

RUTH 3

INTRODUCTION

It is worth asking ourselves the question, what sort of God do we have? How do we answer that sort of question from people? It usually comes after a tragedy or disaster strikes and people ask what sort of God is this God you talk about that allows such things to happen. People have all different views of what God is like. Some believe in a God who I describe as a clockmaker God.

You know like the old fashioned clockmaker who worked hard at making the clock wound it up and left it ticking that was his job done, it was up to others to keep the clock ticking. Well there are people who believe that God is like that; he makes the world and creates people, he creates the laws of science and then he places the people in the world and that is his job done. It's up to the people of the world and the scientific laws to keep the world going.

This type of God sits in heaven powerless watching as one disaster follows another and one tragedy follows another. This view simply says you can't blame God when this world goes wrong it's not his fault he is no longer involved in our world.

Then there is the superman God. This is the God who seems to have no involvement in the world except when disaster and tragedy strikes and like superman we call on this God to come and sort out the mess. He is a hero type of God who comes and helps us when we can no longer help ourselves. This view simply sees God as one who has no interest or involvement in our lives or world except when we really need him, when things are really out of control.

We call upon him and we expect things to be made better again. However the problem is that such gods don't exist except in our own minds and so when we call upon our superman type of God he doesn't turn up and we become disillusioned and turn from such a god.

But none of those descriptions describe for us the God of the bible and we have a good example of how our God works in this third chapter of the book of Ruth. How does the God of the bible work in our world?

1. GOD WORKS IN THE DETAILS OF REAL PEOPLE'S LIVES

The story so far is reasonably simple to follow. Elimelech and Naomi left Bethlehem because of a famine when they shouldn't have and went to Moab. Their two sons married two Moabite women, which again is something they should not have done. Before long, Elimelech and his two sons die in Moab leaving Naomi and her two daughters in law destitute. However God had come to the aid of his own people by providing food for them (1:6). This resulted in Naomi heading home after 10 years away and she urges her daughters in law to go back to Moab and find themselves another husband who can care for them.

Eventually Orpah is persuaded to do so but Ruth refuses and is converted and as a result is committed to Israel's God (1:16-18). Back in Bethlehem Naomi and Ruth put to the test the laws of the land concerning the poor and gleaning (Leviticus. 19:9-10 and Deuteronomy 24:19). The reason why these laws were given is because they reflected God's character; he was Israel's God he had redeemed them therefore their laws and life should reflect something of the character of their God, which was one of compassion and grace.

Ruth finds that she is gleaning in the field of Boaz who was a kinsman redeemer. This person was responsible according to God's law to do all that was necessary to secure the land and support

their near relatives who had fallen into poverty. Also according to God's law the Kinsman redeemer was also responsible for marrying that near relative, this was called a levirate marriage. You see in Old Testament times it was vital that a man's family name should be preserved. These were God's people and God's people must not be allowed to die out. According to the law of the land, which was of course the law of God, if a husband dies without an heir steps were to be taken to ensure that he had an heir to carry on his name and inherit his property. The widow of the dead man being married to a near relative ensured this and the first child of that marriage would be the dead man's heir (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).

Naomi knew this law and now in chapter three she begins to take steps to ensure that Ruth is married off to Boaz who is a relative although as we will see not the closest relative.

a) Naomi Hatches A Plan (vs. 1-5). - Naomi knew that Boaz would be willowing barley at the threshing floor so Ruth is to prepare herself. She is to wash, put on perfume and put on her best clothes. She is out for the kill she is out to impress. This is a time-honoured method of catching your man just look at how people dress on Saturday nights. She is to go to the threshing floor and is not to let him know she is there. After Boaz has finished eating and drinking she is to watch where he lies down for it would be a tragedy if she lies down beside the wrong man.

Then she is to uncover his feet which is a word that carries with it sexual connotations (the word is used in Leviticus 18 and 20; 24 times and means to uncover the nakedness see Deuteronomy 23:1). It was probably a custom of the time the meaning of which is lost to us but it could mean something like I am ready for marriage, I want to share your bed with you through marriage. Ruth is to wait for Boaz's response so Ruth willingly obeys the advice of Naomi.

But let us pause here and ask how God is at work through this cunning plan of Naomi's? What is the God of the bible doing is he in complete control here or is it spiralling out of control? Well look at v1 here is Naomi's desire for Ruth but if we turn back to 1:9 we have what is in effect Naomi's prayer for her two Daughters in Law. Lord may you grant Orpah and Ruth a new husband and a new home were they would find rest. Naomi's prayer is now being answered in this chapter and in chapter 4.

God is working out his purposes in order that Naomi's prayer might be answered and he is doing so through the various individual decisions that are being made in this chapter. God is using Naomi to be the means by which her own prayer is answered. God is not a God who is aloof waiting for us to call upon him to help the God of the bible is at work through the details of the lives of real people. All that you did today or all that you did over this past week is part of God's plan for fulfilling his purposes. But we are not pawns in God's game of chess we are responsible human beings who make decisions by thinking them through and considering the cost yet in the midst of what we are doing God is also at work working in and through us who are his people. One of the ways that he does this is by using us to answer our own prayers.

It is a dangerous thing to pray for we may be the very person God uses to answer our prayers. Let me give an example of this. As a church we often pray that God may build his church. But how does God do that? Well it might be through one of our evangelistic efforts like door to door; or coffee morning or Lunch and Listen or children's club but you can't have an evangelistic effort without people. It's as we work and it's as we pray that God builds his church.

The evangelistic things that we do as a church we do because we believe that it is God's method of reaching out to people with the gospel. But in doing so are we conscious that we are being used by God to answer our own prayers. It could be that there is someone in work that presents us with an opportunity to present God's truth; in time that person may be converted and added to God's church. Although we may not have thought much about it but we may have prayed that God will provide us with a fellow Christian work colleague. That conversion may be an answer to our

prayers even though we may not have been conscious of it. Our God the God of the bible works through the lives of normal people, in the midst of everyday things and activities God is at work accomplishing his purposes and although we might not think about it he may be using us to answer our own prayers.

The same truth is again seen in the next section of this chapter of Ruth.

b) The Plan Unfolds (vs. 6-15) - The plan is going smoothly, Ruth does as she's been told and then Boaz wakes up (v 8) probably as a result of the night air on his bare feet, he looks and discovers a woman who is lying at his feet, Boaz asks who it is and Ruth tells him and invites Boaz to marry her because he is a Kinsman redeemer. This was not part of the script for Ruth is told to wait until Boaz tells Ruth what to do but now Ruth is telling Boaz what to do.

The custom of spreading the garment over someone is in fact to show your intent to marry them according to the custom of the day (Ezekiel 16:8 and Deuteronomy 22:30). It would have been unheard of for a woman to propose to a man in Ruth's culture so what she is doing is highly unusual. Boaz recognises that Ruth is doing this because she is committed to the family and to God's provision of keeping the family name alive. She was probably still quite young (20's) Boaz was probably at least twice her age but Ruth has not gone after younger men for she is intent in keeping the family name alive.

Naomi couldn't do it as she was probably passed the age of child bearing, so Ruth commits herself to finding a man from the family tree of Elimelech who could marry her, give her children and keep the family name alive as was required by the law of God. Boaz assures her of his intention to marry her and be her kinsman redeemer although there is a problem there is another relative who is a closer relative and therefore has first choice to be Ruth's Kinsman Redeemer.

Boaz asks her to stay the night (v 13) and the word used here is one that has no sexual connotations at all, so that Ruth's honour remains in tact. She and Naomi took a risk her advances could have been misunderstood or at least they could have been taken advantage of but Boaz is an honourable and godly man and so Ruth is able to slip off before anyone found out what was going on or before anyone could accuse her of immorality (v 14).

But what is God doing in this scene? How is God at work here? Well if you look again at verse 9 the word that is used for the corner of your garment is the same word that is used in 2:12 where it is translated as 'wings.' What God is doing is answering Boaz's prayer for Ruth that she may be richly rewarded because she has come under the wings of God. Here God is protecting Ruth, he is using the actions of Ruth and Boaz to demonstrate what it means to come under the wings of God. God is using Boaz to protect Ruth through her marriage to Boaz.

When Boaz prayed for Ruth he had no idea that the way that God was going to demonstrate his protection for Ruth was by bringing Ruth and Boaz together in marriage. You see the God of the bible is involved with the lives of ordinary people, in order to answer the prayers of his people and in order to accomplish his own purposes within this world. There is however another application that I want to make here the decisions that Ruth and Boaz made were costly decisions.

They were both motivated by a desire to obey God in all things. They both fulfilled not just the literal law of God but its spirit as well. Strictly speaking Ruth had no obligation to Elimelech, it was Naomi who should have been redeemed, and similarly Boaz did not have an obligation to Elimelech, as he was not the nearest relative. However both Ruth and Boaz knew that God's laws were intended to show his deep concerns for the welfare of his people. Thus they both went beyond mere obedience to the letter of the law to fulfilling its very intention. Such obedience is expected of every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not just to obey God's word in a

very literal way but we must obey it to the extent that our actions and attitudes show the very character of God, show his intentions for the world.

The world gets some idea what the God of the Bible is like by the way that we demonstrate his character in our own lives. If we see the commands of God in a very literal sense only i.e. you shall not commit adultery without seeing God's intention i.e. marriage is good honourable and permanent then the world sees our God as cold and even callous. But if we obey God's commands with a loving heart being prepared to go the extra mile in order to show God's purpose behind his laws then people will begin to see God as a God of love mercy and grace.

That is clearly shown by Boaz and Ruth, Boaz was merciful and gracious to Ruth when he didn't have to be and Ruth was gracious and loving to Naomi again when she did not have to be. As people look at our lives do they see something of God in the everyday details of our lives? Do they see him as hard and harsh or as a God who is gracious merciful loving and kind? You see through the mundane events of our lives God is teaching us what he is like and through us he is showing the world how he works in this world. It is like a football team whose style of play points to the manager, so that he gets the praise or gets the blame. Well in a much greater way the way we live life, points to the one who is in charge of our lives the one who works through the details of ordinary people's lives in order to accomplish his purposes.

Therefore we can never see life as mundane, for even in the most mundane thing we do God is at work fulfilling his purposes for us and for the world therefore we can have confidence in the providence of God and step out every day in faith knowing that God is at work and behind every decision we make God is working out his purposes for his glory and for our ultimate good.

Amen