

STUDIES IN RUTH

CHAPTER 3 : "LIVING AT HARVEST-TIME - PLENTY"

REVISION TEST

LAST WEEK'S HOMEWORK

In small groups, discuss questions 1 and 2, namely realising that God has noticed you, and meditating on being "under his wings". 10 minutes - no feedback.

Then all together, discuss question 3 - "*at the end of the barley and wheat harvests*" is the time of Pentecost. Note that the book of Ruth is traditionally read by Jews at their harvest festival celebrations during Pentecost.

Significance ?

- 50 days after Passover = first harvest festival at end of grain harvest (second is at Tabernacles in October, with fruit/olives/vines)
- first act of the celebration was when priest offered two loaves of leavened bread to God - made from new flour made from the best wheat - two loaves represent both Jews & Gentiles coming together to form God's people (see Ephesians 2:11-22, Galatians 3:28-29) - no part of the harvest could be eaten until the two loaves had been offered (first-fruits)
- specific command to include outsiders in the celebrations (see Deuteronomy 16:11) - families, servants, Levites, strangers, fatherless, widows
- marks giving of law and covenant at Mount Sinai - birth of Israel as a nation
- fulfilled at coming of Holy Spirit in Jerusalem - birth of the church

So for Ruth and Naomi :

- inclusion of widows and strangers in celebration
- inclusion of Gentiles in God's purposes
- birth of something new, implementation of covenant initiated by God

RECAP LAST 2 WEEKS

So far we've followed the story of three women whose lives were touched by pain, hurt, tragedy.

In the first week we watched as they struggled with how to respond to life's hard circumstances, and saw three very different reactions :

- 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)?

Then last week we followed Ruth into the fields as she tried to cope with poverty and hunger. She started to glean with the other outcasts, picking up the leftovers and trying to find enough to live on.

We asked ourselves whether we were as determined as Ruth to get involved with the harvest of God's blessing and presence. Are we prepared to do whatever it takes to be part of what he's doing?

We saw God was watching over Ruth : She "just happened" to come to the field belonging to Boaz - a near relative of her late husband.

We realised that there are no coincidences with God, and asked whether we were in "the part of the field belonging to Jesus".

Lastly, we found that Ruth's story depended on the fact that Boaz noticed her, included her, protected her, showed her real kindness & generosity.

So for us - Jesus notices us!! We realised that sometimes we feel like we are on the edge of what God is doing, only picking up the leftovers. But God sees us and includes us.

Back to the story. Gleaning was hard work, and only lasted as long as the harvest. Chapter 2 closed with a cliff-hanger "Ruth gleaned until the end of the barley and wheat harvests" - what would happen next??

CHAPTER 3 - THE STORY

Naomi decides to take action - arranged marriages were normal, so she decides to try to find a home for Ruth.

She knows the Jewish law that requires a family to provide for childless widows, by asking a relative to marry the widow and raise an heir in memory of the dead husband. The person doing this was known as the *goel* or kinsman-redeemer. Naomi realises that Boaz qualifies for this role, and devises a plan to see if he is willing to exercise his responsibility.

At the end of harvest, all the grain is threshed together, with a big party to celebrate which goes into the night. (The Pentecost party is described in Deuteronomy 16:9-12) The farmers then stay with the grain to protect it until the next day when they can take it away to their own barns.

Naomi tells Ruth to prepare to meet Boaz by washing (Hebrew *rachats* = total immersion bath), anointing herself (Hebrew *sook* only used for anointing with oil), and putting on her *simlah* = large outer cloak (not best dress). This is the traditional way a woman prepared herself on the day before her wedding (especially the full bath).

Then Naomi sends Ruth to the threshing floor when the party is nearly over and tells her to look for Boaz, and lie at his feet when he goes to sleep :

Ruth obeys, and when he wakes (at midnight), she asks him to marry her, using a poetic symbol "Cover me - extend the border of your garment over me, for you are my nearest kinsman" (explain later!)

Boaz accepts this proposal - but tells her some bad news - there is another relative who is closer and who could block their marriage by claiming the role himself.

Dramatic tension and suspense!! What will happen?? (Next chapter!!!)

As part of his acceptance, Boaz sends Ruth back to Naomi with 6 measures of barley (as much as she could carry?) - "You must not return empty-handed to your mother-in-law" = dowry or bride-price, paid to bride's parents before marriage. The dowry was a token of the inheritance that would become the bride's after the wedding.

Ruth had been starving, then gleaning the leftovers at the edge - now she had a promise for the future - she would inherit the whole harvest!! (NB - Pentecost = first harvest of grain, birth of church, looking forward to Tabernacles = final harvest of fruit, vines and olives, all nations)

Naomi was thrilled at what had happened - and knows that Boaz will resolve the problem of the other relative very quickly ... !!

THE TRADITION OF THE *GOEL*

The idea of redemption is key to the story of Ruth - the verb "to redeem" (Hebrew *gaal*) appears 20 times in these 4 short chapters.

[Note that there is another Hebrew word for "redeem" = *padah* = to ransom, release from slavery, rescue, deliver. Throughout the story of Ruth, the word *goel* is used exclusively.]

This tradition of *goel* refers to the responsibility of a family member to look after relatives who were in trouble. Four areas of responsibility :

1. to purchase back forfeited inheritance land if a poor relative had sold it to raise money (Leviticus 25:25)
2. to ransom a relative who had become a slave (Leviticus 25:47-55)
3. to avenge the death of a dead relative as a point of family honour (Numbers 35)
4. to marry a widow in order to raise children as an inheritance for the dead relative (Deuteronomy 25:5-10, especially verse 6 "so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel") - initially described as the responsibility of brothers, but had been extended over time to include near relatives.

One of the keys to the kinsman-redeemer is that he had the right to redeem his relatives in these ways, but there was no obligation - he was free to choose whether or not to exercise his responsibility - grace!!

Two applications :

- God describes himself as Israel's redeemer (usually as *goel*, only occasionally as *padah*). Verses using *goel* include :
 - Isaiah 43:1 "Fear not for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine"
 - Isaiah 44:6 "Thus says the Lord, the king of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts - I am the first and I am the last, besides me there is no god"
 - Isaiah 54:5 "For your maker is your husband, the lord of hosts is his name, and the Holy One of Israel is your redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called"
 - He sees himself as their relative, bringing them back from slavery, giving them back their land as an inheritance, judging their enemies, and marrying them
- In the same way, Jesus is our redeemer :
 - Galatians 4:4-7 "God sent forth his son ... to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons ..."
 - Ephesians 1:7-8 "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us."
 - I Corinthians 1:30 "God made Jesus our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption."
 - Also Galatians 3:13-14, I Peter 1:18-19, Titus 2:11-14, Colossians 1:13-14 ...

RUTH'S REQUEST

Ruth took a major risk going to the threshing-floor - women were banned when the men were at work. But she obeyed Naomi and trusted her (and God).

She waited until Boaz went to sleep, by his part of the harvest "at the end of the pile of grain". Then she lay at his feet = a position of submission, the place for the personal slave, waiting to see what he would do ("He will tell you what to do")

When he woke at midnight, she explained who she was, and asked him to marry her : "Spread the edge of your cloak (*kanaph*) over me ..." - the groom covered the bride with his cloak during the wedding ceremony as a symbol of his protection

She also asked him to exercise his responsibility as the kinsman-redeemer : "... for you are *goel*". She was asking him for protection and redemption, to rescue her from slavery, to provide an inheritance for her, to bring her into the people of God.

SO WHAT?

Last week we saw that the relationship between Ruth and Boaz was like the relationship between us and Jesus.

Chapter 3 takes this a step further.

Ruth shows us what we should do :

- She was determined not to stay on the edge of the field, enjoying the occasional company of the master, under his protection and kindness, but only as one of his servants. For Ruth this was not enough. How about us? Are we happy to stay on the edge of what God is doing?
- She went to lie at the feet of Boaz, waiting to see what he would tell her to do. We need to come to Jesus in submission, laying aside our own position, waiting for him to tell us what to do.
- She asked for his covering and protection, to be her redeemer, recognising her own vulnerability and need. We need to ask Jesus to meet our needs, spiritually, emotionally and physically.
- She asked him to accept her as his bride. The relationship between Jesus and his church is described in the Bible like a marriage - we are the bride of Christ. We need to seek a relationship of love, closeness, intimacy with Jesus - not just his servants but loving him with all our heart.

And just as Boaz accepted Ruth, so Jesus will accept those who come to him, recognising their need and asking for his help, wanting a closer relationship with him. John 6:37 " I will not reject anyone who comes to me".

He also gives us a gift as a foretaste of our inheritance - as much grain as we can carry! He wants to bless us here on earth as much as we can cope with - as a reminder of the blessing that is to come when we enter our full inheritance!

If today you find your relationship with Jesus is a bit distant (on the edge of the field, like one of his servants) - follow Ruth, be bold, come to Jesus and tell him that you want a closer relationship with him.

He won't say no!!

QUESTIONS ???

HOMEWORK

1. Read Ruth chapter 4.
2. Spend time during the week thinking and praying about how to develop intimacy with Jesus. This is the key to everything else!
3. I Corinthians 1: 30 contains several key words describing Jesus : "God made Jesus our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption." Spend time this week meditating on these words, asking God what they mean in practice for you.
4. Try writing a poem to express what redemption means to you, using an acrostic made of the letters REDEEM (show example)
5. Ruth chapter 4 ends with a family tree, showing how Boaz fits into the line between Perez his great-great-great-great-grandfather, and David his great-grandson. Can you extend this family tree using other passages in the Bible, to show how Boaz is related to Judah, Caleb, Rahab and Moses??