

The Kindness of the Redeemer

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[0 : 00] Amen. Well, there's an old prayer, perhaps some of you know it, called the Valley of Vision, and it sums up really nicely where we left off in the book of Ruth last week.

Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly, you have brought me to the Valley of Vision, where I live in the depths, but see you in the heights.

Yes, hemmed in by mountains of sin, I behold your glory. And that's really where we left Naomi last Sunday, isn't it?

Hemmed in, stuck in the dark depths of her pain, despairing of life, getting any better. Her husband and her two sons have died, leaving her all but alone in the world.

I went away full, she says, but the Lord brought me back empty. Don't call me sweet, she says, call me bitter, because the Lord has made my life very bitter.

[1 : 03] But though Naomi can't yet see the glory and the goodness of God in her deep, dark suffering, we got a glimpse of better things coming.

Ruth, Naomi's faithful daughter-in-law, clung to Naomi, despite what it cost her, and came home with her. And as they arrive back in Bethlehem in the house of bread, what do you know?

But it's the beginning of the barley harvest. The good gifts of God are about to flow again. And we find Naomi and Ruth really in the right place at the right time.

And that's no coincidence, is it? Because Ruth and to a lesser degree, Naomi have put their trust in the promises of a faithful God.

Naomi heard on the grapevine from far away that the Lord had brought the famine to an end and was giving food again. So she has turned back to benefit from the Lord's rescue that he was bringing.

[2 : 07] But Ruth went much further. She was an outsider. And she turned at great cost to herself with only the word of God's promise to go on.

And she trusted herself, body and soul, in life and in death to Naomi's God. Your God will be my God, she says. And let me be cursed if anything should ever change that.

So these two women have turned and thrown themselves on the promises of God. They have repented. But the question now in chapter 2 is, what will they find now that they have turned back to the land of promise?

What kind of God will they meet there? Is this God who they've trusted as good as his word? And will his people be as good as his word?

To bring it into our world, what sort of God do we turn to when we repent of our sin? And what sort of church can we expect to belong to that God?

[3 : 15] Who do we find when we turn and trust in God's promises? The answer that we find here in this passage is a redeemer.

Out of the darkness of chapter 1, chapter 2 shines a light on the kindness of the redeemer that we meet when we turn to this faithful covenant God, the Lord.

Firstly then, we're shown our great need for a redeemer as we find Ruth and Naomi still hungering for fullness. Yes, Naomi and Ruth are now living in the land of promise.

Naomi again, Ruth for the first time. But they are only still halfway there because we find them still living on a prayer. Look at verse 2 with me if you would.

Ruth, the Moabite, said to Naomi, Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor. Naomi said to her, Go ahead, my daughter.

[4 : 15] So she went out into the field and began to glean behind the harvesters. See, it's the beginning of the barley harvest. The food is ready.

But how were Ruth and Naomi, poor landless newcomers, going to get in on the harvest? How are they going to benefit from this goodness?

Well, Ruth's suggestion is a practice known as gleaning. So in his law, God had created a safety net, essentially, for the very poorest in the covenant community to be able to survive, even without any other way of supporting themselves.

And basically, the law said if you owned a field and you grew a crop, you shouldn't harvest the whole thing. Growing right up to the edges, you should leave some barley, wheat, whatever growing on the margins of your field.

And also, once you've gone over it, you shouldn't go back over it, picking up the leftovers. And the result of that was that in every field after the harvest, there'd be a good amount of grain left over.

[5 : 25] And God's purpose in making that law was so that the grain that was left over would feed the poor and the foreigner. People who lived on the bread line, people on the edges of society, who would then come and collect that grain for food.

So gleaning was how God, in his great kindness and generosity, made sure that everyone was provided for who lived in his land. So when Ruth suggests that she go and glean the fields so that she and Naomi could eat, well, it tells us two things.

Firstly, it tells us that between these women, they have nothing. You wouldn't go and glean the fields unless you had no other way to survive.

These women are the poorest of the poor. But secondly, and maybe more importantly, it tells us the kind of God that Ruth was expecting to meet in the land.

That is, a God who is as good as his word. God had said there would be something left over for them, so Ruth goes to find it. There seems to be no question in her mind over whether there would be food even for them, because they were living in God's place and because God had promised.

[6 : 51] But humanly speaking, remember, they had every reason to doubt that there would be something for them. And we saw in the time that Ruth was living, in the time of the judges, everyone did what was right in their own eyes, not what was right in God's eyes.

In most fields of that day, the words God's law says would have just been drowned out by laughter. And what's more, as we'll see, gleaning in someone's field wasn't safe for a single woman without protection.

So Ruth is hungry. We find her hungry not only for food, but for the kind of God that God promises to be to those who trust him.

She is throwing herself on the faithfulness and kindness and generosity that God promised to those who cling to him. And in her longing, Ruth's trust in God also leads her to trust the people of God, the covenant community.

God is as good as his word, she thinks, so his people must be too. Now, let me say, that is a bold faith, isn't it?

[8 : 09] How many people have come to a church perhaps hoping to find the kindness and the welcome of God, but have found their lifelong disappointment the very opposite?

A place where God could not welcome them because his people were so unwelcoming. Perhaps you're here this morning finding out about God, finding out about his people, and you have been burned in the past by your experience of church.

Now, no church is perfect. We at Bon Accord are not the finished article. We are sinful and broken, and I personally get it wrong. But if that's you, our desire and our prayer for you is that you would find a family here that shows you the loving kindness of God.

We long to be a church that reflects to everyone the kind of welcome that God gives to those who come and cling to him. Because, brothers and sisters, that is what those who don't yet come to church, who don't yet call themselves Christians, that's what those people should expect to find where God's spirit lives.

An overwhelming kindness and warm welcome and extravagant generosity that isn't found outside God's family home. That home is not a church building, of course, but a church family.

[9 : 41] By this they will know that you are my disciples, says Jesus, that you love one another. Speaking personally, that is certainly what Susie and I have found since coming to be with you.

And so we are so thankful, and we together can be so thankful that God is shaping our church family in his own image. But it's something to keep praying for, isn't it?

That we as a church never stop growing in that likeness. That we together keep living out his kindness. Our church has a reputation for good hospitality.

But let Ruth remind us that we are called to show that hospitality not only to one another, but to extend it to those on the sidelines, on the outside, those who come to us hoping to find a God who is as good as his word.

Because Ruth's hope hangs on who God is, and therefore on the kind of people that belong to this covenant God. Or should I say what kind of person belongs to him?

[10:51] Because, look with me at verse 1. Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a man of standing from the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

Translation, Naomi had a rich uncle. And the question again is, what kind of person would this rich uncle Boaz turn out to be?

Would rich uncle Boaz share God's kindness? God's generosity of spirit? Would he be a man after God's own heart? Well, as it happens, we are about to find out.

As Ruth does indeed discover true kindness. Ruth went out. Entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters.

As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. And just then, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters.

[11:52] The Lord be with ye. The Lord bless ye, they answered. Now notice the element of fake surprise here. Our narrator is kind of tongue-in-cheek speaking about the chance happening, the luck of the matter, that at that moment, Ruth would go into the field of Boaz, and just then, Boaz should happen to turn up.

He is saying, indeed, this is no luck at all. Because we know, though Naomi and Ruth don't, that the very one they are counting on has just entered the story.

And straight away, we see what kind of person Boaz is. The first words out of his mouth, the Lord be with ye. That's possibly just a formality, like saying good morning.

But I reckon in the time of the judges, it was perhaps not such a common saying. And his workforce likewise respond, the Lord bless ye.

It's a field of such joy, encouragement, and trust in the Lord. And that one exchange seems to capture the whole thrust of this man's life. Because next, Boaz spots Ruth.

[13:07] Now how does this man react to having a poor, orphaned, widowed, foreign woman hanging around in his field? Is she a problem?

An inconvenience? Convenience? Oh no, he shows extraordinary concern for her. When he finds out who she is, that she is, a poor, orphaned, widowed, foreign woman, he gives her an all-day, all-inclusive pass.

My daughter, listen to me, he says, don't go and glean in another field, and don't go away from here. Stay here, watch the field, follow along. I have told the men not to lay a hand on ye.

And whenever you're thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars. So not only does Boaz give Ruth permission to glean in his field, he insists that she stay.

He's giving her protection from the unkindness, from the evil that she might find in other fields, and indeed in his own fields. See, this is not only kindness.

[14:14] It's no expense spared kindness, abundant kindness. Clearly far beyond what Ruth was ever hoping to find in the fields.

And her face to the ground, she asks him, why? Why? Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me a foreigner?

And here's why. Boaz knows that Ruth has repented. I know, he says, what you've done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with the people you did not know before.

The cost that Ruth counted when she turned away from the things of this world to trust in the faithful covenant God, Boaz knows. And therefore, he showers her with kindness.

And who is behind that incredible outpouring of generosity and kindness? Verse 12, may the Lord repay you for what you've done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

[15:30] I find it really interesting that Boaz's twofold blessing of Ruth here kind of mirrors Naomi's twofold blessing of Ruth and Orpah in chapter 1.

That faithful love and that promised rest that Naomi wanted for her daughters-in-law off somewhere else, well, she has found it right where the Lord promised to give it in his place, with his people, in his presence.

In short, Ruth's costly faith is being repaid by the Lord. So what can we expect to find then when we turn to this God?

Well, we find him as good as his word. We find a kindness that knows no limits, a welcome that is never taken back, love beyond calculating, a weight of goodness and glory that outweighs the suffering and sin of this world infinite times over.

And Ruth teaches us that anyone can turn and put their trust in this God and they will be received and repaid and rewarded with his love.

[16:50] So if you're not sure today whether you can turn and put your trust in him, well, you need never fear that he is going to turn you away.

All that the Father gives to me will come to me, says Jesus, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. If we come to him, he will never send us away.

See, God is no man's debtor. We can't out-trust him. We can't out-give ourselves to him. We can't out-do his generosity with our simple dependence.

He will always repay our trust. He will always reward our faith infinite times over, not because he owes us, but because he is faithful to his promise that he will welcome whoever turns and clings to him and to his word.

He is more generous and gracious than we could ever possibly dare to imagine. So if you're wondering today whether the Lord will indeed show you kindness if you turn to him, don't second-guess him because whoever, whoever trusts him will be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

[18:14] anyone who comes to take refuge under his wings. And brothers and sisters, whatever it costs you to come to him, to turn to him, know today that it does not compare to what you have gained through his faithfulness and his love.

Who has ever given a gift to God that we should be repaid? Jesus' followers said to him, we have left everything, everything, to follow ye. Truly I tell you, Jesus replied, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age, homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields, along with persecutions and in the age to come, eternal life.

Jesus reminds us today that you and I have never given anything to God or lost anything for God that he has not and will not repay a hundred times over.

Yes, in eternity, but here and now he says. Now when Jesus talks about all the home and the family and possessions we gain, I take it that he's talking about what it means to belong to his church.

This is where we gain hundreds of homes, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters. He gives us one another.

[19:49] So again, what kind of God he is and what kind of people we are cannot, should never be separated in God's economy. He himself gives us all that we need to live full and fulfilling lives of trusting dependence on him but he does that partly through giving us one another.

So friends, let's never forget that. Paul writes, bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Or Hebrews chapter 10 verse 25, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

See, though Ruth does not feel worthy of it, and has nothing to give and has done nothing to deserve it, Boaz gives and gives and gives again.

At midday under the blazing sun, he invites her to eat lunch with him and his workers and he gives her enough food and then some for the day. She ate all she wanted and had some left over.

And then his kindness reaches astronomical proportions. If you would read with me from verse 15, Ruth got up to glean and Boaz told his men, let her gather from among the sheaves and don't reprimand her.

[21:13] Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up and don't rebuke her. See, now Boaz is not only letting Ruth pick up the leftover grain after his workers but giving her more grain out of what he has already harvested to go home with.

This is generosity far beyond what God and his law ever required. A super abundant generosity even at his own cost.

What kind of God, what kind of people will we find when we turn to the Lord? Well, Ruth found a God of unending faithfulness and of infinite kindness and of super abundant generosity and of unfailing love.

In short, a God who is as good as his word. And that is the very same God we find when we turn to him from the emptiness of this world, from our deadness in sin and we trust in him.

Because just as Boaz proves to be the one through whom God's promised kindness is shown so supremely and ultimately, Jesus Christ is the one in whom all God's precious and very great promises are yes.

[22 : 37] He is the one through whom all God's blessings flow, the one through whom our lives are redeemed. Because finally we see Ruth's hunger for fullness and her discovery of this kindness leave her hoping in the Redeemer.

Ruth returns home to Naomi weighed down with food. Once she had thrashed out what she had collected, we read it came to an effort which maybe you have a footnote in your Bible that tells you is about 13 kilos.

If it takes two growing young men in this room who won't be named a month to get through a 25 kilo bag of rice, I imagine it took these young women many many weeks to get through the takings of this one day's work.

A heap of food gathered in a single day by a landless orphaned widowed foreign woman in the field of Boaz and in the fields of the Lord.

And when Naomi sees Ruth heaving this bag of grain through the door, she comes alive. At the start of this chapter, Naomi seemed lifeless.

[23 : 56] She had no initiative. In fact, she can only utter two words in Hebrew, go daughter. Now she exclaims, verse 19, where did you glean today?

Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you. Then Ruth reveals the name of this man. Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she has been working.

The suspense builds. The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz, she says. And of course, this is the moment we've been holding our breath for since the very first verse.

Who is this rich uncle Boaz? What kind of person will he turn out to be? Well, now it all comes together because, verse 20, Naomi pulls back the curtain to reveal.

That man is our close relative. He is one of our guardian redeemers. See, the story, however sweet it is, is not ultimately, in the end, a rom-com.

[25 : 05] Because what drives this story from beginning to end is the promise of a redeemer. See, again, in his law, God had graciously provided for families who had lost a father.

God passed the responsibility of the dead father to another relative to redeem the family from emptiness and death.

And hope comes alive for these women when they discover that hope beyond hope. That kind man they had met earlier in the fields is one of those who can redeem their family from death.

So, in the words of one writer, the book of Ruth is a love story, but it's not a romance. Because the book of Ruth shows God's love for this family that they discover in and through the person of Boaz, who for them embodies the overwhelming kindness and faithfulness of God to them.

We've seen that in his character. there. But now it becomes clear that this kindness is in fact why he's in the story. Because he is there ultimately to redeem them.

[26 : 23] Ruth and Naomi have already had a taste of his redeeming kindness, but we see it's only the promise of things to come. Ruth will go back to his field every day until the harvest is done.

And if day one is anything to go by, she will come home overflowing with good things again and again. And even then, as we read on in chapter 3, the best is yet to come.

And so, brothers and sisters, even in his immense kindness, Boaz remains for us a hazy reflection of the Redeemer, the one who is God's kindness incarnate, through whom God's love and kindness come to bear on our lives, who does save us from the emptiness of this world, who saves us from our deadness and sin by overwhelming us with his mercy and kindness and grace.

That is why our Redeemer came, the Lord Jesus Christ. And today, God invites us simply to trust in his overwhelming kindness, to remember all his precious benefits, to discover and to rediscover his mercies that are made me morning by morning.

Paul tells us in Ephesians chapter 2, God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable

riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us Christ Jesus.

[28 : 05] God's purpose for us in Jesus is that we would live in the overflow of his kindness forever. And so as we turn to him and we trust in him and thank him, let the kindness of Jesus, our Redeemer, cause our hearts to say with Naomi, blessed be the Lord, for he has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.

We have his spirits with us as the first fruits, the taste of his blessing. We continue to enjoy his goodness and his presence with us each day because the overwhelming love of God to us who were once outsiders, who once had no claim on his goodness, endures for us now forever in and through the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. Let's turn to him now and thank him. Let's pray together. God, our Father, how we thank you that you have provided for us a Redeemer.

We thank you for Jesus that he is everything that we need and more. We thank you for his great kindness to us in coming, how he left behind the glory, the treasure of heaven, to live as we have lived, yet without sin, and that he did it to redeem us.

We thank you that in him we see your kindness and love embodied. We thank you that we need never wonder whether you are to be trusted, for in Jesus you have proven that you are.

[29 : 47] And so we pray, Lord, that you would help us to turn to you and cling to you each day of our lives, knowing that you are good and kind. And we pray also, Father, that you would continue to make us, your people, reflect your goodness and kindness to others, and that many would come to know and love and trust you through the witness of this church and this family.

For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.