

Reading: Ruth 1:16-2:13

Theme: 'under whose wings you have come to take refuge' (v12)
In summer 2010 we had a number of additions to our family. A grandson - our first grandchild, 4 days later a daughter in law! But we also had four other members added to us as a couple - chickens. We are kept them for eggs and had four different varieties of chickens, but no cockerel! We had not realised that the chickens were such characters, or that they were so destructive! We stopped keeping chickens on moving to Doncaster – no room! Since we had them, I have noticed a number of various chicken and bird references in the Bible, one of which is Ruth 2 v12. Let's note 5 brief things from this verse:

1. Setting.

Naomi and Ruth return from Moab after a tough time. In chapter 1 Naomi and her family - husband and 2 sons had left in a time of famine and went to Moab. Her husband died there, but her sons grew and were married - she had 2 daughters-in-law. Sadly, her sons died too. Naomi then heard of better times at home in Bethlehem. She set out to return and both her daughters-in-law started off with her, one eventually went back, but Ruth stays with her and they both get back to Bethlehem as the barley harvest was starting. Naomi makes some sad comments in 1v20-21.

Ruth went gleaning - **explain** and 2:3 says of a remarkable coincidence! NIV = '*As it turned out*' - her hap was or it happened - but not by luck or random chance. The Bible speaks of the God who is in control of all matters in people's lives, especially those who are His people. Here she meets Boaz - destined to be her husband - *another story*. He had heard of her and was told of who she is and so he speaks kindly to her and with respect and part of which is v12 which we will look at in this message. Moving on we see:

2. Symbolism.

What is Boaz meaning by this? It is a word picture from an agricultural age area and they knew exactly what it pictured or symbolised. The Bible uses many bird pictures in it and the original readers, as well as throughout the centuries, people had a good grasp of what these meant. As we've lost touch with the agricultural background and may need these explained to us. This is what I hope to bring out here and other Bible word pictures. So, the remaining 3 points just open up on some of the matters symbolised and pictured for us:

3. Safety or Salvation.

Boaz uses this picture about Ruth. She was not a Jewess, but from Moab and had served and worshipped gods other than "*the Lord, the God of Israel*". She had come in contact with God's people - Naomi and family, she saw the reality of their God and had come to trust Him as her God - sheltered under His wings as a refuge, or come to trust Him.

What a challenge and encouragement to us who are Christians - do we repel or attract people to our Saviour by what they see in our lives? For Ruth she came to a place of safety, of being saved and safe. To shelter under His wings is this picture of safety. I read a story of a fire that swept through a farm. After the fire the farmer was going through the fields and he saw a charred body of one of the chickens and couldn't understand why she hadn't got away. He moved her body and out ran her chicks - safe and secure, insulated by her body and feathers. They had sheltered under her wings and were safe.

That is the picture used here of Ruth - she had gone and sheltered under the wings of the Lord, the God of Israel and was safe for time and eternity. In fact, we can do that too - **Psalm 36** v7 says "*How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among*

men find refuge in the shadow of your wings.” No one is too good or too bad, too rich or too poor.

The place of safety under His wings does not refer to having no pains, problems, difficulties, opposition, losses or trials. It refers to being safe for time and eternity from the justice and judgement of God Himself. We go to Him and find a safe place from His judgement and His wrath. I realise that is something people don't like the thought of *“How can a God of love judge people, send people to Hell?”* It is a big subject. Don't we all want to see justice done? We all want someone who has committed some vile crime to be brought to justice and feel it is right.

Why do we deny the perfect Judge, with perfect standards, who knows everything about everybody the same right and desires to perfectly judge and bring perfect justice? In an amazing way, He has provided a way for those who only deserve to be judged and punished, to be spared and be safe. When we shelter under the wings of the Lord, the God of Israel by trusting the Lord Jesus as our Saviour. Like that chicken bore the horror of the fire and gave her life to save her chicks; incredibly the Lord Jesus bore the horror of the punishment our sin deserved on Himself on the cross so we can be safely sheltered in Him - faith in Him and all He did for us. This is for whoever will trust in Him - good, bad, moral, religious. All **need** to be safely sheltered there and He calls all to do so.

Jesus had a warning for those in Jerusalem Matt 23v37 (ESV) *'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!'* It was not to the bad ones, the worst in the city this was said to, but mainly to the rich, powerful, influential and especially the very religious ones. We can be extremely religious

or not religious at all and still not be sheltered safely in Christ as your Saviour. This goes for younger and older; listening, watching for the first time, or heard many, many messages and brought up in a Christian home. Are we one of those who would not be gathered in to safety by Jesus?

If we have trusted or will trust Jesus Christ as your Saviour, then we may question if we can keep on being a Christian. There are also bird pictures of His caring for us and giving us:

4. Strength.

Ruth as a stranger to Israel's ways and the ways of its God, must have had fears and doubts. Would she manage? Would she revert to her old ways of thinking, reacting even in the way she viewed and obeyed this Lord? But she had no need to fear, for the Lord, the God of Israel under whose wings she'd come to trust was the One who would help and strengthen her.

In Exodus 19v4 God said to the people of Israel *'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.'* - He worked and delivered them as He did so many of us here.

In Deuteronomy 32v11 we read: *'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.'* - God kept them and keeps us and works in us before we will ever trust Him. He will not then abandon us and leave us alone. He did not abandon Ruth and He will never leave or forsake anyone who has taken shelter under His wings by trusting the Lord Jesus as their Saviour.

An OT prophet and writer, Isaiah, picks up on this eagle idea to show how God strengthens those who are in His care. He speaks of God's power and might and how people's strength and power

fails and he says Isaiah 40v31 (X3) (AV) *'But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.'*

In remarkable ways we will know God's help and strengthening. Sometimes He takes the burdens, the problems, the trials etc away. Other times He quietly gives us the strength, the ability, the patience to carry on when we should be giving up or crushed by things - both are linked to waiting on Him. Not arms folded and demanding *'Well come on then, do something!'* but a dependence on Him - seeking to do what pleases Him, asking for His help and enabling in such times of weakness, stress, felt need; even saying as honestly - *'I don't understand this or why it is happening, but I trust You'*.

I'm impatient. I like things to happen quickly, or be done straight away. I throw myself into something wholeheartedly and I need to make sure I keep on going on in that. Gardening is helping me with my patience - plant a fruit tree and wait a few years before fruit It can be the same in church life, in the Christian life - we sow seeds, have to care and nurture the seed sown, do our duty wholeheartedly and after many years we may see fruit - but not that we hoped, prayed, longed and worked for; but the Lord gives us strength to keep on going on and to do as we should and mount up with wings of an eagle in praise and thankfulness for all He has done, is doing and will do. If we know this safety sheltered under His wings as our refuge, then we not only have His strength and help, but:

5. Security

Boaz's words and example were part of God caring for Ruth. In the OT provisions were made for the widows and orphans. Boaz in fulfilling that duty of care, was showing the care of God through

him to Ruth and also the security she had as one who'd trusted in the Lord. Being a child of God, then and now, does not mean all will be plain sailing and sunny days and times. If I said or thought that, people here would soon point out the folly of such, for as a church we have known sorrows, illnesses, distresses and trouble of hearts, minds and bodies. We know as a church what it is to rejoice and weep together, and if we are honest, sometimes we may find it hard to rejoice with those who rejoice because of the measure of hurt and confusion we are experiencing on a personal level. At Harvest especially, we as a church usually give food help to a local charity and also a Christian organisation.

Now as a child of God realise we have this security - not a glib '*It will turn out alright in the end*', but we have a secure care, protection and help that will bring us through all the muck life dumps on us.

David wrote in **Psalm 17v7-9** '*Show the wonder of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes. 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.*' David knew tough times, but he knew his God cared for him tenderly and dearly and would hide him under the shadow of His wings even when faced with real enemies and problems - David was a hunted fugitive in the mountains, had many enemies out to kill him, but he owned his God's care and keeping.

At another time David wrote Psalm 57v1 '*Of David. A miktam. When he had fled from Saul into the cave. 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.*' David on the run, hiding for his life and he reminds God what he had done and expresses the confidence he had in God.

OK life may stink for us, be a tough time, but none of us are being hunted and are a step away from our lives being ended by sworn enemies who hate us because we are purposed by God to be a great leader.

In another situation David is again desperately crying out to God for help and says Psalm 61v4 *“I long to dwell in your tent for ever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.”* It seems David just didn't want freedom from troubles, but intended to use such to enjoy being with God's people and to know God's care. Some people want ease from troubles to live as they want, even to do more wrong and evil, to use God's blessings for sin opportunities.

In Psalm 63v7, David, hiding away in the desert of Judah and praises God and says *'Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.'* Under pressure, suffering as God's child, knowing a tough time and yet he owned God's help and sang! Paul and Silas on the first recorded preaching of the gospel in Europe, were in prison – in the maximum-security wing, beaten and chained and all because they did good. They had every reason to complain; they weren't or couldn't sleep and at midnight they were praying and singing hymns to God. There were doubly in safe custody - maximum security and under the shelter of their Saviour's wings. It is not easy to own that in hurting, bewildering and troubling times in our lives or the lives of our families, but even then, we are under His wings and have, if we recognise that, reason enough to sing His praise.

Psalm 91v4 says (NIV) *‘He will cover you with his feathers, and under his 9 wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.’* Or (Message) *‘His huge outstretched arms protect you—under them you 're perfectly safe; his arms fend off all harm,’* Under God's wings we are in His protective custody. Yes, He does watch over us in life - but in His love and wisdom

He does allow His children go through trials and difficulties; but that is not a sign of His abandoning them, or ceasing to love them. He has never had and will never forsake any child of His - because He deliberately forsook the One He most dearly loved - the Lord Jesus and He forsook Him, so He would never ever have to forsake you and me. He will never leave us or forsake us. One day, through old age, Covid or another illness, accident or some incident we will die, but even as we go into death's dark valley, but He will not ever forsake us, but take us safely through, even singing His praise as we go through it and we will find and fully realise that this dark valley is the way to eternal security and joy and there we will not just be in the shelter and shadow of His wings, but we'll see our Saviour as He is and delight in Him - no more gleaning bits and pieces about Him as here in life, but see the Lord, the God of Israel under whose wings we came to take refuge and we will know we have been richly and royally treated because of His love.

So, what about us this Harvest morning?

Salvation/safety - are we sheltering under His wings? If so, are we thrilled and amazed by it?

Strength - do we renew your strength day by day, week by week as we wait on Him one to one and then with a group of His people? We don't have to come to church to be a Christian, but if you are a Christian, then surely, we would want to come and join with others at every opportunity to learn of and worship this great Lord under whose wings we have come to trust?

Security - loved, cared for, secure and guaranteed amazing things. Shouldn't that encourage us to love Him more and serve Him not out of duty but love and gratitude?

Ruth 2v12: 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."