the land of Moab without her husband and her two sons. Within ten years of living there they had all died. Chapter one verse six says, "Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where they had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah." Naomi encouraged Orpah and Ruth to return to their own families in Moab. She said to them, "May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband". Naomi reasoned that she was now too old to marry again and could not have any more sons. She said, "Even if I thought there was still hope for me and even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons, would you wait until they grew up?" We read in verse fourteen, "then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her".

There are two lessons to be learned from this incident. The first is the nature of Naomi's faith. She says something significant in verse thirteen: "It is more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has gone out against me!" Here we have insight into Naomi's understanding of God's ways with her and her attitude about it. She says, "The hand of the Lord has gone out against me". Naomi's faith was a faith that triumphed in darkness. The Hebrew word translated 'Lord' in verse thirteen is the word "Yahweh" (Jehovah). It refers to God's faithfulness to his covenant with his people. He is the eternal, unchanging God. Naomi was admitting that God had permitted whatever she had experienced for purposes best known to Him. In it all He was being faithful. It has to be remembered that God is still being faithful even in the dark times we pass through. It may appear to us that the hand of the Lord is against us, but it is actually FOR us. Naomi believed that both the rough and the smooth came from God's hand. The same God that brings peace and rest also permits turmoil and hardship to come into our lives. Because He is a faithful God He always does what is best for us. The blows of life that we experience are from the hand of a loving heavenly Father. He is working all things out for our ultimate benefit. He has our best interests in mind whatever He does, and whatever He allows to come our way. In trials and buffeting we may feel that the hand of the Lord is against us. We must remember the words of Romans chapter eight verse twenty-eight, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose".

Naomi was honest about her feelings. She did not give the impression that she enjoyed what had happened to her, but she saw that God's hand was in it all for some purpose. Be honest with the Lord about your feelings. When difficulties come, let him know how you feel. At the same time be humble before God. Accept the affliction and look for God's hand in it. The Bible teacher J.I. Packer gives some good advice on how we should respond to troubles. He says, "First, by taking them as from God and asking ourselves what reaction to them, and in them, the gospel requires of us; second, by seeking God's face specifically about them. If we do these things, we shall never find ourselves wholly in the dark as to God's purposes in troubles".

The second lesson from this incident is the impact of Naomi's faith. We read in verse fourteen, "Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and said goodbye, but Ruth clung to her". Naomi advised Ruth to return home with Orpah. Ruth then made this wonderful reply: "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people

and your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried". Ruth had become a believer in Naomi's God - the eternal One. The people of God would become her people. That is why she clung to Naomi as she did. What was it that led Ruth to place her faith in the God of Israel? What was it that caused her to turn from Chemosh, the false god of Moab, to the one eternal God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? It was Naomi's behaviour in affliction. In this Ruth saw the reality of Naomi's faith and of Naomi's God. Ruth had never seen anything like this from the Moabites when they faced suffering. Naomi had a calm faith and rested in the hands of a sovereign, faithful God. In this she found her comfort. Ruth watched her mother-in-law's reaction to all that she experienced and was impressed. Naomi's God was so obviously real to her and because of that Ruth wanted to know this God for herself. Christian, people are watching you as you live your life. The world can see through empty sham. They can see hypocrisy a mile away. what the world needs to see is reality in our lives. so often we moan and groan when things do not go the way we like. Sometimes unbelievers are not impressed with our Christianity. We respond to problems like they do by complaining and grumbling. People need to see that God is real to us and that we have a calm trust in the midst of life's trials and problems. Two people were having a conversation, one was a Christian and the other was not. The non-Christian said, "I have to say that while I have worked with you here you have had a profound effect upon me. You walk the walk and you talk the talk. But your walk talks more than your talk talks!" Ruth witnessed faith in action. She saw a buffeted faith come through the storms of life.

A well-known preacher said to his students, "We will go down to the town and preach". He led the way. They walked into the town and passed through the main streets and alleyways. They went into the suburbs and then to a round about route back home. not a word was spoken along the whole journey. One of the students said, "I thought we were going to preach?" "We have preached", said their leader, "we were preaching while we were walking. Many have seen us; our behaviour has been closely watched; that is how we preached our morning sermon. It is of no use to walk anywhere to preach unless we preach everywhere as we walk".

Live in such a way in your neighbourhood, work-place, home, university and school so that you will be an attractive advertisement for Jesus Christ. As you do there will be those who will say, "Your people will be my people and your God my God".

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5 – Submitting to God's Will

Naomi had been living in the land of Moab. Her husband and two sons had died there. While they lived there her two sons had married Moabite women. Their names were Orpah and Ruth. Naomi decided to return to her home in the land of Judah. It was quite a long journey of some 110 kilometres. The descent from the mountains of Moab to the Jordan valley was about 1400 kilometres. They would have then had to travel the 1200 kilometres ascent to Bethlehem, Naomi's home town. Orpah stayed in Moab, but Ruth decided to go with her mother-in-law. We read in chapter one verses nineteen and twenty, "So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, 'Can this be Naomi?' 'Do not call me Naomi', she told them, 'but call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter'". The name Naomi means "pleasant". Naomi's last ten years in Moab had been far from pleasant. Mara means "bitter" and Naomi had gone through a bitter time of grief and heartache. Yet in it all she testifies to God's activity. She says (verse twenty-one) "I went away full but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me".

You will have noticed that she refers to the Lord twice in these verses as "The Almighty". This translates the Hebrew word "Shaddai". It is a word that is derived from another Hebrew word for "mountain". It provides us with a powerful image of God. Like a mountain, God is strong, steady, immovable and stable. It refers to that which is dependable, solid and trustworthy. Naomi recognised God's sovereign activity in her life. The Lord determines our circumstances and sometimes they can be perplexing. We grapple with issues and experiences we face and we find them hard to understand. But Naomi's faith did not waver. She told it how it was, and what she felt in her heart. She humbly submitted to the Lord and his dealings with her during her time in Moab. Naomi believed in a God who could be trusted and who was righteous in all his dealings with her. She went away full, but she came back empty. In all the changing circumstances of life we have an all powerful God who can be trusted. Vance Havner put it well when he said, "I thank God for the unseen hand, sometimes urging me onward, sometimes holding me back; sometimes with a caress of approval, sometimes with a stroke of reproof; sometimes correcting, sometimes comforting. My times are in his hands".

He is the Almighty, the rock who supports us and who is unchanging in his love toward us. This is good to remember when you go through a bitter time. As the Almighty, He is in control of all that happens to you. When you experience the bitter times in life they have not caught God by surprise. He watches over you during those times when He permits trials to come into your life. We read in First Corinthians chapter ten verse thirteen, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.". The word "tempted" here in the original Greek has the idea of testing. It can be the testing of our faith or the testing of our obedience. In times of difficulty and testing remember the faithfulness of the Almighty. The words in this verse, "He will not let you", show that He must be in control. You are not the victim of chance. He is able to draw the trial to a close and to deliver you from it, or give you grace to bear it. The fact that He promises a way of escape shows that God has the last word in the circumstances

you face. God can be relied upon. He will never fail you in your times of affliction. He permits them for a purpose. Hudson Taylor, the missionary to China, wrote a short poem. He said, "Ill that God blesses is our good, and unblest good is ill, and all is right that seems most wrong, if it be his sweet will".

What possible purpose could God have in the afflictions that Naomi experienced? In it all God had a purpose for the young Moabite woman Ruth. He needed to get Ruth to Bethlehem. Even Elimelech's failure to trust God in the famine, and his mistake of taking matters into his own hands and moving to Moab, was turned around and eventually the Lord brought blessing out of it. He would fulfil his perfect plan. God has a perfect plan for your life. To perform it may mean that He may take you through times of fullness and emptiness. There may be times of affliction and apparent misfortune. At the end God will bring to pass that purpose He has for you. A. W. Tozer, a great Christian writer, commented, "We travel an appointed way". We read in Ruth chapter one verse twenty-two, "So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess". Mission accomplished! This would result in blessing and provision for Naomi and for Ruth, and would bring about another step in God's plan of salvation for the world.

Naomi had learned to read between the lines. There were the lines of her life experience and there were those things that could be seen and observed. There was the move to Moab. The tragedy of losing her husband and sons, the emptiness and the journey home. But there were the unseen lines and the hidden hand; the story within the story. There was the unseen hand at work in the events of Naomi's life. Another writer, Eugenia Price, said, "If only we could get hold of the life-changing fact that there are no little things with God! Your seemingly small trouble is of eternal importance to Him at this moment. He has some lovely lesson it for you. A lesson if well learned now, will affect you eternally. If you and I refuse to learn it now, He still cares. The next time we 'fall to the ground', He will still be there". So, we need to look for the lessons that God wants to teach us through the problems we have to deal with. These lessons are discerned by looking behind the things we can see with our eyes. It is seeing the Almighty in the afflictions. It involves recognising the hand of providence in all the various experiences of life whether good or bad. It is this that helps us to cope and provides us with a sense of purpose. Without this trust life will seem merely a vicious circle of haphazard events without purpose or meaning.

Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem at the time of the barley harvest. This means that it was around April time. This was a providential time to arrive because workers would be needed in the harvest fields. This would be the very means that God would use to move the events of Ruth's life forward as we shall see in the next study.

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Studies in the Book of Ruth

6 – The Providence of God

Naomi has returned to her homeland of Judah after ten traumatic years in Moab. She has brought her daughter-in-law Ruth a Moabite woman with her. They are now home in Bethlehem and chapter two of the book of Ruth begins with a reference to a man called Boaz. Verse one says, “Now Naomi had a relative on her husband’s side from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz”. The Hebrew word translated “a man of standing” means a man of wealth and property. It was harvest time and workers were needed in the fields. It appears that Ruth was aware of the law of Moses that allowed for the owners of a field to permit gleaners to gather grain after the reapers had passed by. This was so that the poor might have their needs met. In Deuteronomy chapter fourteen verse nineteen we read, “When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands”. How did Ruth know this? It is likely that Naomi had taught Ruth the scripture. She had talked to Ruth about the things of God.

Your family, friends and neighbours will not know what God requires of them unless they are told. So it was that Ruth followed on after the gleaners. She asked Naomi, “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favour”. Naomi gives Ruth permission to go. Not all field owners allowed the poor to gather grain in this way. But Ruth gathers in the field of Boaz, Naomi’s relative. Verse three says, “As it turns out she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech”. This shows that Boaz was being obedient to God’s word in allowing the poor to gather grain. Boaz was evidently a spiritual man with an eye to pleasing God. We can tell whether someone has a love for the Lord by their obedience to God’s Word in their lives. There were many in Bethlehem professing to love the Lord, but they did not obey the Scripture and did not permit the poor to gather grain after the reapers in the field. We read in James chapter one verse twenty-two, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says”.

Ruth begins to work in the field and Boaz appears. We read in verse four, “Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, ‘The Lord be with you!’. ‘The Lord bless you’, they called back!” Working relationships between employer and employees would be much better today if the Lord was brought into the workplace! We read in verse five, “Boaz asked the foreman of the harvesters, “Whose young woman is that?” The foreman explains who Ruth is, and when Boaz hears that she is Naomi’s daughter-in-law he is concerned to provide for her. He immediately looks to her welfare and says to her, “My daughter, listen to me. Do not go and glean in another field and do not go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where the men are harvesting and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled”. So Ruth works all day in the field until the evening came. In verse eighteen we are told that she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. She carried it back to town and told Naomi how much she had gathered. Ruth told her that she had been working in a field belonging to Boaz. Naomi saw God’s hand in all this. She says in verse twenty, “The Lord bless him... he has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead”. She added, “That man is our close relative, he is one of our kinsman-redeemers”.

The significant thing about this story is the evidence we see of God at work in providence. Providence is God's activity in the everyday activities of your life. In them He works out his plan and his purpose for you. Benjamin Franklin put it like this, "The longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs the affairs of men". Do you recall those words in verse three of this chapter, "As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz"? and in verse four, "Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem". Think about those words, "As it turned out.....Just then". Most people would call this a coincidence and simply chance happening. Some would argue that it was fate; it was simply how it turned out to be. No, there is more to it than that. This was no chance meeting. It was not a coincidence. It was God at work. He was fulfilling his purposes for Ruth, Naomi, Boaz and the nation of Israel and ultimately the whole world. God is in the detail!

We read in Proverbs chapter sixteen verse thirty-three, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord". By his sovereign power He is doing all that needs to be done to achieve his goal. The difference between the Christian and the non-Christian is that the Christian acknowledges God in all his ways. God is doing what needs to be done in world history, and he is doing what needs to be done in everyone's personal history in this journey called life. So God commands us in Proverbs chapter three verses five and six, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight".

Consider Esther, another godly woman in the Bible. God is not mentioned once by name in the Book of Esther, yet his activity can be detected in every chapter. In the deposing of Queen Vashti, and in the search for another queen for King Xerxes, even in Esther's appearance that attracted the king to her, and his inability to get to sleep one night can be seen the working of God. During that sleepless night he requested to have the history of his reign read to him and he was reminded of Mordecai the Jew who had saved him from assassination. All of these things, and more, were the effect of God's activity to save the nation of Israel from a plot by Haman to exterminate them. God did all this without removing man's free choice to make his own personal decisions. It is no wonder that Paul says in Romans chapter eleven verse thirty-three, "Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and his paths beyond tracing out!". In Esther chapter four verse fourteen, Mordecai, Esther's uncle says to her, "and who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" God had so worked in the current affairs of the nation, and in individual lives, that Esther was in the right place at the right time.

So be comforted by this truth that God is at work in your circumstances. He is working in them for your good and for his glory. Jesus said in Matthew chapter ten, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows".

Redeeming Love

Studies in the Book of Ruth

7 – God is Our Refuge

Ruth has moved to Judah with Naomi. Their husbands had died in Moab. They are destitute and without any inheritance. In the month of April they had arrived in Naomi's hometown of Bethlehem. It was harvest time and Ruth joins the servant girls working in the fields of Boaz a relative of Naomi. Boaz cares for Ruth and protects her. He discovers that Ruth has taken it upon herself to look after Naomi, and so we read in Ruth chapter two verse eleven, "I have been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before". He begins to support her and show kindness to her. In verse fifteen he says to his men, "Even if she gathers among the sheaves, do not embarrass her. Rather pull out some stalks for her from among the bundles, and leave them there for her to pick up, and do not rebuke her". This was very kind as usually the poor were allowed only to gather the leftover grain.

Boaz tells Ruth something comforting and encouraging. He says in chapter two verse twelve, "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". This is the key verse in the Book of Ruth. This is Ruth's position as a new believer in the Lord. She is under the wings of the Lord. God has become her protector. The picture is of an eagle fluttering its wings over its young. Being under the "wings of the Lord" is the place of great reward and blessing. Like Naomi and Ruth we face troubles, problems and trials in life. The child of God is in that place of refuge in our Lord Jesus Christ. The Psalmist says in Psalm forty-six verse one, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever p[resent help in trouble".

There are definite blessings to be found under the wings of the Lord. Ruth experienced these and so will you. She found all that she needed in the Lord. It is under the care of our God that we find safety. Psalm thirty-six verse seven says, "How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wing". We face many temptations and trials. Sometimes we face opposition and even persecution as believers. In it all we can find a place of safety in the Lord because He loves us and wants to help us. We read in the Book of Proverbs chapter eighteen verse ten, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe".

Under the Lord's wings there is a place of refreshment for the soul. Psalm thirty-six verse eight says, "They feast in the abundance of your house, you give them drink from your river of delights". Because of his love for us, the Lord nourishes our souls and strengthens us. In Psalm twenty-three verse two we are reminded of the love and care of the good shepherd: "He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me by still waters; he restores my soul". Christ rejuvenates us when the going has been tough. Under the shadow of the Lord is also the place of fellowship. Meal time is always a time of togetherness, friendship and relaxation. Feasting speaks of fellowship with the Lord. They are blessed times for the soul when we can retreat from the demands of the day and spend time in his presence feeding on his word, and drinking the water of life in communion with our Saviour. Such times do our souls good.

Under the Lord's wings is a place of stillness, peace and quiet. We read in Psalm fifty-seven verse one, "I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed". There is an old

poem which says, "In the centre of the whirlpool, while waters rush around, there's a place of perfect stillness, though with turmoil it is bound; all is calm and all is quiet, scarcely even a sense of sound. So with us, despite the conflict, when in Christ his peace is found". We are told in Psalm ninety-one verse four, "He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day".

Under his wings there is hope and joy. Psalm sixty-three verse seven is another reference to the wings of the Lord: "Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings". Satan tries to use our problems and trials to rob us of our joy. So often we allow him to get away with it. We become worked up in our troubles, but we should sing in them rather than complain. Why? Because we have God as our helper. No matter how severe the storm, the Lord is our shield and strength. Paul says in Philippians chapter four verse four, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice!" Notice that this is a command. It is not a request or a "take it or leave it" option. God commands us to rejoice because we have no reason to do otherwise for He is with us in the storm. The very creator of the universe is our helper. Let us say with the Psalmist, "I will lift up my eyes to the hills; where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth". (Psalm 121) The Psalmist drew his strength from the fact that the God who made all things was well able to help him in his troubles, and was willing to do so. No situation you face is too difficult for Him to deal with. God is referred to as a rock in Scripture. Psalm thirty-one verse three says, "You are my rock and my fortress". This means that God is a sure help and support at all times.

A ship was wrecked in a furious storm. The only survivor was a small boy. He was swept by the waves onto a rock. He remained there all night long. The following morning he was found and rescued. His rescuer said to him, 'You must have trembled as you sat on that rock during the night'. "Yes", replied the boy, "I trembled all night - but the rock didn't". Build your life on the solid rock of Christ and when the storms come you will be safe.

This world is a dangerous place. There is war, evil, terrorism and all kinds of sin. The safest people in the world are those resting by faith under the wings of the Almighty. In times of upheaval, bereavement, loss, hopelessness, emptiness, loneliness, troubles and trials, He will strengthen you in it. He will, in his own time and manner, bring you through it all. God does not promise a trouble free life. We are in a fallen, sinful world and that will affect our circumstances. But God does promise his presence and his help. He was protecting and overruling in the life of Ruth to fulfil his purposes and for her blessing. Psalm ninety-one verse one tells us, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, will rest in the shadow of the Almighty".

Redeeming Love

Studies in the Book of Ruth

8 – Strangers and Foreigners

Naomi and Ruth have left the land of Moab and are now living in Judah, in Naomi's hometown of Bethlehem. Whilst in Moab, Naomi's husband and two sons had died. She had had sad times there, but Naomi continued to trust God. She refers to Him as "Shaddai", the Almighty One, the faithful Lord. God is faithful to his people and because He is almighty, He is able to look after them even in times of distress. Back in Bethlehem she saw that God was beginning to provide for her and for Ruth through a close relative called Boaz. He was a relative of Naomi's late husband, Elimelech and is described as "a man of standing". In Boaz we have a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in his behaviour towards Ruth that we see an illustration of the redeeming love of Christ. If a mere fallen man can act in compassion and kindness as Boaz did, how much more will the Lord who is full of grace and compassion. As we continue to look at Ruth's story, and the developing relationship between Boaz and Ruth, I want us to discover how it pictures the love of the Lord Jesus for you and me.

In Ruth chapter two verses eight and nine, Boaz considers Ruth's need. We read, "My daughter, listen to me. do not go and glean in another field and do not go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where they are harvesting, and follow along after them. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you get thirsty drink from the water jars the men have filled". Boaz offers care and provision for Ruth. He acts kindly towards her. Here we see this wealthy landowner considering the needs of a poor, destitute foreign girl. Why should he do this? It was because of his concern and compassion. This is even more remarkable when you consider that the Moabites were formerly fierce enemies of the Israelites. When the Israelites were on their wilderness wanderings after leaving Egypt, the people of Moab would not allow Israel to pass through their land. This would have shortened their journey to Canaan. They were rebels against God's people, Israel.

The Bible teaches that when you were without Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, you were strangers and foreigners where God was concerned, and more than that you were alienated from Him and from his promises. You were in rebellion against the Lord. For the true believer this has all changed. We read in First Peter chapter two verse ten, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not the people of God, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy". Why is this? Because of God's love and compassion towards you. God is the wealthy owner of all things. He says, in Psalm fifty verse ten, "For every animal in the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills". This same God looked upon you with deep compassion in your sin and need. He showed marvellous grace to you. He showed you much kindness and goodness. We read in Ephesians chapter two verses one to five, "And for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins....but because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ.... It is by grace you have been saved".

Before he became a Christian, John Newton was a cruel slave trader and a drunkard with a foul mouth. Then God saved him and he came to experience the joy of sins forgiven. He became a changed man. He once admitted, "I am not what I might be; I am not what I ought to be; I am not

what I wish to be; I am not what I hope to be, but I thank God that I am not what I once was, and I can say with the great apostle, 'By the grace of God, I am what I am''. His testimony has been declared in the hymn he wrote. He recognised the cause of his salvation in the first verse, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see". As you read these words, do you know anything about the amazing grace of God in your life? Are you a true Christian? Has there been a time in your life when you recognised your need of Jesus Christ to be your Saviour from sin? Can you say because of God's grace and compassion that you are not what you used to be? Has your life been changed because Jesus is now your Lord and is living in you by his Holy Spirit? If this has not been your experience, then just where you are, ask God to forgive you, and place your trust in the Lord Jesus who on the cross took all the punishment due to your sins. If you do this you are placing yourself under the redeeming grace of God who loves you and you will be cleansed of all your sin.

We are considering the grace and compassion that Boaz showed towards Ruth. Notice the love and care that we see in his words to her as he tells her that she may glean where she will and she is under his protection. We read in chapter two verse ten Ruth's response to this: "At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground; she exclaimed, 'Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me, a foreigner?'" She was overwhelmed with gratitude that Boaz should treat her in the way he had. In writing about grace, the Christian writer A. W. Tozer said, "Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines Him to bestow benefits upon the undeserving". Stop and think about all that God has done for you, how He has shown the exceeding riches of his kindness in Christ Jesus. Consider what you were before Christ saved you, yet God still loved you and reached out to you in compassion and love. He showed you his favour. He noticed you in your hopeless condition and moved to help you.

Our response to God's grace should be the same as Ruth's was to Boaz. We should be full of wonder and thankfulness. Ruth bowed down with her face to the ground. So we should bow down in humility and worship before our God. We do not deserve the least of his blessings, but He has poured them upon us in abundance. Why have we found such favour? Someone has put it like this, "There is no reason to be given for grace, but grace".

Redeeming Love

Studies in the Book of Ruth

9 – Helpless or Hopeless

Ruth and Naomi are beginning to settle down in Bethlehem. One thing that has helped is the concern of Boaz for Ruth's well being. He has shown her much kindness and Ruth has expressed her gratitude to him. She said to Boaz, "You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant, though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls". (Ruth chapter 2 verse 13) Naomi sees Boaz's dealings with her daughter-in-law as significant. She says in verses nineteen and twenty, "The Lord bless him! He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead. That man is our close relative". Naomi believed that since Boaz was a close relative, he could become their kinsman-redeemer. What was a "kinsman-redeemer"? This refers to an ancient Jewish law and practice that began in the time of Moses. If a man died leaving a widow, then his brother, or a close relative, was required to continue his name by marrying the widow and having children by her. The idea was that the first son born would carry the name of the dead man so that his name would not be forgotten. You can read about this in Deuteronomy chapter twenty-five verses five and six. So, as a close relative, Boaz was qualified to become the kinsman-redeemer of Elimelech's family.

In Ruth chapter three, Naomi gives Ruth instructions on how she should make it clear to Boaz that she desires him to become her kinsman-redeemer. This is what Naomi said to her, "Is not Boaz....a kinsman of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Wash and perfume yourself and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but do not let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do". So Ruth went down to the threshing floor and did just as Naomi had instructed her. We need to understand the custom here. Some have misunderstood this act. It has been suggested that Ruth was guilty of sexual immorality when she did as she was told and uncovered Boaz's feet and lay down there. Was she acting wrongly when she said to Boaz, in verse nine, "I am your servant Ruth. Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer"? No, Ruth was not throwing herself at Boaz like a loose-living woman. This was the custom in that culture and at that time. It was the way a woman would let the male relative know that she wanted him to act as her kinsman-redeemer. An expert in Middle Eastern culture says, "The custom of a man placing the corner of his garment over a maiden as a token of marriage is known among the Arabs today". Also we see Boaz confirming Ruth's high moral character in verse eleven: "I will do for you all that you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character". He saw what she did as practising a well-known custom, and he confirmed her integrity. In the early hours of the morning Ruth returned to Naomi and told her all that Boaz had said. Naomi's response is found in verse eighteen, "Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For this man will not rest until this matter is settled today".

We have seen in previous studies how Boaz's attitude and behaviour towards Ruth is an illustration of the Lord Jesus Christ and his dealings with his people. This event in Ruth's life is a picture of our salvation in Christ. As Ruth said to Boaz, so we say of the Lord, "You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant". If you are a true Christian, there was a time when you heard of the love of God in sending the Saviour. You heard how that love was demonstrated on the cross. You marvelled at his grace and mercy. Paul describes this in Romans chapter five verse eight, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us". You

responded to his love declared in the Gospel, and recognised that He died for your sins. As the hymn writer puts it, “guilty, vile and helpless we, spotless Lamb of God was He”. What did you do? You took up that position of humility and, as it were, lay down at his feet and yielded to Him. You asked Him to be your “kinsman-redeemer” and to do what you could not do for yourself, which was to deliver you from sin’s penalty and power.

Ruth acknowledged her total dependence on the goodness and intervention of Boaz, that without his intervention she was helpless and hopeless. So it is with all who would know God’s forgiveness for sins. Admitting your sin is the starting point of salvation. Realising the magnitude of your need and that that need can only be met by God Himself through the Lord Jesus Christ, you come to his feet and cast yourself on his mercy. He will respond to that cry. We read in John chapter six verse thirty-seven, “Whoever comes to me I will never drive away”. The Lord will forgive all your sins and accept you as his child as you come to Him in faith and in sincerity, turning away from your sin.

Ruth’s act was an appeal for protection. Ruth uncovered Boaz’s feet and she place his coat over her. Remember the words that Boaz spoke about Ruth’s position with God in chapter two verse twelve, “Under whose wings you have come to take refuge”. Well now she placed herself under the corner of his robe. She was appealing to him for his protection as the kinsman-redeemer. So when we come to Christ we are appealing to Him for his protection from the just anger of God towards our sin, because He bore that just anger for us on the cross. There He became our Redeemer. We find in the Lord Jesus our rock of ages. He becomes our safe hiding place. He is our place of safety and security. We read in Isaiah chapter twelve verses one and two, “I will praise you O Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away, and you have comforted me. Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord is my strength and song; He has become my salvation”.

I trust that your experience is the same as the hymn-writer Elisha A. Hoffman who wrote, “It was down at the feet of Jesus, O the happy, happy day! that my soul found peace in believing, and my sins were washed away....It was down at the feet of Jesus, where I brought my guilt and sin, that He cancelled all my transgressions, and salvation entered in”.

Redeeming Love

Studies in the Book of Ruth

10 – Love Triumphs Over the Law

In our study so far we have seen that Ruth has appealed to Boaz to be her kinsman-redeemer. She has approached him according to the cultural practice of the day which was to uncover his feet and lie down there. Boaz knew immediately the meaning of what she did. As a near relative he was being asked to act for the family to ensure that the name of Elimelech would continue through the first born son of this new relationship.

There was a problem, however. Boaz says in chapter three verse twelve, “Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I”. Boaz was under obligation to give the immediate next of kin the opportunity to discharge his duty and become the family redeemer. Chapter four takes up the story as Boaz meets the legitimate next of kin. He calls the elders of the town and presents his case. We read his words in verses three and four, “Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me so that I will know. For no one has the right to do it except for you, and I am next in line”. Now the next of kin saw a good opportunity here. He must have reasoned in his own mind that Naomi was passed childbearing age, so the land could be passed on to his own son. He says, “I will redeem it”. Then Boaz brings in his masterstroke and says, “On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man’s widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property”. Ruth was presented as joint owner of the land with Naomi.

Although Naomi was passed childbearing age, Ruth was not. The next of kin saw the implication of this and realised that Ruth could bear him a son. The land would then pass to her to maintain the name of Elimelech’s son, her deceased husband Mahlon. In other words, he would spend a large sum of money and in the end receive no benefit from it. We read his response in verse six: “Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it. I cannot do it”. The next of kin then removed his sandal and gave it to Boaz. This was the custom when someone refused to act as a kinsman-redeemer for a family. Verse seven gives us some background to this custom: “Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one part took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalising transactions in Israel”.

There appears to have been a much more relaxed approach at this time in Israel’s history. In Moses time when this law was introduced, it was shameful thing to refuse to act as a kinsman-redeemer. In Deuteronomy chapter twenty-five verses eight and nine we read, “If he persists in saying, ‘I do not want to marry her’, his brother’s widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals and spit in his face and say, ‘This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother’s family line’”. That attitude was not apparent here. Boaz was next in line and he received the sandal and so took full responsibility to act as the redeemer. He says, “Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon’s widow as my wife in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family and from the town records”.

Once again Boaz can be seen as a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ in his relationship with his people. The thing to notice here is that love triumphed over the law. It is possible to apply the law but to have no love in its application. It is also possible to have love but to take no account of the law - this is called antinomianism. True love applies and keeps the law in a just and loving manner. Keeping the law does not redeem the believer. We are not capable in ourselves of keeping God's law. Our salvation is all of God's grace through faith in Christ. Where the law of God is concerned, Christians seek to keep it out of love for Christ, not in order to be saved. We read in James chapter two verse eight, "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbour as yourself', you are doing right". Galatians chapter six verse two says, "Carry each others burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ". The law of Christ is the law of love.

Boaz did not have to act as the kinsman-redeemer. He did so, not because the law required it, or because he was under obligation and duress. He could have walked away, and let them all sort it out among themselves. He did not do this, but acted in love. He went out of his way so that he could redeem the property and provide for Ruth and Naomi. In love he placed himself under the law and fulfilled its requirements. This was redeeming love. It is the same with the Lord Jesus Christ. We were in debt to God, burdened with our sin, helpless and hopeless, with no means to pay the debt ourselves. We read in Ephesians chapter two verses three and four, "Like the rest, we were by nature objects of God's wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions; it is by grace you have been saved". Christ died for us because He loves us. He had deep compassion for us and in redeeming love He met all the demands of God's law for us. He lived a perfect life, without sin and fulfilled the Father's will in all that He did. We read in Galatians chapter four verses four and five, "God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons". Redeeming love took the Lord Jesus to the cross to bear the wrath of God against our sins - to take our place.

The mercy, grace and love that Boaz showed to Ruth was nothing compared to the display of love and grace shown at Calvary by our great kinsman-redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. He paid the ultimate price for you and for me. He faced death on the cross, and separation from God his Father during those dark hours as He hung there. He was truly God's sacrificial lamb who has taken away your sin and mine, and of all who will believe. There is a Redeemer, Jesus, God's own Son.

Redeeming Love

Studies in the Book of Ruth

11 – The Redeemer’s Qualifications

As we have looked at the story of Ruth we have noticed that Boaz is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ in his love and provision for his people. This is especially seen in Boaz’s role as the kinsman-redeemer, purchasing the land belonging to the family of Elimelech and taking Ruth to be his wife. The Lord Jesus Christ is our Redeemer having paid the price for our salvation from sin by his death on the cross. The kinsman-redeemer needed certain qualifications before he could be recognised, and before he could act. I want to look at these qualifications and apply them to the Lord Jesus and so discover all that He has done for us.

First, the kinsman-redeemer had to be a relation. He needed to be a family member and someone who was identified with them. Our Lord Jesus Christ identified Himself with the human race. Philippians chapter two verses five to eight describe this for us: “...Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!” Jesus is the Word of God come in human form. We read this in the first chapter of John’s Gospel verse fourteen: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us”. The Lord became part of the human race and He shared in our sufferings. We read in Hebrews chapter two verse eleven, “But the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers”. God in Christ became one of us so that He might be our kinsman-redeemer.

Second, the kinsman-redeemer had to be able to redeem. He must have what was needed to pay the price. Boaz was described as “a man of standing”. This can also be translated as “a man of wealth” or “a man of property”. Boaz had both the ability and the resources to redeem the land for Naomi and Ruth. So too the Lord Jesus was qualified to act as our redeemer. No sinner can pay the price for the sin of another. Jesus Christ came as the spotless Lamb of God. He came into the world and lived a perfect, sinless life, and was thus able to offer that life in atonement for the sins of the world. He was perfect in his death for by it He accomplished the Father’s will for our salvation. His resurrection declared Him to be whom He claimed to be and demonstrated the Father’s acceptance of that redeeming sacrifice. We read in Romans chapter one verse four, “Who through the Spirit of Holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God”. Because of what Christ accomplished on the cross “...God exalted him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...” He has paid the purchase price completely and fully for our salvation. Nothing is lacking, there is no more to be paid by us; all has been achieved by our glorious Lord. On the cross He cried “Finished!” The work was complete. When we pay a bill sometimes the words “paid in full” are written across it, there is nothing more to pay. We will never be asked to pay more. The hymn-writer, Graham Kendrick, put it like this, “The price is paid, come let us enter in to all that Jesus died to make our own. For every sin more than enough He paid and bought our freedom from each guilty stain”. All our sins, past, present and future are atoned for and covered by the precious blood of Christ.

Third, the kinsman-redeemer must be willing to fulfil his duty. Boaz was willing to act for Naomi and Ruth. In Ruth chapter three verse eleven we have his words, “And now, my daughter, do not be afraid. I will do for you all you ask”. You will remember that there was a nearer kinsman whose duty

it was to act, but Boaz says, "If he wants to redeem, good, let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives, I will do it". His willingness is seen in the way he talks to the next of kin: "If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me so that I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line". The Lord Jesus left the glory of heaven willingly. The Father sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world and He came in love to be our redeemer. Here is the amazing grace we thought about in a previous study. We were sinners, lost in darkness, slaves to sin and Satan, unholy and ungodly. We were rebels against the King of the Universe and self-centred. (The middle letter of the word sin is "I") There was nothing in us that deserved that God should act to save us, but Jesus came as a willing offering for the sin of the world. He came to do the will of God for our redemption. (See Hebrews chapter ten verses five to seven)

So, we have discovered that our Lord Jesus Christ is supremely qualified to be our "Kinsman-Redeemer". May we willingly commit ourselves to Him and receive all the blessings that He has for us.

Redeeming Love

Studies in the Book of Ruth

12 – The Cost of Redemption

In our last study we noticed some of the qualifications of the kinsman-redeemer. He must be a relative, able and willing to redeem the property of the deceased. We have seen that Boaz was both able and willing to act in this way on behalf of Naomi and Ruth. We discovered that this honourable man is, in the way he acted, a picture of the believer's great kinsman-redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him the eternal Word became flesh and was found in the likeness of men. He became related to us in that He identified Himself with the human race. He showed his ability to redeem by living a perfect, sinless life, and by dying the perfect death for our sins on the cross. He came to this sin-sick world willing to save us. In the Lord Jesus Christ we have the only one who was qualified to be our Redeemer.

We continue now to look at some more qualifications of the kinsman-redeemer as seen in Boaz. As the kinsman-redeemer he must pay the cost required for the redemption of his dead relative's property. A promise to pay was not enough he must take action and make the necessary payment. Often we here it said that salvation is a free gift, and of course it is. It did not cost you and me anything, but that does not mean that our redemption was not costly. There was a cost to be paid for our redemption from sin and that cost was paid by God's own beloved Son. "God spared not his own Son but delivered Him up for us all". (Romans 8 verse 32) We read those wonderful words in John chapter three verse sixteen, "For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes (places their faith) in Him shall not perish but have eternal life". There was a price to pay to deliver you and me from the penalty and power of sin and from the kingdom of Satan. That cost was the life of our kinsman-redeemer.

Don and Carol Richardson were missionaries working with a head-hunting tribe in New Guinea. At that time the tribe viewed cannibalism and treachery as virtues. They even considered Judas, who betrayed Jesus, as a greater hero than Jesus himself. Don felt that there was no way to reach them with the Gospel message in a way that they would understand. Then there was warfare between the tribe and a neighbouring one. It was so bad that the Richardsons decided it was time to move on. As it happened the tribe had grown fond of them and were sad when they thought that they might lose them. This caused them to want to make peace with their neighbours. The tribes followed a traditional peace ritual that involved the exchange of children. As long as the children remained alive, the peace between the tribes would continue. Mothers in the tribes were filled with anguish at the thought of the loss of their children. The chief decided that rather than the mothers lose their own children he would take his own son and give it to the other tribe. In doing this he was actually giving his tribe to his enemies. The neighbouring tribe did the same and so peace came to both sides. The missionaries saw their opportunity. They realised that they had the perfect picture for getting the message of the Gospel across to the people. They gathered the tribal elders together, and told them how God, the heavenly Father, sent his Son Jesus to earth as his peace child to make peace between God and man. The tribe understood at last and many accepted Christ and were saved.

The Lord Jesus was fully aware of what it would cost Him to become the Redeemer of sinners. He knew that there lay ahead of Him all the physical and spiritual agony of the cross. In the Garden of Gethsemane he prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will". (Matthew chapter 26 verse 39) The Lord Jesus faced the cross, and willingly went to

Calvary to pay the cost so that we could be set free. He paid the correct price for our sins. The Bible teaches us that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. (Hebrew chapter 9 verse 22) The full cost was paid by the shedding of Christ's blood - the giving of his life - on the cross. Have you realised just how much God loves you? Have you ever realised just how much it cost Him in sending his Son to be your Saviour? Have you asked Him to forgive you all your sins? Is there peace between you and God? Have you come to Jesus Christ in true repentance for your sins and found cleansing through faith in Him?

Not only was the kinsman-redeemer responsible for paying the purchase price of the family property, he must also be willing to become responsible for the well-being of those family members involved. In Boaz's case, for Naomi and Ruth. Boaz paid the price for the redemption of Elimelech's land and family. He now also had the responsibility of looking after them on a daily basis. The "kinsman-redeemer package" was instant purchase with ongoing protection. Christ's redeeming love goes beyond his death on the cross. The cross certainly shows us the depth of his love for us. In Romans chapter eight verse thirty-two the apostle Paul writes these encouraging words, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave Him up for us all - how will He not also, along with Him, freely give us all things?" You can be sure of this, that your Saviour Jesus Christ will care for you throughout the coming days. You belong to Him and He has committed Himself to you and to your welfare in the end. Your well-being is his main concern. He has promised to meet your need, whatever that might be. In Hebrews chapter thirteen verses five and six we read, "God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'. So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid'".

Two Christians were walking past a farm. There was a weather vane on top of it with the words, "God is love". That's a strange place to put those words", said one of the friends, "God's love is not forever changing like the wind". The other friend replied, "No, I think you have misunderstood it. The sign is saying that regardless of which way the wind blows, God is love". You can be certain that in all the changing directions of the wind of your life's experiences, God loves you and your kinsman-redeemer will always care for you because He is well qualified to do so.

Redeeming Love

Studies in the Book of Ruth

13 – Witnesses to the Redeemer

We come now to our last study in the Book of Ruth. This time we are looking at chapter four verses eleven to twenty-two. Boaz has become the kinsman-redeemer and taken upon himself the full responsibility for redeeming the property of Elimelech and providing an inheritance for Naomi and Ruth. This transaction was a public one, done at the gate of the town where all the business was discussed and where important decisions were made. Boaz announced that he had fulfilled the duties of the kinsman-redeemer and he called the elders of the town and others present to bear witness to this. We read in chapter four verse nine, “The Boaz announced to the elders and to all the people, ‘Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Mahlon and Kilion. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess’”.

What had the elders and people actually witnessed? They had witnessed redeeming love in action. How did they respond to this act of redeeming love? They responded in two ways. We read their first response in verse eleven: “Then the elders and all those at the gate said, ‘We are witnesses....’”. In the same way, Christians are called to be witnesses to the redeeming love of Christ. In Isaiah chapter forty-three verse twelve we read, “I have revealed and saved and proclaimed - I and not some foreign God among you. You are my witnesses, declares the Lord, that I am God”. We are to bear witness to the fact that God is the saviour of sinners. Jesus said to his followers in Acts chapter one verse eight, “You will be my witnesses”. We are to be witnesses to our kinsman-redeemer who has redeemed us by his death on the cross. If anyone were to ask the elders of Bethlehem what they thought about Boaz, and what he had done, they would speak well of him and pass on the good news. They would say that through the self-sacrifice of Boaz, Ruth now belongs to the people of God.

As Christian believers we too will speak well of the Lord Jesus. We will tell others what He has done for them. We will speak much about the self-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. We will make his death on the cross known to everyone as the only way for them to be saved from the judgement of God against sin. This is the only way to belong to God’s family. We read in Acts chapter four verse twelve, “Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”. Christians will also bear witness to his redeeming love in their own personal experience. We will share with others how we became members of God’s family. It was through God’s goodness towards us, and by faith in the one who paid the redemptive price, that we are now in the Kingdom of God. We will tell others how real Christ has become to us, just as Ruth’s redemption by Boaz was real to her.

We are saved through the agency of the gracious action of our kinsman-redeemer. We then become the agents through whom others find redemption. Our duty as believers is to point them to Jesus who is the author and perfecter of our faith. We must not keep to ourselves the grace of our redeemer. We must witness about Him and pass on his invitation to come to Him and be saved from the penalty and power of sin. Jesus commands us in Mark chapter sixteen verse fifteen, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation”.

The second response of the elders and people is found in verses eleven and twelve. It is the response of prayer. We read: “May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel”. The whole nation of Israel descended from Rachel

and Leah. This prayer was that Ruth would become the ancestress of a famous race. This was a spiritual prayer. It was not a request for fame. Rachel and Leah fulfilled God's purpose and great blessing came out of it for the world. This prayer was that Ruth would likewise fulfil the purpose of the Lord in her family life and so bring blessing to others as a result. Ruth had now been accepted into the family of God's people and they were showing their support and care for her. It is our privilege and responsibility to support new believers in Christ by praying for them. We seek that the hand of God will be on their life, and that He will work his perfect will and purpose in them and through them. We pray that they in turn will be a blessing to everyone they meet.

The elders go on to pray for Boaz that he would be blessed in his family life and prosper. They prayed that he would have a large number of descendants like Perez one of the sons of Judah and an ancestor. The spiritual lesson here is that we should pray for each other's spiritual prosperity and growth. We should pray for each other that we might bare fruit for the Lord as we serve Him; fruit from our witnessing that will result in many souls be added to the family of God.

Ruth's story ends with her marriage to Boaz. From this marriage was born a child and this brought great joy. We read in verses fourteen and fifteen, "The women said to Naomi, 'Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel. He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better than seven sons, has given him birth". So the Book of Ruth ends happily: "Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. The women living there said, 'Naomi has a son', and they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David".

The book closes with a short genealogy. It takes us through nine generations from Perez to David. There is an important reason for this. God works through a family, a woman from Bethlehem, a Moabite woman, and a wealthy farmer. Ruth, Naomi and Boaz had their part to play in the ongoing purposes of God although they probably did not realise it. Through subsequent generations, from the family of David who became king, would come the Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ. God is the God of the individual. Boaz and Ruth would never have met David, but they were part of the ongoing purposes of God for our salvation. Jesus was born of the line of David. Paul says this of Him in Romans chapter one verses three and four: "Who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead; Jesus Christ our Lord". Ruth and Boaz fulfilled God's purpose in their time. So we are called to do God's will for our own generation. Commit your daily routine to the Lord because He is working in it all for his purpose and glory, and for your ultimate benefit and good.

We trust that you have been blessed as we have discovered Ruth's story together, and that your faith in the love of your Kinsman-Redeemer and in the providence and guidance of your loving Heavenly Father will have been strengthened.