

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- Sunday 25th August 2024 am
TITLE: "Faith active in love" TEXT: Ruth 3
SERIES: "There is a redeemer Pt 3 Scripture references from the ESV

Ruth 3 Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? ² Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. ³ Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴ But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do." ⁵ And she replied, "All that you say I will do."

⁶ So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. ⁷ And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. ⁸ At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! ⁹ He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings^[a] over your servant, for you are a redeemer." ¹⁰ And he said, "May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. ¹¹ And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. ¹² And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. ¹³ Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning."

¹⁴ So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another. And he said, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." ¹⁵ And he said, "Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out." So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her. Then she went into the city. ¹⁶ And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, "How did you fare, my daughter?" Then she told her all that the man had done for her, ¹⁷ saying, "These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said to me, 'You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law.'" ¹⁸ She replied, "Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today."

To understand what is going on in this chapter, we need to know something of what God had commanded Israel before these events took place. Otherwise, we might take this as an example of how young women are to meet and marry men or even just as a love story. We would be missing the point of it all!

When the Promised Land was given by God to his people, Israel, it was divided up between the 12 tribes,
and each tribe was allotted a portion.

Because the land had been given to them by God, it had to be kept in the family. If the family became impoverished and had to sell the land, there were a number of options for getting it back:

- They could only sell it to an Israelite, and if, later, they had the money to buy it back, they could redeem it from the person they had sold it to.
- In the year of Jubilee (every 50 years), any land that had been sold had to be given back to the original owners.
- They could ask a close male relative to redeem it for them. That man would be the **kinsman redeemer**.

In this way, God provided for the allotted land to be kept within the family. Naomi needed to sell the land that belonged to her dead husband, because she was so poor. She was in need of a **kinsman redeemer** so that the land could still be kept within the family.

There was a second situation that Naomi faced. Both her sons have died without children, and so there is no one to inherit the land, and not only that, the family name is about to die out. However, in this situation too, God had shown his care for his people and had made provision in his law. This was called **levirate marriage**. The word levir means brother-in-law. The widow was not to marry outside the family, but the brother of the deceased had the right could to marry his brother's widow in order to raise up an heir for his dead brother. He could refuse but if he agreed to do this, he would keep his brother's name alive and keep his brother's land within the family.

The law of the kinsman redeemer, and that of levirate marriage, form the backdrop of all that takes place.

Our culture operates very differently, but we can apply the underlying principles:

God is sovereignly and providentially working behind the scenes to provide for his people.

At the same time, his people are making use of God's provision, as they take action

The Bible constantly asserts that God is sovereign over the whole of creation, including the lives of every human being.

God sees to it that everything works to the eternal good of his people to the praise of his glory.

The Bible also asserts that we are not pre-programmed robots.

- Although God ultimately determines everything that happens in his universe, he does not limit the freedom of our actions or the dignity of our choices.

God may be hidden behind the activity of humans but he is always active

The story of Ruth shows us that God is continually at work in the lives of his people, even when we think nothing much is happening, but at the same time we have our part to play. He cares for us by providing a harvest, but Ruth still had to go out to glean in the fields to benefit from it!

Faithful believers in God respond to God's providence by living faithful lives of loving obedience to what God has revealed in his word.

We see what this requires from us as we look at the example that is shown to us by Ruth and Naomi.

1. **We are required to take the initiative (vv1-4).** In seeking marriage for Ruth, Naomi is seeking Ruth's welfare within the provision of God's law. She is basing this on circumstances that she has not engineered, but that God has brought about.

Naomi had prayed for her daughters-in-law: **May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!"** (1:8-9). It seems that God is beginning to answer her prayer but not in the way that Naomi had expected. She had anticipated that the best hope for the girls was to stay in Moab. For Ruth to come back with her would mean a life of singleness and poverty, since no Israelite would marry her and Naomi had nothing to give her. Ruth was willing to do this, no matter what the cost to her. However, as Boaz shows loving kindness to Ruth throughout the time of harvest, Naomi starts to realise that Boaz might be a possible husband for Ruth.

Naomi has not tried to set all this up. She sees God's providential hand in it and she knows God's law well enough to see that Boaz could be a **kinsman redeemer**

for the family land and fulfil the role of **levirate marriage** to keep the family name alive.

Naomi takes the initiative to get Ruth to go to Boaz and ask for marriage (**vv3-4**). She is motivated by

- The word of God (God's law) whereby she knows the provision God has made for her and Ruth
- Reading the circumstances (which she has not engineered) in the light of what God has to say in his word

Naomi shows us a wise way of stepping out in faith.

She is taking the initiative to push on a door that is allowed in God's law. That door seems to be opening to her and Ruth, but all the time she is willing to submit to God's providence if it leads her in a different direction (**vv 12,13,18**).

2. We are required to show courageous loyalty (vv5-7). We see here the danger that Ruth has put herself in. She was at risk of being assaulted in the fields, but now she has gone to the threshing floor where the men have been drinking, and a foreign woman would definitely be at risk. Her reputation is at risk too – the people of Bethlehem perceive her as a worthy woman (**v11**), but that could easily change.

Is she putting herself at risk out of desperation to get married?

She is acting out of loyalty to the Lord

She has already shown her loyalty to Naomi and the family, but now she demonstrates loyalty to the Lord under whose care she has come to shelter. God's law requires her to be willing to give herself in levirate marriage for the sake of her dead husband's family. She knows she must do this to honour the Lord to whom she has committed herself, though it means marrying a man who is older than her (**v10**).

- It is her responsibility to be willing to raise a son to keep the family name intact
- It is her responsibility to ensure that the land given by God remains in the family

As believers we are put right with God by God's grace alone, and we receive this justification through faith alone in Christ alone, not through obedience. Nonetheless, as those redeemed and put right with God:

**We are to respond with loving loyalty to him,
by seeking to obey his word in the strength he gives by his Spirit**

We are to do that even when it requires courage and takes us out of our comfort zone. We are to do that even when we risk being misunderstood, mistreated or even killed. Faith says: God has brought me to this place by his sovereign will, and I am going to follow his word even at the expense of my own comfort or safety.

We need to live out courageous loyalty

- 3. We are required to show gracious generosity.** Boaz is not under an obligation to marry Ruth and redeem Naomi's inheritance, as he tells her (v9). He could just have refused her proposal because he is not the nearest relative, but instead he seeks to find a way to accept her request for marriage (v13) because
- he loves her and wants to show her grace.**

At this point in the story, Boaz continues to show grace to Ruth by continuing to protect her and provide for her.

- He protects Ruth by not letting her walk home at midnight, and by making sure no one knows she is there so that her reputation is not tarnished (vv13-14)
- He provides for Ruth by not only giving her six measures of barley, but by agreeing to resolve the issue of the other kinsman redeemer (v15).

Boaz is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. **Jesus is the true man of faith**

- who **takes the initiative** in our lives to ensure that we are provided for both spiritually with eternal life, and physically and emotionally during this life
- who acts with **courageous loyalty** to the people he has eternally committed himself to by coming to this earth in human flesh, by living a righteous life on our behalf so that we will have a righteousness to cover us and by dying a sacrificial death on the cross to atone for our sins.
- who is **graciously generous** to us to protect us in so many ways, but especially from the judgement of God on our sin.

When we turn our lives over to him, Jesus Christ produces the following responses to God's providence in our lives:

- He enables us to read the signposts of God's providence in our lives and **take initiative** even when we do not know exactly how things will turn out
- He enables us to act with **courageous loyalty**, not just to those we have committed ourselves to (our spouse, our church and friends) but also to the Lord who has drawn us into covenant relationship with himself.
- He enables us to show **gracious generosity** so that, just as Christ has generously forgiven us, accepted us and served us, so we are able to generously and graciously forgive, accept and serve others.

In the ordinary routines of life, we have opportunity to respond to God's providences and those providences and our response might just lead to God doing something we could never have imagined.

This narrative in Ruth helps us to see that the ordinary everyday initiative, loyalty and generosity might seem insignificant, but could be far more significant than we realise. The story is set in the time of the judges which was a time of recurring calamity for the people of Israel, as time and time again they rebelled against God. Whenever God raised up a judge who courageously defeated Israel's enemies, they had peace until the next time of rebellion. Some of those judges, such as Gideon, Deborah and Samson, really were heroes. Ruth is set in this time but there are no overt heroics.

Naomi and her family are just an ordinary family going about their everyday life in Israel:

- They moved home, experienced bereavement, suffered poverty, made use of God's law to ensure they had food and were shown kindness.

Boaz is just an ordinary man of the town, doing what he did every year:

- He ploughed his fields, and sowed seeds, trusting there would be a harvest. He employed workers, gathered grain and celebrated God's goodness with his friends. In the middle of this, he fell in love with an outsider to Israel.

It seems very ordinary in comparison to the mighty deeds recounted in Judges, but as these people responded to God's providence in the everyday of human life, God was

doing something far more amazing than just physically delivering his people from physical enemies.

God was bringing the Saviour of humanity into the world.

It is through the line of Ruth and Boaz that Jesus came.

Never underestimate those seemingly ordinary providences of God in your life, and your apparently mundane responses to them. That person you just happen to bump into at the bus stop, giving you the opportunity to say a few words about Jesus, might have their life changed because of that meeting.

God has not called us all (or even most of us!) to accomplish great feats of heroism. He has called us to respond to his ordinary everyday providences in our lives by:

- faithfully taking initiative
- exercising courageous loyalty
- offering gracious generosity

As we respond in that way, God is at work to accomplish his eternal purposes.

When we get to heaven, our part in those purposes might turn out to be far more significant than we ever imagined.