

## STUDIES IN RUTH

### CHAPTER 2 : "LIVING ON THE EDGE - ENOUGH?"

#### REVISION TEST

#### LAST WEEK'S HOMEWORK

Ask for testimonies about dealing with difficulty, or understanding God as Father

Ask if anyone thought about the significance of Ruth & Naomi arriving at the beginning of barley harvest :

- Passover - redemption by God's grace & intervention
- Exodus from Egypt (1290 BC)
  - Israel were in Egypt but should have been in Canaan - cp. Ruth & Naomi's personal exodus from Moab
  - Israel were slaves to Pharaoh but should have been free nation under God, so God set them free - cp. Ruth & Naomi coming back to Israel [*from Pharaoh to Father, from slavery to sonship*]
- "first sheaf" (called the Omer) = Jesus : cut, threshed, dried, ground, mixed with oil & frankincense, waved as sacrificial offering, first-fruit as promise/guarantee of full harvest later, asking God's blessing

#### RECAP LAST WEEK

Chapter 1 saw the three widowed women, Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, deciding to travel from Moab to Bethlehem, because they had heard that God had again visited his people.

All three had experienced tragedy and heartache, but their responses were very different :

- Orpah - returned to her old life, turning her back on faith in God, and leaving her family
- Naomi - made the journey to Bethlehem, but was filled with bitterness towards God, blaming him for all that had happened to her
- Ruth - went to Bethlehem full of faith, hope and trust, looking for a new beginning

We asked ourselves how we responded when things were hard in our lives. Do we give up (like Orpah), carry on but blame God (like Naomi), or trust God for a new start (like Ruth)?

We also looked at Ruth's commitment to Naomi, and compared it with the "love slave", refusing to leave his master when given the opportunity to go free, because he loves his master so much.

We asked ourselves how committed we are to Jesus, who offers us freedom from slavery - will we choose to stay with him for ever?

Lastly, we saw how Naomi's relationship with God had been affected by her experiences. She was bitter, blamed God, thought her sufferings were a sign of his disapproval, and viewed him as impersonal, distant, other.

We asked ourselves about our own view of God, and whether we see him as a loving Father, or as a distant uncaring being.

This week we find out what God had in store for Naomi and Ruth when they arrived in Bethlehem - at the start of the barley harvest. How would he deal with these two very different women? Would he bless Ruth and ignore Naomi?

## CHAPTER 2 - THE STORY

Naomi had been away from Bethlehem for over 10 years, possibly many more. She would still have had a home there, but with no man in the family there was no work, no income, no protection, no future. [No welfare service, unemployment benefit, jobseekers allowance ...]

But Jewish society was very advanced in the way it looked after the disadvantaged, poor, marginalised. Lots of rules on how to treat the stranger, widow, orphan, traveller - with kindness, generosity, grace and justice.

Throughout the Bible, God declares himself on the side of the disadvantaged, for example :

- Deuteronomy 10:18 "He executes justice for the fatherless and widow, and loves the traveller, giving him food and clothing."
- Psalm 68:5 "Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation"
- Psalm 146:9 "The Lord watches over the travellers, he upholds the widow and fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin"

He expects his people to be equally committed to supporting people in need :

- Jeremiah 7:5-7 "For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly execute justice with one another, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless or the widow, or shed innocent blood, and if you do not go after other gods to your own peril, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers for ever."
- Zechariah 7:9-10 "Render true judgements, show kindness and mercy each to his brother, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the traveller or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against your brother in your heart."
- James 1:27 "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this : to visit orphans and widows in their time of trouble, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

The OT law makes special provision for the poor and disadvantaged, and ancient Israel was perhaps the most enlightened civilisation of its time, caring for those in need.

For Naomi and Ruth, their only hope was to take advantage of these rules. Ruth decided to go gleaning - let's see what happened ...

## GLEANING

Gleaning = picking up left-over grain during the harvest.

See Leviticus 19:9-10 and 23:22 "And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field to its very border, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger."

Also Deuteronomy 24:19-22 "When you reap your harvest in your field, and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow; so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands ... You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt - this is why I command you to do this."

Gleaning was however very poor - hard work, difficult to get enough to live on :

Poor grain on the edge

Mixed with weeds

Left-overs, second-best

Also degrading - only social underclass gleaned - poor, strangers, fatherless, widows.

But Ruth qualified on all counts!! So she was willing to do this in order to survive. She knew she and Naomi had no other means of support, so she gleaned.

She was not entitled to the full harvest, but she would not sit by and starve - she was going to get at least some of the harvest. In fact she worked so hard that the reapers noticed her (verse 7) - she was determined to get as much of the harvest as she could carry.

So Ruth went out to the fields to glean. Verse 3 is a lovely understatement of dramatic importance to the story - "So she went out to glean in the field following behind the reapers, and she **just happened** to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was a relative of her late father-in-law."

No coincidences with God!!!

- Romans 8:28 "For we know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose."
- Psalm 31:14-15 "But I trust in you O Lord, I say "You are my God". My times are in your hand."
- Proverbs 16:33 "The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly from the Lord." - no such thing as chance?? The Lottery???!

We'll come back to the significance of Ruth being in Boaz's field later ...

## THE MEANING OF GLEANING

But first a look at the meaning of gleaning. What can we learn from this practice, what is God saying to us through this?

Are we hungry for more of God? Do we lack satisfaction in our faith? Do we see others enjoying their faith more than we do?

Are we determined to survive, not just to give up when the going get tough?

Will we be like Ruth - go to the field and see what we can find? Be determined not to miss out on what God is doing? Be prepared to do whatever it takes to find God's blessing and presence in our lives? Even if it means being treated as odd?

***Do it with barley stalks - go and get one as a symbol of being determined to be part of what God is doing in these days, not to be left out, not to starve, to at least be on the edge of his field, not to miss out.***

## RUTH MEETS BOAZ

Back to the story. Ruth 2:3-16 describes what happened when Ruth met the owner of the field, a man called Boaz, who was a relative of Elimelech.

Who was Boaz? His name means *strength*, and verse 1 says he was *a man of wealth*. In Jewish eyes this makes him doubly blessed, with both physical health and material prosperity. He was also a close relative, which would turn out to be important later in the story ... Ruth could never have realised what her gleaning would lead to, when she "just happened" to come to the field of Boaz!

So what was Boaz like? How did he treat Ruth?

## GROUP WORK

In small groups of 4-6, spend 10 minutes reading Ruth 2:4-16, and discussing how Boaz treated Ruth - make a list.

Brief feedback (flipchart)

- He noticed her (verse 5) - "Who's that??"
- He included her (verse 8) - "Don't go to another field"
- He protected her (verse 9) - "I've told the men to leave you alone"
- He provided for her (verse 9 - drink, and verse 14 - lunch)
- He wanted God to bless her (verse 12) - "May the Lord be your reward"
- He made sure she had extra (verses 15-16) - an ephah = 50 lb !!

He showed her real kindness and generosity, lasting for about 8 weeks (verse 23 "... until the end of the barley and wheat harvests")

Note : here's another mention of a specific time in the calendar - is this also significant?

## BOAZ IS LIKE JESUS

If we are like Ruth in this story, then Boaz is like Jesus.

- He notices us
  - Knows you by name, calls you (e.g. Mark 10:46-52, the blind beggar at the roadside, Jesus stopped. The people said to him "Cheer up, get on your feet - he's calling you!")
- He includes us
  - He calls us to be with him : Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me all you who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."
- He protects us
  - John 16:33 "In the world you will have trouble, but cheer up, I have overcome the world"
- He provides for us
  - Philippians 4:19 "My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory through Christ Jesus."
- He wants God to bless us
  - See John 17, especially verses 11 (Holy Father, keep them in your name ... that they may be one), 15 (keep them from the evil one), 17 (sanctify them), 24 (I desire that they also may be with me, to behold my glory)
- He makes sure we have extra
  - John 10:10 "I have come so that you may have life, and have it abundantly".

Jesus too notices us in the crowd, includes us, draws us in, protects and feeds us, and wants God to bless us richly. He doesn't want us to stay gleaning on the edge, but calls us to be with him.

## CONCLUSION - SO WHAT?

We need more of God than we have now. Some of us are starving, with not enough to keep us alive. But there is a harvest, God is visiting his people. How will we react?

Let's be like Ruth - go and get involved, start gleaning, pick up whatever we can find, wherever God is at work. It may not be fantastic, but at least we won't starve.

But there's another question - whose field are you in? We need to be in "the part of the field belonging to Boaz" - going to Jesus. He is the one who loves us, who wants to include us, protect us, meet our needs.

All of that starts with the realisation that Jesus has noticed us - this revelation will transform us!!

But there's more. Gleaning gives just enough to survive. God wants us to have more, not staying on the edge while others enjoy the fullness of his harvest.

How?? Find out next week with chapter 3!!

## QUESTIONS ???

### HOMEWORK

1. Read Ruth chapter 3
2. God notices you!! Every day this week, reflect on this and thank him for it.
3. In Ruth 2:12, Boaz prays that Ruth will be blessed by "the Lord the God of Israel under whose wings you have come to take refuge." This is a lovely picture, worth thinking about.

Here are six verses from the Psalms that use the same phrase. Take one each day this week (Monday-Saturday = 6 days), and meditate on it, asking God to reveal his heart to you. Make sure that you are under his wings!!

Psalm 17:8, 36:7, 57:1, 61:4, 63:7, 91:1-2

4. Ruth 2:23 says "Ruth gleaned until the end of the barley and wheat harvests." We saw that the time when she and Naomi arrived in Bethlehem (at the beginning of the barley harvest, i.e. Passover) was significant. What about this time? What festival takes place then? (See Leviticus 23:15-21 and Deuteronomy 16:9-12) Is this significant for Ruth's story??