

Reading: Ruth 2:1-23

Theme: Favour, Joy and Obedience

As a Boy Scout I enjoyed a huge number of events with the Scout group, the more so because it had recently been reformed and I was one of the new group appointed as a patrol leader. One event was the South Wales jamboree, with Scout groups from all over South Wales came together in Pontypridd Park, only 10 miles from home. At this jamboree that Chief Scout, Mr McLean, was coming to visit. We had read of him, his background, now he was in South Wales and would have a chance to see him in the flesh. We were given our instructions where as a troupe would be standing and how our patrol groups would stand. Then the great man arrived and went walkabout through, saluting each group. We would actually see him close up. He came to our troupe and saluted, we did the same back. Then he took a step forward and started talking to me and asking me questions! To me at that time, this was the greatest, most incredible thing that had ever happened and also one of the worst things also - as my mind went blank and answers stuttered out! People wanted to know what he said, I said it felt amazing, yet amazed that he spoke to me and I couldn't remember what he said as I was shocked! As I thought about this as I was preparing, it still seems like a dream, but it wasn't.

I tell you that little incident to try and convey something of the amazement and wonder Ruth must have felt as this great man Boaz was speaking to her and speaking so kindly and caringly, especially as he blessed her for her care and kindness to Naomi, even asking God's blessing upon her. It really was indeed a great kindness Boaz showed to this foreigner. Let's go on in this passage and I've three points to help us look at v13-23:

1. Favouring (v13-16)

We are still in the situation out in the barley field around Bethlehem and remain there until v17. Ruth is stunned, amazed by Boaz's kindness and she expresses the humble desire that she may continue to find favour in his sight - this is an expression of gratitude as well as a desire that such favour would continue. Boaz's words must have meant a great deal to her. This favour was probably the best thing that had happened to her in a long, long time and it amazed her. Ruth says firstly that Boaz's words had comforted her. No doubt she been worried, apprehensive concerning the work of gleaning, how she would fare, how she would be received as a foreigner among the people. She was gleaning in this strange land with strange customs. Her reception would have been unpredictable, but Boaz's words and his whole attitude would have been a great comfort to her.

Ruth goes on to say secondly that Boaz had spoken kindly/friendly to her. Literally she says he'd "*spoken to the heart of...*" His words had touched her innermost being, for they were so kind and gentle. Ruth also uses the term that NIV translates "*servant*", KJV as "*handmaid*" and says she does not have the standing of one of his servant girls/handmaidens. The term she uses is a word showing a much lower estimation of herself than even the lowest of Boaz's paid servants. She says in essence that she had no rights and yet he has been so kind. Ruth is truly amazed at this favour and kindness shown to her already and her words demonstrate this.

Yet Boaz's favour doesn't stop there for he continued to show her favour publicly and let all know she was to be shown favour by them also! For as they were at food, Boaz tells her to get some bread and dip it in the vinegar. It was only a simple meal - bread, vinegar, roasted grain and water, but her being there, being encouraged by Boaz, was a sign to all that she was accepted and welcomed by the master and therefore to be accepted by all others

present. Boaz gives to her, as she seated with the harvesters, some roast grain. He doesn't just offer it as NIV and indicates, but it seems he heaped it up, gave her in abundance - so she had more than enough to eat and had some spare, which she does not waste but put it to one side for Naomi – an early example of a doggy bag!

In v15-16 Boaz further favours Ruth as he ordered his men to let her glean among the sheaves and even for them to drop extra for her on purpose. All these things speak of Boaz favouring Ruth highly.

Boaz's words of greeting, his enquiry about Ruth, his caring for and blessing of her shows that here was a man with religious beliefs that were not just an academic thing. He was a man who went beyond mere outward conformity to the written laws of God. He caught the spirit of God's word and not a cold literal meaning. He knew the rights of gleaners, but he saw beyond it to God's provision for those in real need. Boaz goes beyond the letter of the law and graciously makes provision for this Moabite widow and her mother-in-law. He allowed her to glean among the sheaves, whereas the law allowed them to go over the field only after the reapers and gatherers had finished. The reapers were not to go over the ground again, but Boaz tells his men to deliberately drop extra for her to glean. He is a most generous man of God.

Perhaps we don't realise it, but the great God of heaven and earth also shows us all great favour. Day by day His mercies are ever new upon us; we are sustained and kept alive, given a measure of health and strength, have sun, wind and rain. He gives us of His hand, letting handfuls of undeserved blessing fall on us and for us. Our God shows this great favour in the common things of life and we should rejoice in those, but we are to also realise He has heaped

spiritual favours upon us - we are freely presented with the Saviour He has provided, the Lord Jesus; we can hear and believe the gospel, we can know the Fatherly love and care of this God in and on our lives; we have all this and the promise of eternal life and these truly are divine favours!

2. Rejoicing (v17-20)

Ruth finished her work gleaning at evening time and then she took the time and effort to beat of the barley out of the ears she had gleaned. It turns out she had nearly 5 gallons – 40 plus pint bottles worth, weighing some 30 or so pounds in weight. This shows that Ruth had worked hard and also that Boaz's men had done as they were told!

Ruth then carried it home to Naomi. She now, by beating it, has to carry it in a sack and it was all good food, but it would have been a heavy burden - about a half sack of potatoes in weight. When Naomi saw how much it gathered - she is amazed and realises someone had shown her great kindness. Not only that, Ruth gives her to eat of the food she had left over from lunchtime. Naomi is totally amazed and twice asks in her amazement about where she had worked and gleaned. She pronounces a blessing on the one who took notice of Ruth and allowed her, encouraged her to gather so much.

When Ruth tells Naomi the name of the one in whose field she had been working, suddenly Naomi bursts into a loud cry of blessing, as she rejoices at God's goodness to them. To Ruth, this man Boaz, was a great and kind man, but to Naomi, the mention of his name causes her to again seek God's blessing **on him** and then to rejoice in God's goodness **to them**. She then tells Ruth that he is one of their kinsman redeemers – a near relative; one of their next of kin, their next kinsman (KJV).

Boaz is blessed by Naomi, as she finds out who it is that had shown such kindness to Ruth. It dawns on her that this one was alive, prospering and was still their next of kin, and in his practical care of Ruth, and therefore Naomi, was working out the reality of this relationship. Naomi doesn't stop there. She recognises beyond this channel of blessing, lay the God of all blessing. She sees the gracious hand of God in the gracious actions of this man.

God's goodness and grace is so often worked out through others to us. Yes it is of God, but He moves, guides, directs His people, even sometimes those not His people, to be gracious and provide for His children e.g. Cyrus. Here to care for Ruth and Naomi, God provides Boaz. In NT Paul uses God's rich provision spiritually and physically to the Corinthians to be a reason for their free giving to those in need in Judaea (2 Corinthians 8:9). There are responsibilities that go with the privileges of this life. Wesley said of money that there was a responsibility in getting money, keeping money and disposing of it wisely!

Naomi realised that Boaz's kindness and provision was but part of the kindness and provision of the Lord. Naomi says that the Lord "*had not stopped showing His kindness*" (v20). She uses the word *hesed* (*translated kindness in v20*). We have mentioned this word before in chapter 1:8. It has the meaning of the loving-kindness, tender mercy, steadfast love of God, His covenant love. It is a very full word and Naomi says that the Lord continues showing all these to her and Ruth who were alive and therefore to their dead - and it was through a near kinsman that this was being specifically shown.

God's covenant love was shown by and through this kinsman redeemer to Naomi and Ruth. The term used for kinsman

redeemer is go'el. The kinsman redeemer had a number of functions in OT society, but one of which was to provide for those relatives who were in need. Ruth is shown that Boaz was fulfilling God's law and that God was continuing to show His covenant love through the provision of go'el Boaz.

The kinsman redeemer is an important picture in OT of the Lord Jesus Christ. The same term is used in Job 19:25 *"I know that my Redeemer lives"* - my kinsman Redeemer lives. We will not develop this picture here, as we will see Boaz again fulfilling more of the role of the kinsman redeemer and so we will explore it more fully then and its application to our Lord Jesus Christ.

What we can note in passing is that if we are His then our Great Kinsman Redeemer, the Lord Jesus, will provide for us. He provides for all our needs according to His riches in glory; He does provide for us superabundantly in terms of all we need spiritually, all the blessings of God are ours in Christ Jesus. The question is *"Do we have this one as our Redeemer?"*

3. Obeying (v21-23)

Ruth tells Naomi of Boaz's instructions to stay working in his fields near his women servants. Naomi realises he is determined to favour her and for Boaz to see Ruth in another's field would be an offence, an insult. Also, she would not have the protection Boaz ordered in other fields and may be harmed or molested. Ruth obeys both Naomi and Boaz and stays in Boaz's fields for the harvesting of the barley and wheat. It is interesting to see that chapter 1 ended with a comment on harvest beginning and chapter 2 on harvest ending; yet in chapter 1 the situation was dark and dismal, but here it is bright. As we go on into chapter 3 it will become brighter as Boaz and his relationship to Ruth and Naomi is focused on, developed and opened up for us.

The Lord has been working so quietly, so gently in Ruth and Naomi's lives; Ruth and Boaz have been brought into contact with each other and God's purposes are being worked out, so that shortly after the end of harvest time a marriage will be entered into!

Take heart and comfort. The Lord is working in our confusing circumstances even though we may never understand how. Those things which are confusing and perplexing to us may be the very means through which God comes to our aid and comfort. Even in our dark times we are to keep on trusting in His unfailing love and care and go on living our lives in obedience to His word and therefore to Him. My prayer is that He would help us to do so and to do so with hope and expectation of His good hand upon us.

The chapter ends with the out working of Ruth's obedience to her mother-in-law and to Boaz. Realise each chapter in this book ends with a bridge, a cliff hanger of a statement that hints at more to come. Interwoven within this book are hints, clues that Boaz was more than just a mighty man of valour. If this was a film, no doubt, there would be times when we'd be shown Boaz looking at Ruth; and she at him, perhaps smiling faces as they spoke at times. There would be the old question "*Will they, won't they...?*" We can observe the big picture of God's glorious providence, but we also need to see the beginnings of a divinely given romance here.

Naomi had prayed for Ruth and Orpah to find a husband and know God's hesed. Here we are beginning to see that prayer being worked out far beyond what she could have asked or imagined for Ruth! Have we seen the clues as to the relationship beginning? It is a very precious love story – Boaz, a man alone and God brings to him a woman from a far country and we'll see in the next

chapter that he, like Adam wakes from a sleep to find his wife there! Many of us here have known the Lord's guiding to our marriage partner – small providences, chance happenings, but the Lord has brought us together. For those who are single it should be an encouragement that the Lord is interested in your love life and future marriage partner, even more than you are! Be preparing yourself to be the best person under God for that time and be praying for your marriage partner, if the Lord blesses you with such, that the Lord would be preparing them too, so it will be an obvious marriage planned and made in heaven as the relationship, the marriage grows and develops, so that as the years go on, you will both know and delight in, not only one another's love, but in the ongoing love, the hesed of God. Sadly, regrettably even as believers, marriages do not always work out and are a double source of grief. Some Christians, although longing, desiring marriage, that may not be God's plan and they remain single, or rather - unclaimed treasures.

Both Boaz and Ruth knew and showed the hesed of God in their lives and as a man and woman of God they were suited for each other and then drawn to together. They met doing what they had to do – their jobs and duty. It is amazing how many people can say as with Abraham's servant *'I being in the way the Lord led me'* (Gen 24:7) – in the context of finding a wife for Isaac!

So will they, won't they? If so how will they get together? We'll see the answer become clearer as we continue in this marvellous little book. My prayer is that the Lord would lead us and surprise us with His love and grace working in our lives as individuals and as a church.