

**Reading:** Ruth 2:1-23

**Subject:** Hopeful Happenings.

It may be that at times things seems so dark to us. Even the brightest spots seem dark also. In the Bible we see many people having hard and dark times; being in helpless situations. Yet we see their circumstances also changed dramatically and rapidly e.g. Joseph; David in the cave Adullam; Job.

In chapter 2 we notice Naomi and Ruth's dark and desperate situation is penetrated by a clear beam of light. From this chapter onwards, things begin to brighten and pick up. There is not just a light at the end of the tunnel shown us, but the exit from the tunnel into the full summer sunlight of a glorious land. This is quite an amazing chapter for it teaches us much about the everyday life of the poor in ancient Palestine - as we glimpse something of their situation and how they survived; it tells us of the outworking in everyday life of God's word and care; but it also teaches us, emphasises to us, the amazing care and provision of God for His children.

We see again that the God of the Bible is not some far distant God, who leaves people alone - to either sink or swim. We see He is involved and working in an unknown and often unrecognised way in their lives. This may be directly or indirectly. Matthew Henry says in his introduction to this chapter " *There is scarcely any chapter in all the sacred history that stoops so low as this to take cognizance (notice of) of so mean a person as Ruth, a poor Moabitish widow, so mean an action as her gleaning corn in a neighbour's field, and the minute circumstances thereof. But all this was in order to her being grafted into the line of Christ and taken in among his ancestors, that she might be a figure of the espousals of the Gentile church to Christ,*"

So often we may feel our lives do not count, no one ever bothers with us, or cares about us - who we are, what we're going through. We may feel, rightly or wrongly, that we are neglected, accounted as worthless and useless. It would appear society does not care about us, nor the church care - again rightly or wrongly; but we are to be reassured that there is One in heaven, who is not far distant, who is not ignorant of us and our circumstances of life. This almighty God has His eyes of love and care upon us. He knows all we are going through - all the joys and griefs; it ups and downs; the highs and lows and yet none of these are wasted by Him as He works all things together for good to those who are called according to His purpose. It is certainly true for us if we are His child. He also works in the lives of those who may never have desired Him, starting to seek Him and does so to bring them to Himself.

We see something of this beginning in the life of Ruth - as she through her marriage becomes involved in the life of Naomi, who is a child of God and going through much hardship and yet through it, Ruth is brought to trust the living God as her God. To all intents and purposes Naomi and Ruth were in for a hard and joyless life; a life that did not abound with any prospects; a life that seemed as if it would be a shorter one rather than a longer one. Amazingly the Lord was in control, He was weaving the tapestry of their lives as He planned and so alongside all the dark threads there are going to be intertwined some glorious golden threads. Let's look at the first 3 verses using two headings:

### **1. The Unknown Hope.** (v1)

As far as Naomi and Ruth were concerned they had no hope. They were widows, helpless and hopeless. There was no one to

provide for the future. But in v1, we are suddenly introduced to their hope - unknown to them, but we are introduced to him. It seems we are let into the secret straightaway, but they had to wait! Ruth only finds out as Naomi bursts into praise when Ruth tells her whose field she worked so profitably in that day (v20).

He is introduced to us as a relative, a kinsman - a relative of the family. He was related to Naomi by marriage through Elimelech. The word translated "*family*" (KJV) is a word that denotes more than our idea of the immediate family and it is translated as "*clan*" in NIV - which is probably a better translation, as in the Middle East, both then and now, the family is always considered as the extended family or clan.

Boaz was an important and prosperous person. NIV says "*a man of standing*" KJV says "*a mighty man of wealth*". The Hebrew is difficult to express. Elsewhere it is used of Jephthah the translated "*a mighty warrior*" "*a mighty man of valour*" (Judges 11:1). It may refer to Boaz's might as a warrior - they lived in troubled times and perhaps he had been used of God in many battles. Probably as a result of this, he had been honoured and as his fighting days ended, he settled down to be a good member of the local community. The wording of the NIV "*a man of standing*" includes the idea of wealth and that of being respected.

As we learn of Boaz in this book, he proves time and time again that he is one who is worthy of respect - in terms of his godliness, his industriousness, his care and concern for his workers and those in less fortunate situations, to care for reputations, to ensure right is done in a lawful way - even being able to organise 10 elders of the town to hear his case at short notice! The name he has reflects his character also as Boaz

means "*strength*" or "*quickness*", the best meaning seems to be "*son of strength*". He is a strong, upright man of some standing and influence.

It was all this and yet more. We come to see that he was the hope of Naomi and Ruth, for he was not only a relative, but he would be their kinsman redeemer. Naomi points Ruth to this in 2:20 and Ruth uses this word of him in 3:9. He was one upon whom God-given responsibilities and duties were laid - to help these widows, rescue them and give them hope. We see of this later in the book. At this point the writer of the book here seems to be saying "*Keep your eyes fixed upon Boaz*" - there is something more to come!

Many here this morning have the hope of eternal life, have the hope of a glorious Saviour, **the** Kinsman Redeemer - the Lord Jesus, who has worked in our lives, having met with us, rescued us and given us hope. Yet there are some here who may not have this hope and feel they are facing a hard and dark future. You may have no real knowledge of this One, nor of the hope you can have when you trust the Lord Jesus as your own Saviour – He is your unknown hope at this moment, but you can know Him for yourself.

We are to realise God has provided a way for men and women, boys and girls to be right with Him. He's provided only one way. Without Him we would be helpless, we would have to face this God, not as our loving, caring Father, but as the Judge who will have to condemn us to hell. If we don't know this hope, I ask us to realise our predicament and make the Lord Jesus our Saviour and know this certain hope of eternal life. This Saviour need not remain an unknown hope to any of us, but He can be known and

the salvation He gives can be delighted in. Naomi and Ruth had an unknown hope, but we see:

## **2. A Hap Unrecognised.** (v2 & 3)

What is a "hap"? The word is there in the dictionary - well my dictionary (The Oxford Handy Dictionary) and tells me it means "*1. chance, luck: chance occurrence. 2. come about by chance.*" The KJV uses it in v3 of Ruth "*and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz*". NIV says "*As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz*".

A seemingly chance happening, a lucky event! Yes, it would appear so. Ruth had learned of Naomi that God in His word had made provision for widows - by letting them "*glean*" in the harvest fields, vineyards and olive groves (Leviticus 19:9 ff; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19). NIV translates the word "*glean*" as "*pick up the leftover grain*". Gleaning was not on the whim of the landowner, but was a right and privilege commanded by God Himself. God commanded that the corners of fields were to be left, any ears of corn etc on the ground, or, any olives or grapes left on the tree or vine, as well as any sheaf forgotten in the field were to be left, and all these were for the widows, orphans and strangers.

In His care, His common goodness to men and women, God made provision for the most vulnerable and helpless in society. It went beyond personal rights of ownership. Israel was to see God's care and concern so they would not coldly do what God instructed, but also make provision for such ones themselves. It was not a cold keeping of the letter of God's word, but working out its spirit in their daily lives. Boaz carries this out and even told his men to deliberately drop some barley ears of grain (v15 & 16).

In NT, the church picks up the care of widows etc and even in our day and age as believers we will have roles to play in showing the practical love of Christ to those in need, especially those who are vulnerable. It may not just be a case of giving money to a charity or to a person. It may be better for the person, although not easier for self, to provide for the needs in a practical way. We've had requests for money through the post or from people who come knocking the door - often had this just because I am the pastor of the church. We deal with the post ones differently to the knocking ones. If possible, we never give money to callers. If it is for food we will try and give food, or clothes, as money can so easily go on things not necessary for life. These things are not said to boast, but to encourage us to be wise in dealing with people. Some churches have a policy never to give money, but try to meet the need in a practical way - if someone needs to see their family living at a distance, the ticket is bought and given them, even put them on the train or bus. Other people are bought meals or given the food in their hands.

Christians still have a responsibility to show the care and love of God - both practically and spiritually. Both must be included, as we not only seek to care for their bodies and physical needs, but our aim should be always the point them to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a harsh mercy to feed them and let them go well fed on their way to hell!

Ruth knew of gleaning and so asked Naomi's permission to go and work in the fields and her hap was, by chance (!) she went to the field belonging to Boaz and while there, Boaz just happens to come along just at that moment! Here we see the providence of God where He is ruling and working all things together as He knows is best. There is no such thing as a chance

happening, a lucky thing, a coincidence for it is always God working out His loving providences. Don't limit this to but a chance or to fortune or fate. See in this little incident the divine working of a heavenly loving Father who has purposes in this unrecognised hap!

Sometimes it is good to look back on our lives and see God's providences in them. Many events we can say were happy and agreeable providences; others we were not so happy with as they hurt, but we can see God was in them and working. God works in the little as well as the large things of our lives, just as surely as He works in the major events of history. Here God works in history and eternally affects history through a chance meeting of two people - while she is gleaning in his field and it leads to marriage, a son, descendants, royal descendants and the Saviour of the world is included among the descendants. Also included is us as individuals becoming a Christian!

None of us know what the Lord can achieve in and through our lives; nor do we know how He will achieve it either! To many that is a frightening thing, a difficult thing as it may involve us going through times of hurt, grief and even cost us what we feel is too much. Yet our God wisely and lovingly orders events, large or small, as He knows is fit and He directs all by His wise and loving providence.

Do we fear that such a God could love us and lead us aright? Yes, He may lead us through valleys of shadow, into suffering, into times when we are surrounded by enemies, but He is just as much with us then as He is when He leads us by still waters, when He restores our souls. We have a gentle and tender Saviour, who is ever near us, leads us on and will be with us all

the way to heaven and He knows the way which is best and right for us to go.

Ruth and Boaz are brought into contact by this unrecognised hap and yet above it all, the great sovereign God and Lord of all is lovingly working in what seems a chance event and an unlikely romance begins in an obscure little village in Israel.

None of us are here by chance this morning. Our hap is to be here in Doncaster Evangelical Church. So, I can ask us all “*Do we know this loving and wise God?*” Not do we know about Him, but do we know Him personally? He desires that we come to know and trust Him in the person of God the Son - the Lord Jesus. Then we will know we have the Kinsman Redeemer, One who cares for us and lovingly works all things together for our eternal good. If we know Him, then thank Him for the honour and privilege and be constantly filled with wonder that such a God should take knowledge of the likes of you and me.

So often, we all see things from our own point of view, but as we look at this book we are to learn the lesson of looking at things from God's point of view. As we do so, we will see His hand upon our lives and learn to marvel and adore Him more and more. We need to keep the divine perspective in view at all times and that even the unrecognised occurrences and events are full of unrecognised haps even for us. So, we can be quietly confident - not because we know exactly what God is doing in this unpredictable world, but because we know that what is unpredictable to us is already known by Him and He has His purposes for us in our own book of life!

We have to say how good is the God we adore, so we can praise Him for all that is past, and trust Him for all that is to come.