

The Kindness of God

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Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 0 0] Thanks, Rachel, for reading. If you could keep your Bibles open, that would be a great help. Page 269, if it's the church Bibles. And if you'd find it helpful, there's an outline inside the notice sheet so that you can see where we're going as we work through this story together.

But let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise you that you are sovereign and in control of all things. And we return to you now.

And we ask that your word to us, by your spirit, will not just be words for our heads, but will be instruction for our hearts and spiritual food for our very souls.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we've been in a series in this book, Ruth, from the Old Testament. It's a wonderful story about God bringing ordinary people from ruin to redemption.

And these are real events rooted in history. But this is also a timeless story where God encourages his people at all times since these first events that it really is right to return to him.

[1 : 1 5] And he really is trustworthy. You might need to see whether God is trustworthy because you, this morning, are on the outside and looking in at the Christian faith and thinking, well, what would it mean to come to God and trust him?

Or you could be someone who has returned to God a long time ago in your life, but you could still be asking, is God really trustworthy? You could be asking because you think these are dark times in the world or dark times for the church in Scotland.

And Ruth can help us because Naomi and Ruth were living in the time of the judges, which was a dark time for the people of God. Or you could be asking, is God trustworthy?

When you look at your life and you feel that it's a bitter life. And when Naomi returned to the people of God and was looking at everything that had happened to her, the loss of her husband, the loss of her sons, the hunger, the emptiness, she said, don't call me Naomi, which means sweetness, call me Oprah, which means bitter.

So is God trustworthy? Well, the story so far, we met Naomi in chapter one of Ruth. She was an Israelite, so one of God's people. She was married to a limeleck, but there was a famine in Bethlehem, which is bad because Bethlehem is the house of bread.

[2 : 3 9] And they left the land. They went to Moab, which is a place far from the people of God. It's a pagan land. They're enemies of God's people. And they had two sons with them. And the sons got married to pagan women, to Ruth and Orpah.

And then both the sons died. And Ruth's husband, Elimelech, died. And then they heard there was bread back in Bethlehem that God was providing for his people. So Naomi decided, as a widow, she would go back.

She would return to her people. And she said that her life, the Lord had brought her back empty. But she wasn't completely empty because Ruth, this Moabite daughter-in-law, who was also a widow, said, I'll go with you.

Where you go, I will go. Your people will be my people. And your God will be my God. So Ruth is this great woman of faith who turns from the pagan family background that she has to trust God and go with her mother-in-law.

And then she showed great faith in chapter 2 of Ruth as she got up and she said to her mother-in-law, Naomi, that she would go out to the fields where she was looking for a field where she could glean what was left by the harvesters, which under God's law they were supposed to leave.

[3 : 48] But it's the time of the judges. That's very uncertain. But she finds a field where the women are allowed to glean. And then behold, the owner of the field arrives, Boaz. And he's amazing.

And he says, the Lord be with you to his harvesters. And they say to him, the Lord bless you. And we meet this magnificent man who doesn't just see God's law as something you have to keep.

He's generous beyond it. And he's telling his workers to get extra sheaves out from where they've bundled them up and give them to Ruth to send them back to her to give to her mother-in-law to provide for them.

And he's brilliant. He's a righteous man. He's the dude of dudes. And he's extravagantly generous. And then in chapter 3 last week, Naomi sends her daughter-in-law Ruth out to the threshing floor at night where Boaz will be.

And Ruth asks Boaz if he will redeem the family by marrying her and become their kinsman redeemer. Because in those days, if you were a widow and your husband who died had brothers or family members, they could become a kinsman redeemer.

[4 : 55] They could marry the widow and bear children. If she bore children for him, then those children would inherit the land to keep the land for the family and provide for the widow.

So Ruth asks Boaz whether he will do that for her. And he says that he'll do all that she asks. And it's wonderful. But then there's this snag because there's another man who stands in line with the right to redeem the land from Elimelech's family, from Naomi's family before him.

But Boaz says, if he won't do it, I will do it. And it was a cliffhanger church last week. I don't know if someone asked you in the week, how was church? And I don't know whether you said it was a cliffhanger. And I know some of you will not have been able to resist and you'll have already read on into Ruth chapter 4 because you couldn't leave it like that.

Is it going to come off? But let's pick up the story. So the first point in the story is the decision for Boaz at the city gate. And we've picked that up in verse 1. Meanwhile, Boaz went up to the town gate and sat down there.

That's a big square, about 20 meters by 10 meters. It's a place where people did business in the open. And then we get another, behold, because he sat down. And behold, the guardian redeemer, the other redeemer, came along.

[6 : 11] In other words, look at the hidden hand of God again, bringing the right people together at the right time. And Boaz says, come here, pal, and sit down. So he goes over and he sits down.

And then Boaz gets 10 elders. And he says to them, sit down. And they sit down. There's a lot of sitting down because he wants people to see that this is being done right. He wants witnesses. So there's no hint of deception from Boaz, even though what he wants is in doubt.

And in verse 3, he explains to the man, honestly, Naomi is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people.

If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you. And I am next in line. And then the man says, I will redeem it.

And that is the moment when, you know, if it was EastEnders or line of duty, it would stop. And there'd be a drum roll. And we'd have to wait till next week. But we're going to carry on.

[7 : 17] So this man is up for redeeming Naomi's land for her if all he has to do in return is look after this old widow. That seems like a good deal to him.

But then Boaz pulls out the crucial detail in verse 5 of Ruth. Verse 5. Then Boaz said, On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.

And the Redeemer says, verse 6, Then I cannot redeem it, because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it.

And it's a great moment. Back of the net, Boaz. That is just what we wanted. But the man saying no just reveals for us the cost to Boaz of redeeming this family.

That the sensible option is to decline. When the Redeemer, who stood closer in line, realizes that it's not just an old lady he'll have to provide for.

[8 : 27] Maybe he can manage that. Maybe she doesn't eat very much. But he's going to have to buy the land and marry a woman and provide for her as well. And then they might have children, which means more mouths to feed, and cots and high chairs, and travel systems, and school uniforms, and university tuition fees maybe.

It's not Scotland. And after paying all that, the son that they bear will get the land after all. He won't get to keep the land. And he backs out. So Boaz is committing economic madness to redeem this family.

And he's glad to do it. He's glad to do it. Such is his kindness to these widows in need. So they shake hands on the deal. But they don't shake hands, do they?

Verse 8. The guardian redeemer takes his sandal off, and he says, Buy it yourself. And probably Boaz steps into the sandal to say, I'm stepping into your shoes.

And he calls on the witnesses that he has acquired all of Elimelech's land. And verse 10, he says, I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Marlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown.

[9 : 45] Today you are witnesses. And the people all say, We are witnesses. And it's a brilliant thing. And then they bless Boaz. And that's our second point. The men of Bethlehem see a fresh start for God's people.

So look at what they say in verse 11. They say, We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel.

And that's an extraordinary prayer. Because Rachel and Leah were the two wives of Jacob, who God renamed Israel, the father of the nation, through whom the promises from Abraham had been passed on.

And these two women became the mothers of Israel, if you like. It was their children and the surrogates to their children who became the 12 tribes of Israel.

And here's a prayer that the Lord will give his people a fresh start through this foreign woman, Ruth, a Moabite woman. And could it be a better start?

[10 : 52] Because Rachel and Leah is actually a really unpleasant story. It's a story about rivalry within a family and polygamy and bitterness. And here are Ruth and Boaz.

And in chapter 3 last week, we were thrilled by their godliness, their purity. And you start to wonder, could Ruth be a mother like them but better than them? Could her offspring be a new hope for God's people?

And then the men of Bethlehem go on in their blessing. They say, may you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah.

And again, that is an extraordinary thing to pray about this foreign lady and the children that they're praying for from her. Because we know from Genesis that the leader of God's people will be from the line of Judah.

He will be the lion of Judah. Judah is the tribe of the lion, the tribe of the king. And we're in the time of the judges. And Israel needs a king. But the story of Judah and Perez is a horrible story because Judah wouldn't redeem his daughter-in-law Tamar and then he slept with her as a prostitute.

[12 : 13] It's a horrible thing. And here is Boaz in the line of Judah who was chosen to be pure with Ruth and to redeem her and her mother-in-law. And you wonder in that context of magnificent godliness could the seed of Boaz and Ruth be the promised king?

that Israel needs. Could the line of Judah come from them? Then we move on and we get Ruth's last mention in her book. That's our third point.

Ruth's journey reaches a new home. Have a look at verse 13. So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive and she gave birth to a son.

It's just one sentence in our last chapter. Two sentences, one verse. But it's the end of a journey of magnificent faith from Ruth. What a woman she's been.

And Boaz prayed for her in chapter 2 that the Lord would reward her for taking shelter under his wings. And now, she belongs to Boaz and she's taken shelter under his wings and he has redeemed her and the Lord has given her a son.

[13 : 24] And it's a picture for us of the great kindness that we encounter when we return to God, when we come to him in faith. When you come under the wings of the Lord Almighty for shelter, he is kind.

The world says that the Christian God is stingy, looking to spoil your fun. It's the great lie of the devil in the Garden of Eden to make out that God is stingy.

And we've fallen for it ever since. And in Scotland, what do people think of the God of the Bible? What do they think of the church? People who believe you can do whatever you like as long as you don't enjoy yourself.

And yet, Ruth shows us when you return to God, you encounter kindness. He is kind. And in Ephesians chapter 2, the Apostle Paul talks about the kindness that we have received from God when we turn to Christ, that we were dead spiritually in our transgressions and sins.

We were without hope. We were without God. And then Ephesians 2, because of God's great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

[14 : 39] It is by grace you have been saved. And 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 in Christ Jesus.

The Lord is kind when we come to Him in Christ. And that's not to say that our lives will be free from difficulty. Of course, there will be great pain in our lives.

Many of us know that. The Christian writer John Flavel talked about the blessings of the footstool and the blessings of the throne. So how the blessings from God in our lives that are kind of material blessings or blessings for our lives today, blessings like food, shelter, health, friendships, the good things we enjoy in life today, they're the blessings of the footstool of God.

And there are blessings of the throne, the spiritual blessings, that we will enjoy forever when we're with Christ. And meantime, we're assured we have in Christ spiritual blessings of forgiveness, adoption into God's family, redemption, communion with God, peace with God.

And while we live in these times waiting for Jesus, we can claim and enjoy the blessings of the throne that we're assured we have, but we have no guarantee that we'll be full in our lives with material blessings.

[16 : 12] God hasn't promised that our lives will have good health and wealth and personal fulfillment. So in a sense, when we read Ruth, our lives are a bit more like Ruth's life was at the end of chapter 3 where she had promises from Boaz that he would make sure she was redeemed, but she had to wait with Naomi for him to sort everything out.

and she was waiting for the union with him that she longed for. And that's like the Christian life now, waiting, trusting God's promises, trusting our Redeemer and longing for that union that we'll have with him on the day of Christ.

But here in Ruth chapter 4, the Lord demonstrates to us that he is kind, he's worth trusting. And as we leave behind Boaz and Ruth in this book, one thing just to notice about their relationship, because lots of people talk about their relationship, and one thing just to notice is that the reason we really wanted them to get together and the thing they looked for in each other was their faith in the Lord and their kindness.

Ruth trusted God and she lived by faith and she worked hard to provide for others. She committed herself to her mother-in-law in need. She was concerned for others. And these were beautiful things that made her a worthy woman.

And what made Boaz such a worthy match for her? The man we wanted her to be with. We didn't want that other Redeemer to be with Ruth. We wanted Boaz to be with Ruth. Why?

[17 : 49] Because he is devoted to God and he's kind. He keeps God's word. He's generous because he loves God. We don't know what they looked like.

We know what they saw in each other because we know what they commended about each other. It was that they trusted God and they were overflowing in concern for others. It's wonderful.

So now we leave Boaz and Ruth behind and if the story was being told today, if it was a Hollywood movie, I guess we'd have a final scene, wouldn't we, with a picture of them all together. Or maybe Ruth putting the baby down in the cot under a mobile.

But weirdly, surprisingly, it's not Ruth that we see with the baby. It's Naomi. What's going on there? That's our next point. Naomi's lap is filled with a boy.

So let's have a look at verse 14. The women said to Naomi, Praise be to the Lord who this day has not left you without a guardian redeemer.

[18 : 49] May he become famous throughout Israel. He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. for your daughter-in-law who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons has given him birth.

Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. So we meet a new redeemer in this chapter. Naomi's redeemer is not Boaz.

It's the child. It's the baby boy. He can provide for Naomi right through into her old age. Naomi was empty when she returned to God and came back from the land in chapter one.

She was hungry. She was widowed. She was childless. And now we've seen her lap was filled with grain in chapter two and in chapter three. And now, through Ruth's marriage, God fills her lap with a redeemer, with a baby boy.

And it's overflowing grace to her because God is a God of overflowing grace. I was reading the Bible at home just recently with one of our children and it was the bit in the Bible where some generations after this, Nathan the prophet is sent by God to King David and he says to David all the things that God has done for David, bringing him from being a shepherd and making him a king and then he tells David everything he's going to do for him now, for his future and for his children.

[20 : 18] And as I was reading it out, my daughter said to me, but why is this going on? Why is God doing this? Why has he done all this? And I said, well he's just explaining all the things that he's done and he's going to say all the things he will do and as I carried on reading it, she interrupted again and she said, with God, it just never stops.

With God, it just never stops. And that's what Naomi has had to learn in the book of Ruth, that with God, it never stops. And for Naomi, let's notice as well, there's been a hidden redeemer all along.

Not Boaz, not Obed even, this new baby, but Ruth, verse 15, your daughter-in-law who loves you and is worth more to you than seven sons.

And isn't that a surprising thing to hear in the book? Because the whole plot line of the book has been about trying to get a son. And then we learn that there was a woman in Naomi's life who was worth more than seven sons.

All through the book, God's instruments in showing kindness to his people are his people. Showing that kindness to one another. And people will see the same kind of beauty in your life and my life if we could, like Ruth, receive kindness from God and show it to others.

[21 : 39] Independability and commitment and faithful friendship and generosity. And as we've had before in Ruth, if the story had ended there, we would have thought, what a great book.

I love this book. I love the God of this book. But it goes on and that's our next point. Israel's future is secured by a sovereign God. Let's pick things up in verse 17.

The women living there said, Naomi has a son and they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

This then is the family line of Perez. Perez was the father of Hezron. Hezron the father of Ram. Ram the father of Amminadab. Amminadab the father of Nashon. Nashon the father of Salmon.

Salmon the father of Boaz. Boaz the father of Obed. Obed the father of Jesse. And Jesse, the father of David. So we are like Naomi.

[22 : 40] Naomi. God's people are like Naomi. But when we return to God, He gives us a redeemer. Descended from this godly couple.

Boaz and Ruth. And we realize at the end of the chapter that God will indeed answer the prayers of those men. Those extravagant prayers at the city gate.

That through the seed of this couple, He will strengthen His people. and He will give them their king, David. The greatest king Israel will ever have had.

And God here pulls back the curtain and He shows us that all through this story, as we read it and we felt the fear and trepidation of a refugee. And we had the tension and the uncertainty of the narrative.

And then we find out at the end that God was unstoppably at work, intricately at work in the lives of these people. And the people involved couldn't have seen it. The baby that almost was never born becomes the ancestor of the Savior of the world.

[23 : 45] And we know that because even if you've not seen this list before in Ruth chapter 4, it's a list of names we hear at Christmas time. Because in Matthew chapter 1, Matthew begins his account of Jesus' life with the family line of Jesus the Messiah.

And he says in verse 5, as he goes from Jesus' ancestors, Salmon, the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz, the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth.

Obed, the father of Jesse. And Jesse, the father of King David. And then there's another 14 generations from David to the exile and another dozen names until we read, and Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary.

And Mary was the mother of Jesus, who is called the Messiah. And then the angel appears to Joseph in a dream and says, call the baby Jesus because he will redeem his people from their sins.

The baby was almost never born and he's the ancestor of the Savior of the world. And I've just got some implications for us to reflect on. They're on the sheets.

[24 : 54] The first is the Lord's hand at work in empty times. These were the times of the judges. These were terrible times. Perilous times. It's a horrible time for God's people.

You weren't safe in Israel. Especially if you were a woman, you were not safe. And there was no king. And in those times, God shines a spotlight on one harvest field, on one refugee woman who heads out one morning looking for food for her mother-in-law and one faithful landowner.

And he shows us that he is at work behind the scenes where no one could have known unstoppably to save his people and to save the world.

And we might feel that our world today is in a time of emptiness. Spiritually, it's very empty in our city. Will we trust that the sovereign God is at work today, often in hidden ways, so that like Boaz and Ruth, we can just get on with being faithful and trusting him.

We can wait expectantly for what he's doing. Another implication, the Lord's timing is beyond lifetimes. So looking at the family line from Ruth and Boaz, one writer puts it like this.

[26 : 17] The explanation for much that takes place in our lives lies well beyond our own lives and may be hidden from us all throughout our lives. Isn't that helpful?

What a difference it would make to our frustrations in life, our deep sadnesses, our regrets, to remember that the explanation for much that takes place in our lives lies well beyond our own lives and may be hidden from us all throughout our lives.

But God is sovereign and he is kind and we can trust him. The same writer adds this from Ruth, God does not mean to touch only our lives by what he does in us.

He has the lives of others in view, even those yet unborn. as Ruth and Boaz's behavior has shaped not just the people around them but will shape a family that will lead to the royal line of the Lord Jesus.

And another implication, last one, the Lord's Redeemer is worthy of our hope. The women around Naomi, they see Obed on her lap and they know that her emptiness has been filled.

[27 : 37] And for us, we see Jesus. John says of Jesus in chapter 1 that out of his fullness we have received grace. And Colossians chapter 2, in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form and you have been given fullness in him.

the witnesses at the city gate, they saw Boaz willing to bear the great cost of Ruth's redemption and they were glad to witness that.

And all through these events we've seen that Boaz is a man who fulfills all righteousness. He gathered the elders, he wanted them to see that he is fair and just and right.

And we needed a Redeemer who would fulfill all righteousness, one who could uphold the law of God, one who could be righteous and yet redeem us who are unrighteous, who are ungodly, who are sinners.

So what would it cost him to uphold God's righteousness and at the same time enable God to justify the ungodly, law-breaking sinners?

[28 : 47] Only the most costly redemption that he would go to Calvary and die a sin-bearing death. Our redemption price was that our Redeemer bore the justice of God so that on the last day he can say, you are my witnesses how I stepped into their shoes and took on their debts so that these people can now be my bride and I'll be with them forever.

Let's pray together. Father, we praise you, gracious and wise heavenly Father, that your salvation plan was unstoppably at work and that you have now sent us the Lord Jesus in whom all of your fullness dwells and that we've been given fullness in him.

Father, would you grow in us by your Spirit a deeper sense of your trustworthiness and your kindness that our walk with you and the kindness we display for you would overflow and bless the lives of many and would you help us to trust us even in our emptiness that one day we will be filled in Christ.

Lord, that we would be instruments of your kindness today for Jesus' name's sake. Amen. Christ, the Son of righteousness, shine upon you and scatter the darkness from before your path and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always.

Amen. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord in the name of Christ. Amen.