

## Ruth 2

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[ 0 : 00 ] So we're going through the book of Ruth. We started it last week. It's a fantastic book. I mentioned last week for those who wasn't here that it's called Ruth, but actually some people have thought it's really about Naomi.

It's really the redemption of Naomi. And some big themes that come out in it. And some perhaps sometimes as we do with the Bible, they teach things to us, but also they correct us and they train us in how to live like Jesus and how we should live our lives.

But they point to him as well. They point to the good news of the Savior. And this morning we're going to be talking about something that I think, I mentioned it with the kids a moment, it's a word that scares the life out of people.

Because we're going to be talking about commitment. It can scare people about coming to church. Because there is a fear, isn't there, of being committed, of having to be committed.

I was reading an article the other day that said that something that we used to have was formal. The fear of missing out. That's been replaced in the last few years with a new one, full bore.

[ 1 : 12 ] It's the fear of a better offer. And I don't know, I suppose maybe we've done this. You get invited by a friend to a party or some function.

And you don't want to let them down or say that you don't want to go. But you don't want to be tied down either. You don't want to be committed. And there's this, perhaps there's this genuine fear that if you say yes now, what if a better offer comes and you have to send your lame excuse of why you can't go.

And we say things, don't we, like, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I'll let you know nearer the time I'll text you. Because we don't want to be pinned down, we have full bore.

The fear of a better offer. And I say, perhaps we might feel like that about coming to church or even following Jesus.

Will it require a commitment of me that I just don't want or that I'm not able to give? You might fear me.

[ 2 : 21 ] What if the minister or the church asks me to do things, help out with something that doesn't align with my time schedule or personal plan for my wife? Or with the things that I have in my life?

And it may, but it may even be on a deeper level. It may even be, what if the God of the Bible, what if he requires commitment to him?

What if he requires commitment to him? So we're talking about commitment. However, however, there is this strange paradox that occurs.

Because the thing that we really desire in other people is that they are really committed. In a friendship or a relationship, when people are committed to us, no matter what, we know that that's a great thing.

To know that someone isn't just going to jump ship from us at the first sign of difficulty or confrontation. It brings a level of stability to a friendship.

[ 3 : 23 ] To know, even if I let them down, that our relationship, our friendship is strong enough to ride any storm. We know that they're committed to us.

And so, there is this strange thing going on where we want people to be committed to us, but we're not entirely sure about how much we want to be committed to other people.

This passage is really relevant to what we're talking about, because it's about God's commitment to his people, to us.

And that actually, God demonstrates his commitment to us through the love that we show one another. That he uses us, each of us, as his instruments of love, as his instruments of loving

commitment.

In a similar fashion to last week, if you were here, we're going to look at this idea, but we're going to look at it through the lenses of the characters that come up in the story in chapter 2.

[ 4 : 30 ] Last week, it was Elimelech, Naomi, and Ruth, but this week we've got a new character on the scene. We've got Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi. And we're going to see how committed loving kindness is central to understanding this chapter.

Now, last week we saw the events of what happened in chapter 1. This terrible tragedy occurred to Naomi and her family, to her family, to Ruth, and to her other daughter-in-law, Oprah, and how all three of them lost their husbands.

And it was a terrible tragedy. They'd left, but it was because they'd left Bethlehem, the house of bread. They'd gone to Moab, a place that was not where God wanted his people to live.

And they'd decided to come back, but the responses from two of the women, from Naomi and Ruth, were totally different. Naomi was bitter with the Lord, shaking her fist at him. Yet Ruth, who was not a descendant of Israel, she was a Moabite, was faithful to God.

And she demonstrated that by clinging to her mother-in-law. She showed up true faith with life. She was a pointer to Naomi of what it looked like to depend on the living God.

[ 5 : 46 ] To make the living God her God. To make God's people her people. Through faith, she became a daughter of Israel, a daughter of Abraham. And we're going to continue that story today as we continue them once they've landed in Israel.

And the first character that we're going to look at is Boaz. Boaz. And what I want us to see is his loving kindness to an outsider, to Ruth.

Now just as a reminder, just to set the scene a little bit. The general attitude of Israelites towards people from Moab was not great.

But it was of total mistrust. If you were to look, I mentioned this last week, if you were to look in the history of Israel's dealings with Moab, they were the arch enemies in the Old Testament.

Their ancestors were at war. Moab had been nothing but a complete hindrance. There was nothing good in Moab or from Moab. And so, knowing that that's going on in their history, you would expect Boaz, that is right, to have the same perspective towards anybody who came from there.

[ 6 : 57 ] But Boaz surprises us. He surprises us. We don't see, or we would expect, this sort of judgmental mistrust of Ruth that you might expect.

No, we see nothing but love, kindness, and generosity. There's no judgment. He doesn't listen, perhaps, to what his servants, the overseer we say, might be saying about her.

But rather, he's inquisitive about who she is. He takes her at face value. He doesn't allow the past of her ancestors to define her today.

He doesn't allow that to cloud his judgment. Look what verse 5, he says to his servant. Who does that young woman belong to? You see the harvester's opinion of Ruth.

They don't even give her a name. Verse 6. She's defined by where she's from. Verse 6. She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi.

[ 8 : 00 ] They say, they refer to Moab twice in her description of her. That's who she is. You don't need to know anything about her, Boaz. All you need to know is that she's a Moabite from Moab.

She doesn't need a name. He wants to make it definitely clear that he's past judgment on this woman. Don't bother with her.

She's a foreigner not to be trusted. But look at Boaz. He's so different. He's affectionate. Just look at the first thing.

What does he say to her? Verse 8. My daughter. It's an affectionate term. My daughter. One of the family. Listen to me.

Don't go away from me. Stay with the women who work for me. So we see he's affectionate. We see he's protective. Verse 9. I've told the men not to lay a hand on you.

[ 8 : 59 ] Verse 9. We see he provides for you. Whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled. He lets her glean until the evening and take all she wants.

He's gentle and welcomes her in. He shows that spirit, if you like, of compassionate generosity, of loving kindness. And verse 14. Come over here.

Have some bread. And dip it in the wine vinegar. When she sat down with the harvesters, he offers her some more food. He offers her some roasted grain. It is very moving.

You think. Ruth has travelled from her own country. And the first words that she hears spoken to her, apart from her mother-in-law, is Boaz, who says, my daughter.

Who offers her protection, affection, compassion, and a seat at his table. Such gentleness, love, warmth, compassion.

[10:00] He is the epitome of kindness. There is something very powerful at work going on here. Because he doesn't look at her history. He doesn't judge her. Any temptation to view her based on her background is overcome by mercy and grace.

That is very different to the world that we live in, isn't it? It's very different to the world we live in. We all make snap judgments based on so many variables. The family you come from often goes before you as to how people treat you.

That's for good or for ill. I remember in my home village growing up, there were families that my dad would be suspicious of.

Based on sort of the dads and his dealings of them when he was little. My dad loved to know my friends from school's last name.

To see if he remembers their dad. Oh, Chris. What's his last name? Oh, Fletcher. Fletcher. Can you find out if his dad's such and such Fletcher?

[11:06] Oh yeah, he used to be a hard case 20 years ago. Taints the image of poor Chris. Poor Chris. You remember Chris's dad's not poor Chris. Ruth is a mobile.

That's her reputation. It grows before her. But Boaz sees through all that. He illustrates that there's a line in James 3 where he says, mercy triumphs over judgment.

Mercy triumphs over judgment. The way Boaz treats Ruth should remind us or inform us of how Jesus Christ treats each of us.

He doesn't look at our history. He doesn't look at our family background. If your family were a bunch of Romans, he doesn't hold that against you.

I mean, even as a nation, as British people, we look at the way our ancestors treated people. We'd have no chance, would we? But Jesus doesn't see us that way.

[12:12] Ruth comes looking for scraps of food. She's needy and desperate. And Jesus sees us in the same predicament. Needy. Needing spiritual sustenance, spiritual food.

And he sees us. And he treats us, each one of us, like the affectionate, protective, with provision, compassionate, generosity and loving kindness.

Ruth is one of God's people. He's taken her to be one of her own. And he's committed to her. And he demonstrates that through the kindness of Boaz.

We're God's people. And he demonstrates his kindness to us through Jesus. He offers us a seat at his table. Will you sit with Jesus today and eat the bread he offers?

In his committed kindness, Jesus offers us something greater than Boaz. He offers us himself to sustain us. That will satisfy us forever.

[13:19] He doesn't offer us bread to dip it in his wine vinegar. But he says, I am the bread of life. He offers us to come, taste and eat of himself.

Will you come and sit at Jesus' table and eat with him today? The second character we're going to look at is Ruth.

And we're going to see how Ruth is actually rewarded. She's rewarded for the commitment that she has shown to Naomi. Now, at first, you might expect that, you know, Ruth, she's a Moabite.

Everybody else, nobody's spoken to her up until now. She knows the history of Moab with Israel. So she's kind of not expecting, really, anybody to show her that kindness.

She goes out wishful, hopeful that somebody will show pity on her kindness to her. So, you can, it stands to reason that in verse 10, she is a little perplexed.

[14:25] Do you see that in verse 10? At this, at Boaz's kindness, she bows down with her face to the ground before this man. She asks him, why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me, a foreigner?

But verse 11, we get the reason. Verse 11, Boaz tells her, I've been told all about 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 a people you did not know before. You see, Ruth's kindness to Naomi has not gone unnoticed.

It is attractive. And it is an attractive quality. And that's true, isn't it? If you see genuine kindness or if you're on the receiving end of it, it is admirable.

Every year, probably towards the end of each year, we have, you know, on TV, there's the awards season, isn't there? For people of, you know, they've got the Brit Awards and the beginning of the year they have the Oscars.

[15:27] But each year there's the ITV study a few years ago, the Pride of Britain Awards, when people are recognised for genuine acts of kindness and love. Not so that they didn't do those things to receive an award by anyone, but because they had a genuine empathy and concern for other people.

And we should celebrate that. It's great that there's things that go on like that. Because when we see that in people, it is actually a reflection of being made in God's image.

When human beings show great acts of kindness to one another, it is attractive. Boaz notices this in Ruth. Now, we don't know at this point, we know he's heard something about, or we don't know exactly what he knows about her faith.

But we know enough that she receives a blessing from him. It is a blessing from the Lord that comes through Boaz. 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. It's a wonderful illustration there of what the Lord's protection is like.

[16:40] Under whose wings you have come to take refuge. I don't know if you've seen eagles on Naked Nature documentaries. It is amazing how they use their wings to protect their young when it's cold.

Their wings provide warmth. And when it's hot, they provide shelter. So you see what Boaz is saying. He said, in the same way that a bird of prey provides shelter and safety for his chicks, he's praying that that would be the case for Ruth, now that she has come back actually to her own land, to God's land of Israel.

I pray that God will provide safety and refuge for you. In the same way that you have clung to Naomi and been committed to her, I pray that God will be committed to you, now that you have arrived in his land.

Boaz is praying that Ruth would receive that same commitment from the living God. God's commitment to his people is now true for Ruth.

Her obedience aim is rewarded. And what we've noticed in both Boaz and Ruth, is that he uses them to show his love.

[17:57] They are instruments in his hand where his love is demonstrated to them, but it comes through his people. First, it comes from Ruth to Naomi.

Ruth shows love to Naomi. And then we see it coming from Boaz to Ruth. Now, in our church, we don't have many people who can play instruments.

But for Christmas, now this might surprise you, for Christmas I got a harmonica. And currently Annabelle is having to suffer me attempting to play.

And I don't know if you've ever lived with anyone who's trying to learn to play a musical instrument, but there is nothing worse than listening to someone learn how to play an instrument who doesn't know how to play.

I think the worst is probably the recorder. Played well, the recorder makes a beautiful sound. But played badly, it is awful. Now, fortunately, the Lord is a great musician.

[18:58] The Lord is the musician here. And the instruments he is playing is Boaz and Ruth. Boaz and Ruth are the instruments of the Redeemer here. And the melody that he is playing is loving, committed, kindness.

And he plays it through them. And it is beautiful. It is beautiful what we see. They are the instruments in the hands of their living God.

And love and compassion and kindness and committed generosity comes through them to the people that he plays it to. What a beautiful thing.

What a beautiful thing and a privilege it would be to be played by the Lord as his instruments of love. Could that be us? Could that be us?

Could we be the instruments that the Lord plays of committed, loving kindness to one another? I hope that we can. I pray that we will. And I hope that Winchborough and our neighbours and our friends and our families, that we pray that, don't we?

[20:07] We pray that we can be used as his instruments of conduits, of his grace, of his kindness, of the good news of the gospel actually into people's lives. The final character that we're looking at

is Naomi.

And what we're seeing in, what I want us to see in Naomi is that she is changed by God's loving, committed kindness to her. So we have Naomi and Ruth start the chapter.

Ruth goes off. She finds a lot of food from Boaz. And then she comes back. She arrives back to the family home now, to Naomi, with a ridiculous amount of food.

We read in verse 17, it's an e-pad. That's probably about at least a week's worth of food for a family. And Naomi quizzes Ruth on the events of the day.

It is after being told of what Boaz has done, that this is really the turning point in the whole book, actually, verse 20. It's really the turning point in the whole book because the book hinges on this verse because what we see is that Naomi's attitude to what's been happening changes.

[ 21 : 20 ] As she receives grace, it changes her heart. It changes her disposition to the events that have been going on in her life, and it changes her disposition towards the living God.

She recognizes this as the Lord's kindness to them both. Look at her response, verse 20. The Lord bless him. We see again, Lord there is in capital letters.

That's the special name for God in the Bible, in the Old Testament. Yahweh. That's the special name that God gave to his people to call back to them.

And Naomi uses that. It is a name that is evocative of his kindness to them. The Lord bless him.

The Lord bless him, Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. He has not stopped showing the kindness to the living and the dead. She added, that man is our close relative.

[ 22 : 17 ] He is one of our guardian redeemers. Now, when Naomi says, what she says, that he has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.

There is debate as to whether the he, is she referring to the kindness of Boaz, or is she referring to the kindness of the Lord?

It's debatable. For what it's worth, I think she means the kindness of the Lord through Boaz. Two reasons. The first is the word that she uses for kindness.

The word is, it's a Hebrew word, chesed. It means God's never-ending love. His steadfast love. His steadfast love in kindness. His committed love to his people.

And he's only ever used, really, of the Lord's covenant love to his people that never ends. But you see, also, she curiously said that he's not stopped showing his kindness.

[ 23 : 19 ] Now, that is curious, because she's never met Boaz before. So, why would she be talking about Boaz's never-ending love? If she'd never met him before. Now, there is no history regarding them speaking to each other.

Which means, all to say, she is talking about the Lord's kindness. She's talking, she says, the Lord's kindness to the living, and that's her and Ruth. But also, in a strange kind of a way, she's talking to the Lord's kindness to, also to their deceased husbands.

That in some way, by the kindness that Boaz shows to that family, actually honors Elimelech, and her sons.

She honors them, even in their death, because there is honor shown to their family line. It is the Lord who's not stopped showing kindness, both to the living, to them, and to the dead, to their family line.

She then adds, that man is our close relative. He is one of our guardian redeemers. Now, that needs a little bit of explanation. In the Old Testament law, to prevent widows from becoming destitute, because they couldn't provide for themselves in the same way as today, there was a law given to Moses by God, to look after women that might find themselves in that position.

[ 24 : 40 ] So, it might appear to us as we look, that there's a coincidence, that the very man, the very man who, with the roof behind favor, happens to be the man who can redeem them, can rescue them from their situation.

Of course, it is not a coincidence, that it's perfectly planned, by the living God. Naomi sees all this. She sees all this, and it is the turning point in her life.

She recognizes and sees that all the way through, God has never stopped being kind to her. He was never bitter. He was never out to get her. He never blew his top.

There wasn't steam coming out of his ears in rage, but he was smiling, and working things out to bless her and her family all along. Where she might have abandoned God, he would never abandon Naomi.

He would never abandon her. Even though she left the country, and went as far away from possible, from his people, he would never abandon her.

[ 25 : 43 ] His loving kindness was a committed love. And perhaps that, we might feel that today, perhaps we've messed up, even worse than Naomi. Perhaps we're bitter with God, or have been.

Perhaps we've done things, where we think there is no chance, that God will ever smile at me, or treat me with loving kindness. No one is too far from God.

No one. No one is too far from God. He's committed to us. He's committed to saving the people for himself. And he has shown that commitment in history, by sending his son, Jesus Christ, to die in our place.

If you wanted to see, the true demonstration of God's commitment to us, is that he would send his own son, all the way to death. What more commitment is there?

This is how much I love you. Living God is saying, look at my son. Look at him hanging, on a cross of wood. He hasn't abandoned you. If anything, Jesus was abandoned, by his father, out of love, for you.

[ 26 : 52 ] And as Naomi realises, that the loving kindness from the Lord, has never ended. It changes her perception of him, of reality.

It is shaping her. And we need to hear that afresh today, to allow the Lord's grace, and kindness, and committed love to you, through Jesus Christ, to shape us, to shape us today.

Boaz has been shaped, by the loving kindness, of God the Father. Ruth has been shaped, by the committed loving kindness, of a saviour.

And Naomi will be shaped, by the committed loving kindness, of a saviour. It's why they respond, respond to other people, with loving, committed kindness.

It's in response to the, it's in response, from God's grace to them, his grace to other people, as their instruments, in his hand. We talked at the beginning, about commitment.

[ 28 : 07 ] And how that's, difficult, tricky. We'd always like to be committed. Why would it be committed, to someone else, or to Jesus, or to church? It is in response, to his commitment to us, that Jesus has, fully, committed himself to you, even to death.

That's how committed he is. He is good. He's good. The only person, that can fulfill, can fulfill, your expectations, and surpass them.

The only one, who will ever be fully committed, to you is Jesus Christ. No one can achieve, that level of commitment. Even the very best, of relationships, that we have, are only shadow, of the type of relationship, that Jesus Christ, offers you today, in the gospel.

And the level of commitment, that he will show to you. If you're here today, and perhaps you're still, thinking about the truths, of Christianity, the truths of Jesus Christ, and looking in, to what Jesus Christ, can offer you.

Let me tell you, once more, that this is, an offer for everyone. That no one, is too far from God, and his commitment, is offered to you, today, in the gospel, and the good news. His loving kindness, knows no bounds.

[ 29 : 25 ] And we see it, through nail-pierced hands. Let me pray. Lord Jesus, we just marvel, at the good news, of the gospel.

We marvel, how, you're so committed to us. Your love is, unending, unenjoyed, through all things. There's nothing, that we have done, or will do, that will, stop your love.

And we want to know it, more fully, every day, we, forgive us, where we've abandoned you, in our hearts. And we thank you, that we can, we can always return to you, and you delight in us, and your face smiles in us.

And so, we pray, that we respond, to your committed love to us, with commitment to you, and commitment to your people. We pray where, that word has been a scary word, where we've feared commitment.

Forgive us, and help us to, to demonstrate that commitment, commitment in love to other people. We ask for this, in the name of Christ.

[ 30 : 43 ] Amen.