

Reading: Ruth 2:1-23

Subject: The Brief Encounter

Ruth had gone out and was now working in the field of Boaz. It seemed by chance that she was there, but in God's providence nothing is by chance, but He had worked and brought this about, so that Ruth and Boaz would meet up. Ruth had been brought by dark providences to trust the Lord; now that same Lord was going to work further in her and Boaz's life with gracious and pleasant providences. So, Ruth seemingly just happened to be in Boaz's field; but other things occurred - "*Just then*" (NIV) or "*Behold*" (AV). There is a concise vividness about the narrative. As Ruth is working there in the field, Boaz himself comes into that field and notices Ruth. All that occurs in v4-17 goes on in that harvest field. I have 4 short points us to look at the events that went on in that field:

### **1. Greeting.** (v4)

Boaz, this man of standing, of importance, comes out from the town. He's coming to see if there were any problems, to see if all was in hand and the work was progressing properly. As he arrives, he greets the harvesters with these lovely words "*The Lord be with you*" and they greet him with equally warm words "*The Lord bless you*". There is nothing to show that this kind of greeting and response was unusual. It was probably a conventional greeting. Yet compared to our day and age, it carries much witness and testimony in it. I suspect Boaz sincerely uses this greeting, desiring the Lord to be with his workers, to help them and keep them. They in turn wish him the blessing of the Lord - all parties used the covenant name "Lord".

We have a vestige of such God centred sayings in English - "goodbye" derives, comes from "*God be with ye*" or probably "*God bless ye*". This adds a richer and greater dimension to our

partings if we were to use this full sense of the word - not necessarily in "*ye olde English*". Yet as we part we can wish each other "*God bless you*". Boaz and his workers exchange this lovely God centred greeting. It is a lesson to be learned and worked out in our lives with sincerity, not for external show, nor done in a mechanical, unthinking way.

## 2. Enquiry. (v5-7)

Boaz then asks the foreman, the servant set over the other servants, concerning this young woman, damsel that he saw gleaning in the field. Boaz would have been well acquainted with most people in Bethlehem and here is this stranger, possibly still in the fashion, clothes of Moab, and she's working in his field. He had every right to ask concerning her; it may have been he thought she was employed by him and wanted to know all his employees.

The answer Boaz receives is a short one. The servant did not need to elaborate as it would seem that Boaz had a knowledge of Naomi's return and the news that caused the whole town to be moved concerning Naomi, had obviously reached Boaz and more beside (*as he shows in v11*) - all her kindness to Naomi, leaving Moab etc. As soon as she is identified, Boaz must have realised what she was doing and who she was working for and it was not for herself alone.

His enquiry led not only to the discovering of her **identity**, but also of her **courtesy**. She had gone and asked the foreman for permission to go and glean among the sheaves. She is not presumptuous, but modest and asked permission. Yet Boaz learned not only of her identity and courtesy, but also of her **industry** - she had been there in the morning, probably early morning and was still working and had taken the shortest of rests.

It seems this young woman had made an impression on his chief servant, foreman.

I don't know how the servant regarded gleaners, nor whether this servant was for or was not for them, but he gave an unbiased and truthful account of Ruth and her working. It also says a lot for Ruth that she made such an impression on the foreman with her attitude and industriousness. We need to realise that we witness with our lives as much, if not more than with our words. As believers we should do our work to the best of our abilities. It does not necessarily mean we will be the best at what we do, but we will certainly do what we do to our best ability. We should be conscientious in all, diligent in all and truthful in all. Boaz, by enquiry learned of Ruth and was obviously touched by her love and devotion to her mother-in-law, who was one of his relatives. Then we see him:

### **3. Caring.** (v8-10)

Boaz goes across to Ruth. I wonder how she felt as he went across the field, past the reapers and the women binding the sheaves and heading to her! Everyone by their attitude to him had made it clear that here was the "boss".

Boaz addresses her and began by saying that she should listen to him. The word he uses means more than just listen; it means to listen, to take note of, understand and do. He tells her to stay and work in his fields and to stay close to his servant girls. It may have been that gleaners moved about from field to field, scavenging where they could to get the easiest pickings, but Boaz instructs Ruth to stay in his fields and only his fields. *(One commentator notes the unusual Hebrew language used in this verse and points out that Boaz's dialect, country accent was being brought out. So,*

*it is not strange to have an accent or two in an area and even different accents!)*

Boaz tells Ruth to note which field his men are working in and go with the girls behind them - probably the men doing the harvesting and cutting, the girls then tying up the sheaves and standing up, or at least bundling them together. At harvest time it was all hands-on deck to get the harvest safely in. Boaz assures Ruth she'd be safe in his field as he had ordered his men not to molest her. She was a foreigner who was gleaning and could be taken as easy prey by any unscrupulous reapers; it also meant she could sooner get closer to the crop they were harvesting. Gleaners could glean only after the workers had finished and were often kept back by mistreatment if they got too close and were thinking, trying to take things too soon. Here Boaz protects her and at the same time allows her to approach nearer, even before other gleaners and so get a better gathering in safety.

Yet Boaz's kindness and caring doesn't stop there - he gives her permission to drink from the water jars the men had filled. The water supply was not in the field, but near the town gate (c.f. David) and so if she wanted a drink and didn't have any with her, she would have to go to the town and then back again. This was an immense kindness to her, for gave her much more time to glean. Usually the water pots were guarded and kept for those who were entitled to it and so Boaz's care ensures that she is not hindered in any way in her working.

Ruth is staggered, amazed at his care and kindness. It had been many a long day since any good thing had happened to her and here was care and kindness being heaped upon her and therefore also upon Naomi. Ruth prostrates herself, bows down on the ground, before Boaz as a token of her gratitude and humility. She

recognised that Boaz was going further than was required in God's word and she was grateful, but didn't presume on his kindness. She is also wondering "*Why?*", so she respectfully and humbly asks him why he showed this favour to her a stranger, a foreigner. Ruth realised she deserved no favour from this great man. It was a privilege to work in his fields, but to be cared for, to be favoured and shown this kindness was an amazing thing.

Do we ever pause to consider the unmeasurable favour, the immense kindness of God to us? It is an amazing thing that this high, glorious and mighty God – described as sitting on His throne in heaven, and the people who live on the earth are like little noisy grasshoppers to Him, yet this one should take notice of you and me. Not only that He should notice us, but for many here, He has brought us to know His love and favour by saving us, bringing us to know the Saviour He has provided - the Lord Jesus Christ. Someone here may not know this Saviour. Yes, you may know many things about Him, but you do not fully know the love, favour and goodness of God that comes from having the Lord Jesus as your own personal Saviour.

If we do know the Lord Jesus in this way, it should cause in us a great sense of awe and wonder, to exclaim "*Why O Lord such love to me?*" It gives us every reason to be taken up and lost in wonder love and praise for all that He's done for us. That was something of Boaz caring for Ruth, but he moves on and we see him:

#### **4. Blessing.** (v11 & 12)

In reply to Ruth's question, Boaz now tells her what he had heard about her care for and of Naomi. His reply has the force of "*it had certainly been told*" all she done for Naomi. How that Ruth had sacrificed so much - leaving parents and homeland and had come to live with a people she didn't know. Perhaps he was reminded of

Abraham leaving his homeland and family, we don't know, but Boaz had heard this about Ruth and was moved, especially as he considered her living among strangers. Yet Boaz had heard and taken notice of more than that. The faith of Ruth had been mentioned and now he blesses her, asking that the God she had come to trust in, that He would bless her - expressed here as wages and reward.

Boaz truly wanted Ruth blessed. At this time Boaz did not suspect that he would be a major part of the answer to that prayer of blessing! At this point neither Boaz or Ruth suspected that in a short time, she would, as a result of God's favour and blessing, be the wife of the owner of the very field in which she now gleaned! Incredibly that is how God repaid and rewarded her and blessed her even further with a son. I wonder how many times Boaz and Ruth must have laughed at their first meeting and words!

Boaz uses a lovely term to express Ruth coming to faith in the Lord *"under whose wings you have come to take refuge"* - the picture is of a frightened little chick, hiding snugly, safely under the caring and protecting wings of its mother. I'm glad to say the picture still stands for us when we come to faith. We can picture ourselves being safe under the wings of God and taking refuge there. There are a number of lovely examples of this in the Bible and as we come to close will look at some of them and apply them to ourselves to see the tenderness and comfort of this picture and so help us to realise the wonder of coming to take refuge, to trust under the wings of the Lord.

To some the picture of a little bird protecting her young is not a dynamic one, but the Lord pictures himself as caring for His people, personified as Jacob, like an eagle - Deuteronomy 32:11 *"like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that*

*spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions."*  
- This is a picture of power coupled with care e.g. Geoff Capes and his budgies!

God's wings describe a place of safety - Psalm 17:8 & 9 "*Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who assail me, from my mortal enemies who surround me.*"

They picture a place of refreshing - Psalm 36:7 & 8 "*How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast in the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights.*"

Under the wings of God is a place of stillness - Psalm 57:1 "*Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed.*"

Under his wings we can rejoice even in troubled times - Psalm 63:7 "*Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.*"

Under his wings is a place of hope - Psalm 91:1-6

This picture was a precious one to David - he may have written in Psalm 91 also. If he did, I wonder if this idea came down through the family from great grandma Ruth and great granddad Boaz!

What ideas are contained here! Wouldn't we count it a joy and privilege to be under the wings of the Almighty, to take refuge

there - not just from life's storms, but ultimately from the wrath of God? *Story of chicks, hen and fire.*

To come to such a God and Saviour in the Lord Jesus Christ is a wonderful privilege. Sadly, not all will come. His own people rejected Him, the people of Jerusalem where the Temple was, rejected Him and crucified Him. On one occasion the Lord Jesus as He looked upon Jerusalem said these words "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!*" KJV = "*and ye would not!*" (Luke 13:34)

I wonder if today the Lord Jesus is weeping over any of us here! He is willing to cover us all with His wings of salvation, power, safety, refreshing, stillness, care, love and we can rejoice at all those, but perhaps we will not, we are not willing for it. If so, I say as politely as I can to those who are in that position, "*Don't be a fool*". Rather, learn from Ruth and come to take refuge under the wings of the Lord, the God of Israel whether we are younger or older.

Those of us who know what it is to be sheltered there, nestled snugly in peace and safety there, may we have an ever-growing appreciation of the tremendous privilege we have, also the amazing love and care that is lavished upon us and may we be those who delight and rejoice in such.