

Ruth

A Study in Ruth - 16 weeks

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Ruth

This was originally an expository series of sermons given in the church where I was serving as Pastor. A few years later, they were edited to be used as a Bible Study. There are a few things I feel I should share with you before using this material:

First: I had no intent of sharing or publishing this material until encouraged to do so by some friends. While I did consult several commentaries as I was preparing the original sermon series, I did not make notes of the references used in the messages. There was not in the beginning, nor is there now, any intent to plagiarize. Should you see anything you feel is the original thought of another, I ask for your grace and mercy.

Second: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I tend to spell certain words phonetically for the purpose of emphasis. When transforming these notes from sermon notes to teaching notes, I felt inclined to leave a number of these phonetic spellings. They help me to make emphasis in the lesson at particular points.

Third: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I make little effort to conform to rules of grammar. One example is that I often use a hyphen (-) to indicate a point where I may want to pause slightly and to keep certain thoughts connected as I speak. Another example is that I will use local colloquialisms to make points in the message.

Please accept that these notes are not an academic work. But I do hope they will help the preacher or teacher to be able to more quickly prepare their own sermon or teaching.

Have you ever experienced a time when things really looked dim financially? Have you ever had a time when it seemed the only way you could make a living - Was to engage in something that fell below your moral standard? Like a job that some part of you felt was wrong?

It is fairly common today – to find people who compromise their moral standard in an effort to make more money. So, without having to stretch it - or even to reshape it – This lesson from the book of Ruth has a lot of relevance to Believers today.

Read Ruth 1:1 and make notes:

The events recorded in the book of Ruth took place during the time when Israel was ruled by “Judges” - that would be somewhere in the 1200 B.C. to 1000 B.C. Years. Another way of identifying this time is that it was after Joshua led the people into the promised land and before Saul became king.

This was a rather tough time in Israel’s history. There were a number of violent invasions by other peoples – more than once the religion became clearly apostate – civil lawlessness got out of hand time and time again – and there were frequent tribal wars between different tribes of God’s chosen people.

During the times of the “Judges” – frequently a military hero would be given control of a part of the land – not necessarily the whole nation of Israel.

To say the least – the times of the Judges was a time when there was a lot of unrest in Israel. Even when one of the Judges had managed to bring about some level of peace – there remained an uncertainty over the land – much like a dark cloud hanging ominously on the horizon – the people were always on the lookout for the next problem – or attack.

Ruth – 01 – Better Provision

It is in this setting that the events recorded in the Book of Ruth took place. As if living in the land where there was this continuous threat of attack from outsiders or an attack from one of our cousins wasn't enough – then a famine befalls the land.

Perhaps some of the people – maybe even the family we read about in the Book of Ruth – felt they couldn't remember a time in their life when there was a feeling of real peace and safety in the land. All of their life, it seemed they were always on the lookout and making some effort to guard against the attack of an enemy. Maybe a famine stretching itself across the land was just too much to take.

Beth-lehem = "house of bread"

Bethlehem had earned its name. For many years, this region had produced much in the way of wheat, barley, olives, almonds – and even grapes grew plentifully in this area. While they probably had to work for it – up until this point, they were able to buy food or raise food.

Now the fields weren't producing food. So Elimelech and his family left the “house of Bread” and went to the countryside in the land of Moab.

Moab had been an enemy to Israel for many years. Moab's social, cultural, and religious practices made the average Israelite person sick to their stomach. The Moabites came into existence through incest. Lot's oldest daughter had a child by her father – and this child was named Moab. From this Moab – descended all the Moabites.

In the land of the Moabites – sexual activities were just a regular part of their spiritual life. Elimelech, took his family – FROM the promised land of God's people – INTO a land founded and established in incest – into a land where the family unit accepted a variety of sexual activities outside marriage as just part of life. Something very unacceptable to God's people.

Ruth – 01 – Better Provision

Read Ruth 1:2 and make notes:

Elimelech decides it would be better to live among the pagans where there is food - than to live among God's people where there is a famine. After all, he is a husband and a father – surely we won't fault him for trying to provide for his family!

I have read the book of Ruth several times – and it seems rather clear – that the names of these people have very little importance - in the events that follow the passages in this lesson. This account could have simply stated there was a man - who took his wife and two sons to Moab. It could have said, this man and both of his sons died there - without giving their names. And not knowing these persons names - in no way would take away from all the events that follow.

I believe the Holy Spirit had each book of the Bible written just the way He wanted it written. This means there is a reason He provided the names in this account. Let's consider the names of Elimelech's family for a minute before we continue:

Elimelech = “my God is King”

Naomi = "my delight" or “pleasant”

Mahlon = "sick" or “sickly”

Kilion = "pining" or “piney”

Maybe, just maybe, Elimelech didn't think his son “sickly” or his son “piney” - would be able to survive on meager rations. Maybe Elimelech – in trying to be a good father for his children – thought “sickly” and “piney” needed to have regular and sufficient food.

Ruth – 01 – Better Provision

A healthy person might make it during a famine – but those who are already weak – well. . . So, the one who is named “my God is King” - takes “Sickly” and “Piney” to the land of Moab.

Read Ruth 1:3 and make notes:

We don't know the exact time – but it reads as though it wasn't long after arriving in Moab – Elimelech dies and Naomi is left a widow with two sons in a foreign land. “Pleasant” becomes a widow and she is in a foreign country with her two sons “Sickly” and “Piney”.

Read Ruth 1:4-5 and make notes:

Orpah = "gazelle"

Ruth = "friendship"

Did you notice in V2 the boys are referred to as “his” sons – and now in Vs 3 & 5 they are referred to as “her” sons? The weight of caring for and providing for these boys is now fully on Naomi's shoulders.

Ruth – 01 – Better Provision

We are not sure if it happened before Elimelech died or after – but it reads as though the boys marry Moabite women after their dad died. After about ten years both “Sickly” and “Piney” die. Now “Pleasant” is left without a husband - or either of her sons – in a foreign land.

It is a rather normal thing for a widow with children to find some relief from the pain of losing a husband – by the promise and hope of her children producing grand-children. Very often – I don’t say always – but often - a widow will make an effort to strengthen the contacts with her children - and will invest herself and much of her life into the actions and activities of her children. The marriages of “Sickly” and “Piney” however did not produce children – even after 10 years.

Just a note of reference – Abram and Sarai were married for 10 years before she gave her handmaid to Abram to bear children for them.

There are some historical records that give us the impression that 10 years was looked upon by the ancient world as a reasonable time to allow a couple to have children before taking some other action.

We don’t know what was in Naomi’s mind – but what would be typical of that era would be to think that after 10 years – if there were no children from the marriage – that they might take on a handmaid or slave girl for the purpose of birthing children. So it is reasonable to believe Naomi still had a glimmer of hope – and was taking solace in the prospect of grandchildren.

Whatever solace “Pleasant” hoped for in the grand-children was dashed cruelly to the ground – when not one – but both of her sons died. It reads at this point as if “Pleasant’s” life was anything but pleasant. Elimelech – the man who’s name meant “my God is King” - took his family from a place that was experiencing a food famine - to a place where they experienced a family famine.

The family of Elimelech now has no second or even a third generation. Elimelech came up with a plan to take his family from a place barren of food – and they found themselves in a place of human barrenness.

Ruth – 01 – Better Provision

In a male dominated society – such as the case in that era and that place – a widow was in a fragile place in society among her own people – but a widow who was a stranger in a foreign country was in a place of likely peril. Naomi’s life would certainly appear to be a “bitter” life at this point.

Even if Elimelech had arrived in Moab as a wealthy man – it isn’t likely that Naomi remained wealthy. After the death of Elimelech – what would be the means of her income? Her sons – “Sickly” and “Piney” just don’t sound like they would be robust hard working men. But even they had been, they are now both dead.

Naomi doesn’t have the fellowship, protection, or provision of family. Her prospect of survival has got to be the lowest number on whatever scale you decide to use.

Before you think – “well, maybe she can marry again” - consider – if she married when she was 18 yrs old – and if her sons were 20 yrs old when they married – Naomi would be around 38 yrs old when the two boys married. Then consider by the time 10 years go by without them having children – Naomi would be around 48 yrs old.

In that society, a woman past child bearing age would not likely become married again. In that society and culture, the primary reason for marriage was to produce children. Naomi’s prospects from all practical viewpoints had to be at the lowest place.

Naomi was headed into her declining years – there are no children and there are no grand-children to either provide for her – or to bring her cheer and laughter. At this place in the account of Naomi – we are left with a sad story with a gloomy outlook.

Would Elimelech’s family become barren of children if they had stayed in Israel? It might be unwise to say that they would have had children if they had just stayed in Israel. It is probably bad theology to say that God punished them by cutting off their future generations - because they went to a pagan land in a time of a food famine. There are some other O.T. people who went to pagan lands in times of famine and God didn’t cut them off completely.

Ruth – 01 – Better Provision

But it is safe to say – they would have been better off if they had stayed in Bethlehem. Consider first – the Patriarchs of the nation of Israel who went to pagan lands during times of famine – were shown by God that He was their provider.

Anyone living in the land of Israel by the time of Elimelech and Naomi should have learned from the lessons taught those who went before them – that God’s People are to look to God for provision – not to the world around them.

Yahweh, with whom Elimelech’s people were in a covenant relationship - had been shown that Yahweh was also “Jehovah Jireh.” The God with whom they were in covenant - was the one who had promised to be their provider.

But Elimelech sought a Better Provision for himself and his family than what appeared to be available among God’s people. Elimelech appears to have had more faith in a pagan land’s ability to provide for his family than he had in God. Even though his name meant “My God is King” - Elimelech acted more like he was king. Elimelech did not live up to his name.

And consider this: Maybe these two boys “Sickly” and “Piney” were never going to be able to have children – and I said maybe. If it is true that they were not going to be able to continue the family – would it have been better to remain in the land of God’s people – among your family and friends – or was it better to go to a foreign and pagan land?

Surely, we can see - if the family line was going to turn out like this regardless of whether they were in a land of famine or a land with food – it would have been better to live out whatever life they had among family and friends.

The famine in the land of Israel wasn’t the real problem! The real problem was the lack of faith on the part of Elimelech. Before you think I am being hard on Elimelech – ask yourself “did all the people who stayed in Israel die?” The answer is no, they did not.

The truth is that it was a rough time during the famine– no one got all they wanted to eat – but God made sure they had enough to sustain life.

Ruth – 01 – Better Provision

Elimelech is such a clear picture of many people today. At the first sign of trouble – far too many of us think of leaving the place of God’s blessing and God’s anointing – we look out to the world where it looks like they have all they want – and we decide it is better to go and try with all our might – than it is to stay and trust God.

And before you think I am casting some dispersion on other people – I confess to being one of those people some years ago. I know what it is like to take matters into my own hands during a tough time - and move your family to another place. I know what it is like to experience the death of one of your children - and be hundreds of miles away from family and friends.

We had some of our relatives to come and visit for a day, but they went back home. That was such a dark and painful time in our lives. We were in a place where we did not know the people – we had no family except each other – and we were both hurting so bad that we weren’t much for consoling the other.

I began to realize that before we moved – while we went through several months of not knowing where the next meal was coming from – we didn’t know how we were going to make the next house payment – during that entire time – our house was not repossessed as so many others were – our utilities did not get cut off as had happened to so many around us – and while we didn’t get all we wanted to eat – we did get to eat.

Somehow, God had provided what we needed, but at the time of struggling I hadn’t looked beyond my struggling to see God’s gracious provision.

Then, in that place of work and a regular paycheck – while we no longer worried about paying the rent or paying the utilities, or even being concerned about eating – there was no one to console or comfort us in a time of deep pain.

Would our baby have died if he had not moved – most likely. Our baby did not die because of where we lived. But, if we had not moved away – we would have had family and friends who would have and could have consoled us – we would have had some comfort.

Ruth – 01 – Better Provision

Would God have continued providing for us if we had stayed – at the age I am now, I will say He would have – if I had continued to live for Him. I don't know if I am as old as David was when he said it in the O.T. – but in the years that I have lived – I have watched God's people who are being faithful to Him – I have not seen them go without the things they need.

This message is not about moving - or not moving.

The book of Ruth opens with the account of a man who takes the provision of his family into his own hands instead of standing on God's Word. There is a way that seems right to man – and the end of it is destruction. This is such an important message that God says it two times; Proverbs 14:12 & 16:25.

It is a sad story – it was then and it is today – it is a sad story when one of God's people thinks they have a better plan to provide for themselves and for their family – than the plan of serving God faithfully and looking to Him for provision.

The problem for Elimelech wasn't that he moved. The problem was that we did not look to God for guidance.

While the exact story may vary in details – there are others in the churches where I served as pastor who have experienced the pain of taking matters into their own hands - instead of trusting God to provide.

Here is the opportunity for those who had done this: Turn things back over to God! Trust in God's unfailing Love. Trust in God's unfailing provision.

There is always so much more than what we can see. So when we make decisions based only upon what we can see – it is difficult for our decisions to be the best decision.

Did Elimelech foresee that he and his sons would die so young? Probably not. He probably only thought of how he might better provide for “Sickly” and “Piney” - if he left God's land and went to the pagan land.

Ruth – 01 – Better Provision

And he probably thought that if the children are better provided for then his wife “Pleasant” would be even more pleasant.

Oh, if only he could have seen the whole picture. But we don’t see the whole picture - do we?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

If you remember in the last lesson – the land of Judah was experiencing a famine. Elimelech took his wife Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Kilion - from Bethlehem to the land of Moab. Shortly after arriving in Moab, Elimelech died. Not long after that, Mahlon and Kilion both married Moabite women.

After 10 years of marriage, both Mahlon and Kilion died. This left Naomi and her two daughters-in-law - as widows.

There are three verbal interchanges between Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth recorded in this book. They could be studied together as one basic event that sort of went back and forth like a tennis match. But the text is so rich with instructions and encouragement for Believers - that we are going to look at each of the three interchanges separately.

Let's take a look at the first interchange between these three women.

Read Ruth 1:6 and make notes:

The way this verse reads – we get the impression that Naomi has not lost her faith in Yahweh – the Lord of the God's people. It isn't that Naomi has heard there is food in the land of Judah – she has heard that the Lord has provided food for the people there.

Naomi has heard that the “Lord has come to the aid of His people.” That Yahweh would graciously provide for His children – should have been expected – shouldn't it?

Ruth – 02 – Selfless Concern

Wasn't Yahweh and the people of Judah in a Covenant Relationship? Wouldn't it have been reasonable for the people of Judah – including Elimelech who's name meant “my God is King” – to have actually expected God to provide for them – even in a time of famine?

The Covenant Relationship would have dictated that as long as the people of Judah were faithful in their part of the relationship – then Yahweh would provide for them – food, protection, deliverance, etc. Only if they had been un-faithful should there be any concern that Yahweh might allow harm to come to them.

Yahweh providing food for His chosen people had been something of a hallmark of this covenant relationship had it not? Remember the manna in the desert – remember the quail blown into their laps – and a number of other times when Yahweh provided His people with food.

The simple statement that they “prepared to return home from there” – just might be the first ray of sunshine on this dark scene of events so far. The report of God's gift of food marks the turning point for Naomi in this sad story.

Read Ruth 1:7 and make notes:

This is sort of a theme verse for many of us. Naomi and her daughters-in-law left the place where they had been living – and they set out on the road that would take them to the land of God's people.

Ruth – 02 – Selfless Concern

It is a good day – when anyone leaves the place where they have been living in sin – and sets out on the road that will take them to the land of God’s people. Have you personally ever left the place where you had been living in rebellion - left the place where you had been living among pagans and unbelievers – left the place where you had been living in physical sin - and got on the road that would take you to the land of God’s people?

For all of us who have done this – wasn’t that a good day!

Read Ruth 1:8 and make notes:

The account doesn’t tell us how far along this road they traveled – but the account tells us they “set out” - then it tells us Naomi speaks to the other two – so it sort of reads like they didn’t travel far before Naomi encourages them to go back to their families.

We can reason - if Naomi had tried to do this before they left – the daughters-in-law might have tried to get Naomi to stay there with them instead of traveling alone. After all, everything they had in this world would be right there. Naomi might have even been convinced to stay.

It is also reasonable to think that if Naomi had waited until after they arrived in the land of Judah – both daughters-in-law would have stayed with her – it was not a good thing for a young woman to be traveling alone over such distances.

So, it seems reasonable that this interchange between the women took place at some short distance from where they were living – but long before they left the country of Moab.

Ruth – 02 – Selfless Concern

Think about what we said earlier about Naomi being at an age where it isn't likely she will marry again in that culture. These two daughters-in-law are the only likely means of support for Naomi in the remainder of her life. And here she is encouraging them to go back to their own people – to find another husband and make a life for themselves.

This gives us a hint of the utter hopelessness that Naomi must have had for her future. Without any hope of showing Orpah or Ruth any provision or earthly kindness – Naomi sets them free so that they have no further obligation to her. Naomi is basically saying that she did not want these two women to experience what she was sure lay ahead for her.

From the practical side of this – Naomi is too old to bear more children – so she isn't going to have another husband. Orpah and Ruth are very unlikely to be accepted among the young men of Judah because they are Moabites – and all of the people in Judah know about the incest and the child sacrifices - that these two women have probably experienced.

Can you imagine the kind of pressure that the family of a young man would place upon him if he came home and said “hey, mom & dad, I want to marry this Moabite woman I met”? But if Orpah and Ruth go back to their hometowns – it just wouldn't be a big deal to anyone there – they have an excellent chance of getting a husband and having a family.

From the earthly practical side of things – it would make sense for these two women to follow Naomi's suggestion.

Read Ruth 1:9-10 and make notes:

Ruth – 02 – Selfless Concern

Even with the bitterness of heart from losing the three people she loved most in this world – Naomi issues a blessing upon Orpah and Ruth - “May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.” Without any doubt, Naomi is hurting deeply – and it would be understandable that there would be some bitterness in her heart – but is it the bitterness that we see coming out of her?

Look at what Naomi is doing and saying. Does this look like bitterness coming forth?

Even with the hurt, the disappointment, and the bitterness that had to be in her heart – Naomi doesn’t allow that to come out – but instead shows a selfless concern for others instead of showing bitterness. Naomi didn’t say “get out – good bye – and good riddance” – but rather she said “good bye and God bless you both.”

There are a couple of things for us to take home:

#1 –

Self-Less Love

Something really significant took place here – something really important is revealed here. If any of you have read the rest of the book of Ruth already – you know that Naomi does later get to be part of a family – she doesn’t wind up in absolute poverty.

Naomi winds up living well – quite the opposite of what is to be expected. And the thing revealed here – is the primary reason Naomi beat the odds.

Naomi did not dish out to others what she felt had been dished out to her – Naomi wanted what was best for others instead of what was best for her. Naomi did not try to take advantage of her daughters-in-law as her only means of support – but instead encouraged them to do what was best for them – even if it left her at risk.

This kind of selfless love – is a character of God. This seeking the best for others – over the best for me - is the kind of love God has demonstrated to His people for generations. And when one exhibits this kind of love – God responds in like kind. You see, its part of the Covenant Relationship stipulations.

#2 –

It's never too late to head back toward God.

While we may focus on how much “those people” should have remembered God’s gracious intervention and provision – today, we should remember God’s gracious intervention in our lives and his gracious provision for His people.

Maybe it would be wise for us to remind ourselves that ultimately it is God who provides the food we eat it isn’t the grocery store – the distributor – not even the farmers who work the fields. And it isn’t the business where we work and writes us a paycheck!

Regardless of who’s hands through which the provision flows God is the real provider for every Believer.

This account of Naomi – we find in the book of Ruth – demonstrates that it is never too late too get on the road that leads back to God’s people. And it’s never too late to show selfless love and selfless concern for others.

As a people who believe there is much more in this Christian walk than just getting our name “on the roll” - as a people who believes and encourages all saved people to be baptized in the Holy Spirit – to receive and to use the Spiritual gifts God gives to us - How many of us are willing to give – or share this selfless and sacrificial love to those around us?

Are we so focused on our troubles and our suffering that we cannot show concern for others?

Ruth – 02 – Selfless Concern

Let's ask another question – with the Spirit filled Believer in mind – have we become so wrapped up in the receiving – and the displaying – and the using of Spiritual Gifts - that we are failing to show selfless concern for those around us?

As we will see later in the book of Ruth – it has positive consequences when we do. Let's us ask ourselves - Why is there such a shortage of this kind of love today?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Ruth – 02 – Selfless Concern

(this page for additional notes)

In this lesson we are going to look into the second of three interchanges between Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth.

Read Ruth 1:11 and make notes:

These three women, Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth – are on a road and they have a decision to make. Will they go in the direction of Moab – or will they go in the direction of Bethlehem? They could make the decision collectively – they all go the same direction – whatever that is – or they can make the decision individually – each one deciding in what direction they will go.

They set out making a collective decision – “we will go back to Bethlehem” – but they haven’t traveled far – when Naomi encourages Orpah and Ruth to “go back” to the people and the ways they know – then she alone will “go back” to the people and the ways she knows.

“Why would you come with me?” – What good can come of you going with me? – What good can be in that decision for you? Okay, maybe you have developed some emotional bond with me - maybe you feel sorry for me – but do these emotions of yours justify you throwing away any prospect of you having a productive life?

Emotions are good girls – but we are in a serious situation here – we need to make good sound decisions – because the decisions we make in this situation are going to have life long implications.

Ruth – 03 – Choice of Direction

Read Ruth 1:12 and make notes:

Naomi reveals her heart attachment to Orpah and Ruth- she calls them “my daughters.” We have no reason to think Naomi has any negative feelings toward them. It isn’t reasonable to think she blames them for the deaths of her sons and that is why she is trying to get away from them. Her choice of words at this point indicates a concern for what is best for them – even if what is best for them is not what is best for her personally. When we are willing to sacrifice our wants and needs to make sure someone else gets what they want or need – that is a sign of love on our part.

Naomi had tried to get these daughters-in-law to return to their mother’s households. Naomi had spoken a blessing upon them – but both Orpah and Ruth seemed resolved to stay with Naomi.

Seeing that she wasn’t successful in getting them to turn back by her two-fold wish for their happy life – Naomi stops beating around the bush and addresses the issues head on. I am too old to have any more children – but even if I had a son tonight – and even if you agreed to wait until they were old enough to marry – you would probably be too old to have children by that time.

Naomi wanted to communicate to these two young women – if they went with her – all of them would remain childless and most likely die alone and probably destitute. If they would just follow her advice and return to their families – at least the two of them have a chance of marrying again – having a family – and living out their life somewhere above the poverty level.

Ruth – 03 – Choice of Direction

Just in case Orpah or Ruth might be thinking – well we will take the chance – we will see if you can marry again – we will see if you can have a couple of sons – we will wait on them and when the old enough we will be ready to marry them. Just in case either of these two young women might be thinking with their emotions rather than their minds – Naomi answers her rhetorical questions for them – “NO” – absolutely not – you cannot do this – you must go back to your people.

Strictly in the physical realm – it seems to Naomi – that the best chances for Orpah and Ruth will be found in the land of Moab rather than in the area of Bethlehem.

Consider for a moment – Naomi has been reduced from something of a full family setting – down to just herself and two daughters-in-law – and now she is surrendering them – which will leave her all alone – with no family – just a lonely poor widow – bitter of heart and soul.

Naomi closes her argument with a statement that as bad as it is for them to have lost their husbands without having any children – it is much worse for her because “the Lord’s hand is against her.” Naomi isn’t right in all of her thinking – she clearly is accusing God of attacking her - “the LORD's hand has gone out against me!”

She might think Yahweh is punishing her for going into the land of Moab – she might think Yahweh is punishing her for allowing her two good Jewish boys to marry Moabite women – she may have no idea why Yahweh is punishing her – but the way she sees it – God is punishing her.

“Stay away from me – God is mad at me – and anybody that aligns themselves with me will probably get some of the same things God is dishing out to me – so, for your own good now – just stay away from me.” Just look at what God has put me through – famine – exile – loss of my husband – loss of my children – and what if he is not finished – if you go with me you could be putting yourselves in real danger.

I've seen husbands and wives chase away a spouse they love – because they think their life is going downhill and they think their spouse can escape their pain if they just aren't with them. I've seen fathers and mothers chase away their children for the same line of reasoning.

We can look negatively upon Naomi's attitude and her accusing God – but at least she is still recognizing that God is in charge. Naomi is blaming God for all the pain and suffering she is experiencing – and the reality is probably that God has graciously provided for her through all of the pain and sorrow so far – and she doesn't see it

But please don't overlook this reality – even though Naomi is blaming God for the hard times she is experiencing – at least Naomi is headed in the right direction. Even though we don't see anything in this account that would lead us to think Naomi accepts any responsibility for bad decisions – but instead blames all the hard times on God – at least Naomi has decided to get up from the ungodly place where she has been living – and is going back to the Godly place from whence she came.

Rather than finding fault with Naomi's lack of accepting responsibility for her decisions – give Naomi credit for at least realizing she needs to get back among God's people – rather than continuing to live among the pagans.

There are a couple of things we should take home with us from this message:

#1

We have a choice of direction for our lives.

Many people today are faced with a decision just like that of Orpah and Ruth – will we go back and live among the pagans – or will we go and live among God's people.

Many may feel it is just easier to let the crowd make the decision – “we will just go along with whatever the crowd wants to do.” The reality is that it is always an individual decision – each one of us must decide whether we will go in the direction of the pagans – or the direction of God's people.

And here is where it gets really sad – today, there are many people who are saved and filled with the Spirit – Believers who have tasted the presence and the blessings of God - People who even know what it is to have the Holy Spirit minister through them - And they are hanging out in the camp with pagans – they are on the road of life headed in the direction of the pagans – they are on the road that leads to the “dark side”- instead of heading in the direction of God’s people.

#2

We need to remember God is in charge.

Even if we don’t have all of our thinking right! Sometimes we get so bent out of shape because someone has some doctrine mixed up - We get so worked up because someone has some of their theology kind of bent or warped - If they are still acknowledging God as being God – and if they are still worshiping God – and if they are still trying to study God’s Word – and if they are still trying to get closer to God – all of that doctrine and theology stuff will work itself out.

We need to be more interested in getting people into a personal relationship with Jesus and helping them stay on the right path – going in the right direction. It should be obvious that I do think having the theology right is important – I put in a lot of time and effort studying theology.

But here is the end of all my study in theology – if a person spends enough quality time with Jesus in every area and aspect of their life – their theology is going to turn out just fine. If the person doesn’t have a personal relationship with Jesus – and if they don’t maintain a daily and personal relationship with Jesus – no one is a good enough teacher to teach that person right theology.

So, daily, we need to make sure we are headed toward God’s people and not toward the pagan people - and let us never ever forget that God - is God - and we are not.

Ruth – 03 – Choice of Direction

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

In this lesson, we will look at the last of three interchanges between Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth.

Naomi had tried to encourage Orpah and Ruth to return to their people by pronouncing a blessing upon them - and that had failed. Naomi then resorted to laying things out in realistic terms - If you go with me – its probably going to be a hard life - If you go back to your people – you will probably have a rather normal life.

Not once did Naomi make the suggestion that if Orpah and Ruth went with her to Judah - that they might find new husbands there. Naomi knew the prejudice the people of Judah had toward the Moabites. Naomi knew, in the natural, that just wasn't a possibility.

Read Ruth 1:14 and make notes:

Naomi had earlier spoken a blessing upon Orpah and Ruth in an effort to get them to go back to their Moabite families. That led them to hug and cry. Then Naomi laid out the cold hard facts. At least as they appeared in the worldly way of looking at things. This too brings the women to tears.

There is a couple of things that indicate a change is taking place. If you look back at v9 – you see that the farewell kiss led to weeping. Here in v14, it is the weeping led to a farewell kiss. Also, in v9 it was Naomi who kissed Orpah and Ruth; here in v14 it is Orpah who kissed Naomi.

When Naomi kissed Orpah and Ruth – she was initiating the “good-bye” – Naomi was saying let's end this relationship we have - so that you can start over again with someone else. When Orpah kissed Naomi – she was accepting the “good-bye” – Orpah was saying “I agree” and this relationship is now over. Ruth on the other hand – did not kiss Naomi in return. Ruth, instead of kissing Naomi – Clung To Naomi.

Ruth – 04 – Faithful Commitment

It is of some importance to take note of the different response of Orpah from that of Ruth. Orpah agrees to sever her relationship with one of God's people - and return to her pagan origins. Ruth determines to draw even closer to her relationship with one of God's people - and to even further her distance from her pagan origins.

Anyone who looks at life from only a secular point of view - would no doubt agree that Orpah acted wisely under the circumstances and in that society. This same person would no doubt conclude that Ruth acted very foolishly.

From the worldly point of view – Orpah did the sensible thing – while Ruth acted with reckless abandon – she may appear adventurous – but oh how risky was Ruth's decision.

Read Ruth 1:15 and make notes:

Ruth's tender and probably passionate embrace – didn't seem to discourage Naomi from trying again. I can just see Naomi pointing toward Orpah walking down the road - as she says to Ruth, "Look, your sister-in-law is going back." Naomi probably understood how powerful peer pressure can be. So she tries to appeal to that by pointing out to Ruth that Orpah is leaving. And if Ruth had been thinking "you know, Orpah may be right" - this just might have worked on Ruth – and she too might have left Naomi.

Naomi points out that Orpah is going back - not only to her people – but also to her religion. Ruth, follow Orpah's example – do the right thing – go back to your people - go back to your culture.

Ruth – 04 – Faithful Commitment

On one hand – isn't this rather disappointing? One of God's people is actually saying to someone - that going back to your pagan origin is better than going on to be among God's people. There is plenty of indications in the book of Ruth - that Naomi has not given up on Yahweh - But at this point in her life - Naomi is clearly thinking with her fleshly mind - Rather than with her faith and covenant relationship mind.

Ruth is truly at one of those proverbial crossroads of decision - that so many of us find ourselves upon from time to time in our life. Ruth had to choose what was familiar or choose the uncertain. Ruth had to choose between going back to Moab or going on to Judah.

Read Ruth 1:16 and make notes:

I can imagine Ruth maybe loosening her grip on Naomi - stepping back maybe half a step or so - and looking Naomi right in the eyes. We see Ruth issuing a command to Naomi - "Don't urge me to leave you" - "or even to turn back from you" - "Don't try to pressure me into leaving you."

Now the text doesn't tell us anything about the tone of voice - but I can't help but imagine that Ruth took on a rather adamant tone of voice with Naomi - "Just stop talking like that" - "Where ever you go – I will go there also" - "Where ever you stay – that is where I will stay" - "I sever my ties to the people of my birth – And I now adopt your people as my family" - "What ever your future – I accept that as my future as well" - "I renounce my religion – and I make your religion my religion."

This last statement is somewhat surprising. When we look at Naomi - and read her words and actions - What is there in any of this that would make a person want to follow Yahweh?

Ruth – 04 – Faithful Commitment

Naomi has just recently told Ruth – and Orpah – that her God is making all this pain and misery come about in her life. How does statements like that attract anyone to your God?

Now if we stop reading at this point – we can analyze Ruth’s statements – and conclude that these promises are only valid as long as Naomi is alive.

How honorable Ruth would have been to care for Naomi until her death - and then return to Moab - and resume something of a normal life - among her people of origin. And who knows – if Naomi dies soon enough - Ruth could still be young enough to marry and have children.

Read Ruth 1:17 and make notes:

Ruth continues – in making a commitment to Naomi that goes beyond Naomi’s lifetime. Ruth commits to Naomi so thoroughly that she is also committing to Naomi’s people. Even after Naomi dies – Ruth will continue on there until she dies in the same place.

Ruth is saying that when I die - I’m not asking to be returned to Moab - to be buried among my family - I’m not asking to be buried along side my husband - I’m asking to be buried where you are buried. This is saying my commitment is to you and to your people. And it is not temporary. There is no limits to this commitment.

Even in death, my commitment is to be with you - rather than my birth family - or even my husband. This is a bigger deal than it first appears. What if Ruth is never accepted by the people of Judah? Not only might she experience painful treatment during her life - but her body could be treated very shamefully after her death. Her body might receive an improper or disgraceful burial. And in the ancient east – a disgraceful burial is an unbearable thought.

Ruth – 04 – Faithful Commitment

Ruth is really something – she drives home just how serious she is about her commitment. Ruth swears by oath in the name of Yahweh - that she will allow nothing to separate her from Naomi before Naomi dies. Ruth makes an oath in the name of Naomi's God - and not one of the gods of Moab. Naomi, may your God deal with me ever so severely - if I do not keep my commitment.

Naomi started her efforts to get Orpah and Ruth to return to Moab by calling on the name of Yahweh. Ruth tries to bring this whole effort to an end by calling on the name of Naomi's Yahweh.

Orpah had ended the relationship by the tradition of that time – the kiss. Ruth intensified the relationship by taking an oath in the name of Naomi's God.

If Ruth had been paying attention to the things Naomi had been saying about Yahweh - Ruth had every reason to expect the worse from Naomi's God. And yet, Ruth takes on the unknown consequences - accepts the uncertain conditions - and commits herself, her resources, her efforts, and her life - to follow the ways of God's people - even though she didn't have the best example.

Keep in mind – Naomi appears to have a warped view of Yahweh. Naomi has not been presenting Yahweh in the best light. We have no information about what kinds of things Ruth and Orpah might have been told about Yahweh in the 10 years before their husbands died. So it is possible that they heard something better about Yahweh in times past.

But at this time – we see Orpah choosing to turn away from the people of Yahweh - and return to the familiar – return to her past ways. Ruth, on the other hand, chooses to turn away from the familiar - turn away from her past ways - and to embrace the people and ways of Yahweh. The point is - if they had heard something better about Yahweh in times past - it didn't have the affect on Orpah to make her want to follow after the ways of the people of Yahweh.

Ruth – 04 – Faithful Commitment

So we are left to wonder – had Orpah and Ruth never heard anything really positive about Yahweh - or had only Ruth listened or only Ruth Believed? We will probably never know for sure. But we can look at what is recorded in the book of Ruth and wonder – what could have caused Ruth to commit to a God - that was presented in the light that Naomi was presenting Him?

I read one commentator who said Ruth was much like Abraham. They both were immigrants that cast their lot with Yahweh. I don't think that is a good comparison. You see Ruth has no promise of land as did Abraham. Ruth had no promise of any divine blessing as did Abraham. Ruth had no spouse and probably very little in the way of possessions. Unlike Abraham - Ruth's commitment to Yahweh - just may be a larger show of faith than that shown by Abraham. At least trust, if not faith.

Read Ruth 1:18 and make notes:

After a somewhat lengthy - 3 stage interchange between Naomi and her daughters-in-law - v8 simply says, "its over." What else could Naomi say - when Ruth makes an oath in the name of Yahweh.

It's kind of like today. When someone says, "God told me to do this" - even if we think they are wrong - even if we think God didn't tell them to do this - we cannot take the position of telling people to be disobedient to what they think God is telling them to do. We have to stay in the place of telling people to be obedient to what you believe God is telling you. If a person has to be wrong - it is better to be wrong yet faithful - than it is to be wrong by being disobedient.

So there just isn't anything else Naomi can say. Naomi stops urging Ruth to leave her - and they head on out toward Bethlehem.

What do we take home with us:

#1

Believers must walk in faithful commitment.

Ruth modeled something of the kind of faith that is needed to follow Christ Jesus. To walk the Christian walk – it many times calls for an adventuresome faith – it sometimes calls for a willing abandon to the apparent sensible thing to do.

Jesus would later tell his disciples that in order to follow him - a person must be willing to abandon family, friends, home, etc. Jesus didn't say every disciple would have to leave all of these things. Jesus said every disciple would have to be willing to do so.

Here we are in the book of Ruth - many years before Jesus came to earth - we see a beautiful model of the kind of faith Jesus taught about while he was in a fleshly body - walking among mankind on earth. It is very often the attachment to worldly things that keeps a person from accepting Jesus as Savior. They seem to think that if they become a Christian - they might have to give up all their worldly stuff.

It is the same line of thinking that keeps some people from receiving the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. They seem to think that if they are Baptized with the Holy Spirit - they might have to give up something - or sometimes they think - they might have to do something or become something - that they think is embarrassing.

Ruth knew a whole lot less about what lay ahead for her than we know about what lies ahead for us. And yet Ruth said, let's go.

What is our concern about the future keeping us from? Is our concern about the future keeping us from becoming saved? Is our concern about the future keeping us from being baptized with the Holy Spirit? Is our concern about the future keeping us from allowing Jesus to become Lord of your life?

Ruth – 04 – Faithful Commitment

Are we allowing our fleshly concern about the unknown - to keep us from God's full and rich blessings that He has in store for us?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

The text of the previous lesson, left us with the account of Naomi trying to get her daughters-in-law to turn back to their hometowns - while she returns to Bethlehem. Then we are told nothing about the rest of the trip to Judah.

We don't know what kind of conversations took place between Naomi and Ruth - or if they just traveled along in silence. It could have been a very long journey! Can you imagine setting out on a long trip with someone who was bitter? Doesn't that just conjure up in your mind an all day complaining party?

Before you say they just had to talk all they way back – because they were two women. We read later in the book of Ruth that Ruth shows signs of being pretty smart. I think Ruth was the kind of person that wouldn't start a conversation with someone who was mad or bitter. I can imagine Ruth thinking it was better to travel along in silence than to stir that hornets nest.

But then Naomi just might have vented all the way back - even if Ruth didn't get in the conversation. Whether it was a trip of silence or a long arduous trip of complaining – I can't help but feel it was not a trip of pleasure. And at least one of them was really glad the trip was over.

Some people see the text of this lesson as somewhat climatic. Naomi comes home and that sort of concludes the journey. While this text does tell us Naomi and Ruth arrive back in Bethlehem, this is not the climax of the story.

The text of this lesson does more than just tell us they made it back to Naomi's hometown. We see in this text that Naomi was indeed a bitter woman. She says so herself. And this does a couple of things for us. One is that it helps us appreciate how she dealt with Ruth and Orpah earlier. In spite of the reality of the bitterness that was in her heart, Naomi showed and expressed real concern for the welfare and the future of her two daughters-in-law. The second thing it does is that it lets us know that whatever it is that happens next, is being responded to by a person with bitterness in their heart.

Read Ruth 1:19 and make notes:

This text shows us something significant. The relationship between Naomi and Ruth had changed. The relationship before was “Naomi and her daughter-in-law” - and by the time they have arrived in Bethlehem it had become “the two women”.

I realize very few people ever get to witness what I am about to refer to, - but it is still a possible reality. In a perfect world, the parent-child relationship would grow, mature, and change as the children become adults.

In a perfect world, somewhere around the time the children become adults, the relationship would change from a total parent-child relationship to more of an adult-adult relationship. In a perfect world the children would become more of adult friends with their parents than subordinate dependents upon them.

It is right and healthy for little children to be dependent upon their parents. It is right and healthy for older children to be submissive and obedient to their parents. But it is not healthy for grown children to be dependent upon their parents.

Here in the book of Ruth, we see evidence that the relationship between Naomi and Ruth had grown. Naomi and Ruth are walking together as “two women”. Their relationship had moved beyond Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law - to that of two adult friends. They are together more because they are sharing a common fate than because of any family relationship.

Before you get into some kind of disagreeable argument about why this is being brought up – doesn't it just make you marvel a little bit – that Naomi traveling along with a bitter heart, could manage to have a relationship that could mature and develop into something healthy?

In the counseling that I have done as a Pastor – one of the most common things that destroys good relationships and eventually kills them altogether – is that one or both persons allow the bitterness in their heart – to interfere with the relationship with those they love.

The average person allows the fact that something has brought bitterness into their life – to spill over into everything they say and do. And they usually lose their family relationships and friend relationships.

I personally marvel at Naomi being able to control herself, very likely to control her actions, and almost assuredly control her conversation – so that her relationship with Ruth is able to grow and develop and become something healthy and beneficial - rather than destroying what they did have.

Another thing that grabs my attention is the statement - that the “the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?"”

It was a common thing for people to arrive in a town and for people to leave a town. And Bethlehem was not just a small village. It was a town of considerable size for that day and time. Why was it that Naomi arriving in Bethlehem was noticed?

The town was “stirred.” But with people coming and going everyday – what made Naomi so noticed? Could it be because she arrived with a Moabite as a traveling companion? That could have caused some stir among some people, but it would not have caused the whole town to become excited.

Was it because Naomi was such a prominent member of the society that her return was an event to be recognized? Well, she and her husband both had family in town, but nothing in the book indicates that either of them were of such notable position in the local society.

If they had been all that prominent, it would not have made sense that they went to a pagan land in an effort to survive.

Or Could it have been that God knew the plans he had for Naomi and Ruth – plans to prosper them and not harm them. Could it be that God wanted his people to notice that Naomi and Ruth had arrived in town because God wanted people to “connect all the dots” – when God accomplished his intended work in Ruth and for Naomi?

I think there was a divine hand at work here – making sure that people noticed Naomi’s return home and that Naomi returned with someone. At a minimum, Naomi had been gone for about 12 years – maybe longer. With something of a joyful disbelief – the women begin to ask themselves “can this really be Naomi?”

Read Ruth 1:20 and make notes:

“Don’t call me Naomi” – don’t call me pleasant! Instead, call me “Mara” – “Mara” means bitter.

In that culture, names were more than just labels by which people were known. Names were intended to reflect something of the inner person or the true person. People expected certain things of a person based upon their name.

Some years ago, I read about the life and exploits of Alexander the Great. He accomplished incredible military things as a very young man. It was a common practice to draft young men into the military to keep the army strong in numbers.

A teenage boy of about 17 years old had been drafted. During his first battle, he was caught hiding instead of fighting. This kind of action was always punished, and usually a soldier that showed cowardice during battle was executed.

At the end of the battle, soldiers that had made mistakes were brought before Alexander the Great. This 17 year old boy was brought before Alexander the Great and they told him the boy had hid during the battle instead of fighting.

Alexander the Great asked the young man if this was true, to which the young man said, “yes”. Alexander the Great then asked the young man what his name was, to which the young man said, “Alexander sir.”

Alexander the Great stared at the young man for a few minutes and then said, “young man, change your ways or change your name.” And then sent him back to try again.

Do you wonder if sometimes God has thought about saying something like that to us? We tell people we are a Christian – does God think about saying “change your ways or stop calling yourself a Christian.”

Naomi arrived back in her home town. As she arrived and began to move down the streets of Bethlehem, what a rush of memories must have flooded her mind. These are the streets that she and Elimelech had strolled together in years past. Over here, then over there, - she saw the shops where she and Elimelech had purchased items together. These memories at least brought the bitterness in Naomi’s heart to the surface – and may have caused the bitterness to increase somewhat. But alas, Elimelech is not here to share these memories with her.

When Naomi overheard some of the women asking one another if this could be Naomi – she demands that they not call her Naomi. She knows what is in her heart – so she says, “call me bitter.” The person you see before you is not the person who left you years before. The real person – what I am on the inside – is just plain bitter. Since I am bitter, then bitter is a better name for me than the one I used to have – “pleasant”.

Read Ruth 1:21 and make notes:

Naomi seems to have joined the same party as Job. Naomi seems to be questioning God's mysterious justice. Naomi publicly blames God for making her bitter. Naomi recalls the beginning of their trip – "I went away full."

I don't know if it was intentional, but it looks like it was. The way she says this makes it sound as though she intentionally wants to point out that she is the sole survivor.

When I went away, I was full. I had a husband and I had children. Now, Elimelech is gone, the sons of Elimelech are gone - I alone am all that is left of the family.

When I went away, I lacked nothing. But Jehovah has afflicted me, El Shaddai has brought misfortune upon me. Because of God, I return empty.

Naomi is not remembering the Word of God. God is the one who had told Naomi's ancestors that he cared for the widows and expected his people to care for them also. Can anyone justify the thought pattern that would say - the God who cares for widows would be in the business of making more widows?

Naomi is not giving any credit to chance. Naomi is leaving no place for things happening because they just sometimes fall left and sometimes fall right. Naomi is not taking any responsibility for her decisions or those of her late husband. Naomi is clearly blaming God for everything that has happened to her. Naomi is blaming God for everything she feels she has lost.

"The Almighty has brought misfortune upon me" – this is quite an indictment Naomi is making.

The Hebrew word used here is "Shaddai." It is often translated "Almighty" in our English translations – one interpretation of "Shaddai" is "the all powerful one" - but another interpretation of "Shaddai" is "the all sufficient one."

Naomi is standing there in public – among the inhabitants of Bethlehem and she is saying that this "God whom we have been told is the all sufficient one to meet our needs - has taken everything away from me and has left me with nothing."

Naomi is publicly accusing God of doing the opposite of what God has promised to do. Naomi, who has insisted that people not call her Naomi - because she is by no means pleasant. Naomi is accusing El Shaddai of not living up to His name!

Today, there is no problem finding someone who is blaming God for their suffering or misfortune. There are people almost everywhere who are blaming God for the difficulties they are experiencing. And there is an over abundance of people accusing God of doing bad and painful things – many times the very opposite of what God has promised to do for his people. So the relevance of today's text is really without question.

What should we take home with us from this text:

.#1.

Don't Allow Bitterness Of Heart To Control Our Life.

Let's follow the model set out for us by Naomi. Naomi's confession is that she was a woman who was bitter of heart and soul. And yet the evidence all around her – especially in her relationships - indicates she did not allow the bitterness to interfere with her words and actions. She did not allow the bitterness to control her life - she did not allow the bitterness to set the tone of her day. And neither should we today.

Let me say it this way, Successful Christians do not allow bitterness to control their life or relationships.

.#2

Be Real Before GOD And Man.

It is easy for us to sit here today and find fault with Naomi for blaming God. We can easily see what is wrong with Naomi's statements about God. Naomi is expressing faulty theology. But we need to give Naomi credit for having modeled for us true transparency.

There are far too many people today who have one set of feelings in their heart – and pretend to have a completely different set of feelings – when talking to others.

Sure, I can quickly point out several problems with Naomi's theology. And I personally feel rather strongly that she and her family would have been much better off if they had never moved to Moab. But we might make a very big mistake to say all that has come upon Naomi is due to sin in her life, sin the life of her husband, or sin in the life of her children.

It wasn't due to sin that Job experienced such pain. It wasn't due to sin on the part of one man in the New Testament recorded in John 9:1-3. In fact Jesus clearly stated that this man's condition existed solely so that God could receive glory.

When we read the account of Job, we are left with the idea that Job's suffering was so that God could get glory. We are not given enough information in the Book of Ruth to say if sin played a part in Naomi's suffering or if it was just so that God will get glory. Since we don't know – we shouldn't make any hard statements about it one way or the other. But what we can say for sure – Naomi is a good model for us – let us not hide what is inside. Let us get it out!

It is only when we let what is on the inside to come out that it can help others if it is good. It is only when we let what is on the inside to come out that we can be helped if it is not good.

Every Christian – should follow Naomi's model – not in the blaming God for our troubles and hard times - but follow Naomi's model – in presenting outwardly – what is on the inside. For us to do anything else Makes us a “hypocrite”.

It's time to take off the masks - It's time to become translucent if not transparent. Don't worry too much about the charge that some level against the church - the one that says, “the church is full of hypocrites.” If the “hypocrite” doesn't come to church – how will the “hypocrite” ever get help and release from being a hypocrite? Church is the very best place for hypocrites to be – so let's accept the Word of God - let's receive the Word of God - let's apply the Word of God - and at least “be real.”

Ruth – 05 – Be Real

Naomi has modeled it for us. But this must be tempered with what we know from the New Testament, doesn't it. In Romans 4:17, we are told that God is the One who calls things that are not as though they were. So how do we reconcile this?

The hypocrite pretends they are different on the outside from what they are on the inside. The Real Christian doesn't pretend to be any different on the outside than they are on the inside.

The Christian who knows God's Word – while acknowledging the current reality of what they are also calls themselves what God has created them to be. Without denying their current weakness – they call themselves what they are called to be - what they are sanctified to become - what they are gifted to become.

The Christian who knows God's Word. While they are not yet – they call themselves what they shall be. What's gone wrong in the churches today is that too many Believers are “pretending” to be what they are not - and they deny the reality of what they are - and they lie about what they are. And that is being a hypocrite.

At least Naomi was not a hypocrite. That part of Naomi we should model ourselves after - and then add to Being Real. After the manner of Naomi - we add to that – the calling of those things that are not as though they are.

Ruth – 05 – Be Real

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

For the second time in feasting from the book of Ruth, we get a good report. In this account so far, it has read like a continuing spiral downward. One turn of events after another, and each one left Naomi a little lower than the one before.

The first positive note was when we were told Naomi decided to leave the place of pagans (in Moab) - and she headed in the direction of God's people (Bethlehem of Judah). There are several things left out of this account that a lot of people would like to know. Details like: "where did Naomi and Ruth stay when they arrived in Bethlehem?" - and "was Naomi recognized by the town people, or did she have to tell someone who she was?" But this wasn't written to be a "nice story" – it was written to convey some message to Believers. So all the information that is needed to convey the message is included.

Read Ruth 1:22 and make notes:

What details are important to the help get the message across? Naomi returned to Bethlehem from Moab. Ruth accompanied Naomi all the way back home. They arrived at the beginning of the barley harvest.

The barley harvest began in late April to early May depending upon the year. The wheat harvest began about two weeks after the barley harvest began.

There are a couple of things worth pointing out at this time. One – the impoverished widows now have a realistic hope of escaping starvation. Even though the best they can hope for is to simply glean from the fields, at least there will be food. Second – although we don't know if Naomi has realized it yet, she has been given someone who has stuck with her through the tough times – and has willingly traveled with her into uncertain consequences.

Ruth – 06 – Doing Better

Can you imagine the comfort that will come to Naomi’s heart when she realizes that Ruth has stuck by her? Even though Ruth was told that you will probably perish if you go with me – even though Ruth was told that she will likely experience some of the pain that has been coming to Naomi if she goes with her – Ruth traveled with Naomi regardless. When Naomi arrived in Bethlehem, Ruth was still her companion.

When we go through a tough time, having a friend to go through the tough time with us, makes the tough time a little more bearable. Having a friend by our side doesn’t always make the tough time any less tough – but it does make it survivable.

Everything we have read so far says that Naomi has been experiencing some of the most painful life experiences – loss of loved ones – husband and children, - loss of material goods, hunger, - in a foreign land without any family – feeling like God has turned against you. And yet God has given Naomi – someone to be with her – someone that has not abandoned her in the face of likely peril – someone that faced the realistic possibility of being treated badly just because of being with Naomi – yet they stayed with her for Naomi’s sake. Now that’s a wonderful gift from God!

It is also worth noting that Naomi’s arrival in Bethlehem is recorded with something of a racial slur. Naomi is said to be accompanied by “Ruth the Moabitess.” This introduces the idea of ethnic tension – a Moabitess is going to experience some level of ethnic tension in the land of Judah – and especially in a town such as Bethlehem.

Read Ruth 2:1 and make notes:

Boaz means “fleetness or quickness.” And we will see later in the account that Boaz lives up to his name. While others may “hem and haw” around - trying to decide if they are going to do what is right – in relation to family responsibility – Boaz will step up and “just do what is right.”

Boaz was from “the clan of Elimelech” – clans were made up of families that all came from the same ancestor. Clans shared what was considered at that time to be inalienable ownership to certain land areas. There was a certain level of loyalty to other members of the clan. There were also certain duties that were required of clan members to other clan members.

Naomi – this woman who has cried and bemoaned the fact that she has no family left – this woman who has said she is bitter because she has been left alone in this world - she has a relative – a relative on her husband’s side of the family. Naomi has lost her husband and her sons – but she still has a close relative on her husband’s side of the family – And he is a person of influence in the community.

The Hebrew words used in this text that are translated “a man of standing” – are the same words used in other accounts of someone who has become a military hero. This account doesn’t tell us specifically that Boaz was a military hero – but that time in Judah’s history was filled with many attacks from the surrounding pagan nations – as well as attacks among the various tribes of Judah – so it is possible that Boaz became a man of noteworthiness and reputation for his military exploits - but all this account tells us is that Boaz was a man of standing – Boaz had influence in the community.

So, Naomi was not exactly all alone in this world – certainly not to the extent she had been thinking. And isn’t that a lot like most of us?

We face some real trouble – we face some really painful experience – and we cry and moan like the world has come to an end for us! But the truth is that in almost every case of our suffering – if we would stop wallowing around in our pity – we would realize that God has kept some things for us.

Just as a side note here – Do you know what “a pity” is? A “pity” is just a small “pit!”

Even the person who says they have lost everything – often discovers they still have the things that are most valuable – it may be true that they have lost all earthly possessions - but then they discover their mate – or their family – is by far worth more than all the earthly possessions put together.

Naomi is about to re-discover the real value of family and true friends.

Message to take home with us: **We Are Doing Better Than We Think!**

The flesh is just naturally prone to despair. The fleshly mind just naturally starts thinking out the worst case scenarios. Let a misfortune come our way – and before we know it, we have given up!

Do you remember that first boy friend or girl friend? Do you remember when they broke up with you? “Well, there it is, life is over for us – we might as well just go out and die!” Did it hurt extremely bad? – Yes it did, but life was not over, was it?

The Rain falls on the just and the un-just alike. Good and Bad things happen to God’s people just like they do to pagans.

Consider how many people have lost all their earthly possessions when any one of the “natural disasters has struck an area of our country. Some had a hurricane absolutely destroy all they earthly possessions they had. Others had a tornado twist up and blow away all their earthly things. Others had 20 feet of flood waters drown and destroy all their earthly stuff. And yes, a great many have died from these disasters. So large numbers of people have lost family members - and dear friends are no longer they to share things with.

Now for those who do not have Jesus as their Savior – it’s possible they have indeed lost it all – because all they have is earthly possessions. But for those of us who have Jesus as our Savior – no matter how much of the earthly stuff we lose – down to the very last earthly thing we have – We HAVE NOT lost it all. - For we still have everything God has prepared for us in His kingdom.

And if our family members are saved – when we lose one of them – or should we lose all of them to physical death – We HAVE NOT lost them! - For they will greet us when we arrive at the place God has prepared for us.

Ruth – 06 – Doing Better

Here is the truth of the matter – any time we experience misfortune – any time bad things come our way - we are doing much better than we think - we are doing much better than we deserve. And God has a plan for us - a plan to prosper us and not to harm us.

Many people have complained that they just can't see God in all of this disaster. When they cry out "Where is God in this hurricane?" - "Where is God in this tornado?" - "Where is God in this flood?" - "Where is God in this looting and pillaging?" - They are all asking the wrong question.

God is never found in the disaster – or the evil. God is never in the disaster - and God is never in the evil. God is in the response to disaster - God is in the response to evil. So don't be misled and spend your time looking for God in the disaster or the evil.

Look closely at the response to disaster - and look closely at the response to evil - and there you will see God !

Please - say this out loud so that your ears can hear it:

I am doing better than I think –

I am doing better than I deserve –

God has a good plan for me!

Ruth – 06 – Doing Better

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

In this section, as we read the account, we can't help but notice the contrast between the apparent wealth and status of Boaz - and the unquestionable poverty and complete vulnerability of Naomi and Ruth. Can you imagine the scene as Boaz arrives to check on the harvest? The weather is beautiful, there is the smell of freshly mowed grain, the workers are singing in the fields as they work. As Boaz arrives to check on the harvest, all of his senses come alive – there is the visual of good weather – there is the aroma of freshly mowed grain – and there is the sound of happy laborers.

With all the contrast, it does appear that Boaz and Ruth have something in common. The account reveals both Boaz and Ruth to be people of high character – or we might say people of integrity.

For those in this life who consider themselves to be the part of the “haves” – Boaz is a model of how to conduct our life. For those in this life who consider themselves to be part of the “have nots” – Ruth is a model of how to conduct our life. Having said this – let's get into today's message from the book of Ruth.

Read Ruth 2:2 and make notes:

The account doesn't give us any information as to how long Naomi and Ruth are in Bethlehem when this takes place – but in the last message we were told that they arrived at the time of the barley harvest – so it is reasonable to understand that this took place right away – maybe the next day after arriving.

The barley harvest is taking place right now – if they wait very long, the harvesting will be over the barley harvest is a doesn't have a long season. AND – they are both hungry right now. So Ruth, passes up any opportunity to rest from the trip - not because she isn't tired – but because they need to eat – and the time to glean anything from the harvest is now.

Ruth – 07 – God Directs

It was part of the Israelite's legal code – that the poor were to be allowed to glean the fields after the harvesters had done their job. It was also a fairly accepted practice in other parts of the world at that time. And there was something else that was common among the nations at that time – those coming to glean fields were sometimes taken advantage of, abused, and even chased away.

We can talk about the humility that was necessary for Ruth to be able to go out to glean in the fields, - for that would be a real issue – but we must not forget the real physical risk she would be taking. First, she doesn't know the people – she would not know which fields would be kind toward gleaners – and which fields might be those who are apt to mistreat gleaners. Secondly, there is the prejudice against Moabites – Ruth was taking more risk than the average person going out to glean.

The typical harvesting process was fairly simple. One person would go along grasping several stalks of grain in one hand - or sometimes with their arm - pulling the stalks close to the body. While the stalks are held upright, they would cut the stalks off near the ground - they would then lay the stalks on the ground in a straight row. As they would move along down the field cutting and laying the stalks in rows, others who would come along behind them and tie the stalks into bundles to be hauled out of the field.

It was serious business and every effort and care was taken to keep from losing any of the heads off of the stalks. The harvesters were graded on the amount of grain they would take out of a field. Those who had a track record of allowing a lot of heads of grain to drop off were considered less efficient and usually received less pay – as well as being hired by fewer land owners. Those who had proven themselves to take care and managed to bring the most heads of grain from a field were considered worthy of top pay – and were in high demand by the land owners.

In addition to the normal aspects of human character where some people just like picking on others while some people like to be kind to others – there is speculation that those who knew for a fact that they were careful - and left very little grain in the fields - would have little concern about gleaners coming behind them. But those who knew they were sloppy and did not do a good job – were more likely to pick on those trying to glean the field – and be mean to them – because they certainly didn't want the gleaners to be seen walking out of the field carrying any amount of grain. That would show them to be the sorry workers that they were.

This may explain why Ruth said what she did when she asked Naomi if it would be okay for her to go to the fields and pick up leftover grain – she said “behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.” Ruth may have been saying that she would not stay in a field where the workers would treat her badly – she would only work in a field were they would leave her alone. She was basically saying that I know this would likely be the field with the least amount of available grain – but Naomi, “I am not going to put myself in danger, - I will take care of myself so that I will continue to be here for you.”

We have remarked about this before, but it is worth repeating. For one who is so filled with bitterness – as Naomi admits that she is – Naomi manages to speak to and deal with Ruth in notable kindness and maybe even tenderness. Did you notice in this verse what Naomi called Ruth? “Go ahead, my daughter.”

Beginning with chapter 2, Ruth is referred to as a Moabitess several times. The ethnic identity of Ruth is mentioned over and over to make sure we don't forget it is a factor in this account. Every time Ruth is referred to as a Moabitess, she is being called something ugly, something pagan, - something undesirable to anyone of Israelite blood. But Naomi uses a term of endearment when speaking to Ruth, “my daughter.” Now there are some questions that arise at this point in the account of Naomi and Ruth. One is why didn't Naomi warn Ruth about the dangers of what she was about to do? Or had Naomi already warned her about these things? Another would be why didn't Naomi make some suggestions as to which fields Ruth should try?

Ruth – 07 – God Directs

Naomi was from this area, - surely Naomi had some idea as to who would be friendly and who might not. But alas, maybe Naomi is just too depressed to think right now. Do you think this is something of a shame? Wouldn't it have been a nice thing for Naomi to have at least given Ruth some hints or some suggestions as to where to go?

Read Ruth 2:3 and make notes:

Don't you just love this statement? "As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech." It is a fairly important point for us to pick up on – this happened "to Ruth" and not "because of Ruth." To the worldly mind – someone might say "what a stroke of good luck" – that Ruth "just happened" to find herself working in the field of a relative of her late husband. But we know – don't we – that it was the hand of God that gently guided Ruth to the right field.

Ruth was completely clueless as to which field she should go to – she didn't know anyone here in this land except her mother-in-law. And even if Ruth had known of some landowner – she didn't know any of the work crews that harvested fields. There was no way she could know which work crews would be friendly and which would be mean. And now, since we have read this verse – aren't you sort of glad that Naomi didn't tell Ruth which field to go to?

Whatever Naomi's reason for failing to give Ruth some pointers – it turns out to be a good thing that she didn't – for now, God gets all the credit, - God gets the glory, - God gets the praise for leading Ruth to the right place.

Can you think of a time and situation in your life – where you experienced God just moving you and the things around you into the right place at the right time? God doing all this moving and orchestrating behind the scenes and you didn't see it going on – but when things came together – there was no doubt that God had indeed worked things out “just right” for you? But then later you could look back and testify of just such a time.

There were no doubt many people that could tell just by looking at Ruth that she was a foreigner – and the rest of them were sure to know - that “she ain't from around here” as soon as she would begin to speak - “in which direction should I go” – “to which field should I go” – “do I dare talk to anyone” – “oh Lord, what am I to do.”

Don't you just know that Ruth had many more questions than she had answers? Don't you think Ruth would have felt a lot better if Naomi had at least answered some of her questions before she set out to find a field in which to glean?

Of course Ruth would have felt better – she may have felt some level of confidence – if she had only been given a little direction – some helpful suggestions – but she wasn't. And Just Look at how it is turning out!

What do we take home with us from this message?

#1. God Directs The Lives Of His People.

You can argue about whether God was doing this for Naomi or for Ruth - if you want to argue about something. Naomi was one of God's people – and it was part of the covenant that God would provide for Naomi. Ruth was doing all that she could to help Naomi – and when you do it unto one of the least of these – it as if we are doing it unto the Lord.

There is a good argument to be made in both directions however, I am convinced this argument misses the real point. Was God doing this for Naomi or for Ruth – the correct answer is “yes”.

Ruth – 07 – God Directs

Here is something else to consider: Naomi was wrong in her thinking – one, about the way God treats His people – and two, in failing to trust God to provide for her – and yet God directed her in the right direction and to be in the right place at the right time.

How significant the timing was for Naomi to return to Bethlehem - just as the Barley harvest was beginning. Since it is followed by the Wheat harvest – that gives Naomi the a month and a half – to two months to glean the fields.

Ruth was wrong in her thinking – that she was a foreigner and didn't have any reason to expect God to provide for her – and yet God directed her – personally guiding her to the right place and at the right time as we will see in the next message.

As God's people, we too often allow ourselves to fall into despair, into discouragement, and we mope around and whine about how bad it is – we complain that we just don't know which way to go - we whine that we feel like we are just wandering aimlessly - we whine that we don't feel like we are accomplishing anything. And then – one day – we discover that all that time we were whining and moping around, God was busy working behind the scenes – getting us to just the right place to receive what we really need and to do the work that He has called us and gifted us to perform.

And if it isn't bad enough that we fail to remember that God has said He would direct our steps – what's worse is that many of us never take the time to apologize to God - when we discover that He was guiding us while we were doubting and whining.

There are so many “coincidental circumstances” – there are so many “can you believe this happened at this time” kind of things – that take place in the lives of those serving God – and in the lives of those who help those serving God. It happens so often that Believers should be so encouraged – Believers simply have no logical reason for ever being discouraged. And yet! So many who testify to being a Believer – really struggle with discouragement - if not depression.

Ruth – 07 – God Directs

Today, let us acknowledge the time – or the times – when God has guided us even though we thought for sure we were going no where.

Today, let us take time to apologize to God for not giving Him credit – both during our time of doubting and worrying – as well as after we discover that He has come through for us. In Proverbs 16:9 – we are told that God allows each of us to determine our course – but He is the one who determines our steps.

The short version of this is to say that God allows you and me to decide what it is that we desire to do. And then God will direct our steps toward that end.

We may feel that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line - so we want to go directly to this ministry or work. God on the other hand sees a much bigger picture - and He knows that we need to learn certain things - Before we get to that work.

God may see that the very people we are going to be helping in our work - simply aren't ready to receive that work - So he directs us away from them until they are ready - So that when we arrive at the work - We are ready. And those we are to assist are ready.

God is our Provider! And He has proven Himself to be faithful in His providing. And part of this providing is to provide us with the very best steps toward the goal. Even in the face of our being something less than good stewards - Even in the face of our being ungrateful recipients of His direction.

There are a number of Believers today - who simply owe God an apology for our attitude - During the trip.

Ruth – 07 – God Directs

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

In the last lesson from Ruth – we were told that when Ruth went to a field to glean the left over grain – It “just happened” to go to a field that was owned by a man named Boaz –and this man was a relative of Naomi’s late husband.

Read Ruth 2:4 and make notes:

“Just then” – what a coincidence – Boaz just happens to show up – at the very place where Ruth was gleaning in a field. AND at the very time Ruth was gleaning in that field. What a coincidence that Ruth just happened to be in a field owned by Boaz – what a coincidence that Boaz even noticed one poor person - among the other poor people who were gleaning in a field.

If it weren’t enough that Ruth “just happened” to pick a field owned by Boaz – she “just happened” to be gleaning in one of his fields on a day when he decides to drop by and check on the harvesting.

It would be the natural thing – for a land owner to come by some time during the harvest – just to check on the progress of the harvest. It’s no different from the factory owner that would visit the factory from time to time to see how things are going.

Whatever is your means of making a living – you want to check on things from time to time. If you have people working for you – even if it is subcontractors – you want to check on them from time to time. So, it isn’t so remarkable that Boaz came by one of his fields – but we learn some things about Boaz – even in this short text – that lets us know that Boaz was indeed a notable person.

One thing we see that indicates the caliber of person Boaz – when he arrives, Boaz doesn't just talk to the foreman and then move on – Boaz greets all of the harvesters. Boaz calls out to the harvesters and spoke a blessing upon them – "The LORD be with you!"

And this must not have been a strange thing for Boaz – just look at the way the harvesters responded – they called back, "The LORD bless you!" It gives us the idea that the harvesters were accustomed to receiving good words – encouraging words – uplifting words – at least being noticed – by Boaz.

We get the impression as soon as Boaz is introduced into this account – that Boaz was the kind of person that didn't treat people differently – some as having worth and others as being un-important.

Probably most – if not all – of us have met people who treat others according to the way they perceive the other persons worth and value. If they think a person is important in the community – wow, they can treat them with the greatest of respect – they not only give them time and attention when they meet, but they seem to go out of their way to make sure this “important person” notices that they are there – and that they have spoken to them.

This same person, when they meet someone they perceive as being of little importance in the community - well, even if they do speak to them – there is a certain tone in their voice – if not the words they say – that lets everyone know that they look down upon this person – this person isn't really worth “the time of day.”

Unfortunately, most of us have met people like this – or maybe even know someone right now that is that way. But I do hope you have met people who treat everyone as having value and worth. I hope you have met people who treat everyone as being important – a person who treats and speaks to everyone pretty much the same. Even when they are in authority over another person – they tend to speak to those under them as though they are important – as though they have worth – they may tell them what to do, but even when they do that, they do so with respect.

Ruth – 08 – Character of Life

Even if we didn't read any more about Boaz – this short text would give us this kind of impression of Boaz. And let me just say this right here – that is a characteristic of God.

Now that we have discussed the attitude of Boaz toward the harvesters – now that we have noticed Boaz was not a respecter of persons – lets look at what Boaz said. He could have said, “Good morning” – “Hope you guys have a good day” – “Be safe today” – “make me a lot of money today” - “live long and prosper” – any number of things we hear people say to let others know that we recognize their presence. But Boaz said, “May Yahweh be with you.” – Boaz was speaking a blessing upon the harvesters – to wish Yahweh to be with someone – was to wish the very best blessings upon them.

That's better than wishing they would prosper – that's better than wishing they would be healthy – for a person to have Yahweh “with them” means they have everything they need – and in the right proportions – and in the right ways – they are protected – they are comforted – they are provided for – when a person has God “with them” what more do they need to hope for?

Boaz did not wish the harvesters would have “good luck” – he wished the harvesters would have God's presence. Boaz could not have wished anything better upon his sub-contractors. Boaz cared enough to wish them the very best!

Read Ruth 2:5 and make notes:

As already mentioned – it was customary for a land owner to come by sometime during the harvest and check on things. It would have been enough for the land owner to check with the foreman – if everything was okay – then just move along and go to the next field or to another appointment. It would not be customary for the landowner to notice every single worker in the field – it would be enough for the foreman to know the workers – after all, if one of the workers does poorly, it is the foreman who is responsible and will have to answer for it.

In this case, if one of the poor people gleaning in the field were to begin taking grain that is part of the harvest instead of the leftovers – then the foreman would be responsible for stopping the gleaner from stealing. It certainly would not be customary for the landowner to notice every single poor person who was gleaning along behind the harvesters.

Ruth must have been a good looking woman! It doesn't tell us what exactly – but something about Ruth caught the attention of Boaz. He asked a very specific question to the foreman of the harvesters – “Whose young woman is that?” – “who does that young woman belong to?”

If she had been as ugly as a badly bred donkey – would he have asked such a question? He probably would have cared less who she belonged to – but Boaz wanted to know more about “that young woman.”

I acknowledge that many people interpret this passage to indicate Boaz must have figured Ruth was a servant or slave – and they tend to see his question as asking who was her owner. But this doesn't have to be the case and I'm pretty sure it was not the case. In that culture, it was inappropriate for a man to just go up and talk to a woman. To do so could be seen as being disrespectful toward the woman's father or her soon to be husband or her husband. To ask someone else about her instead of going to her directly was probably Boaz showing this young woman respect.

Ruth – 08 – Character of Life

We have already pointed out that Boaz seems to be the kind of person that treats all people with respect. It could be that Boaz was familiar with all the poor of the community – and he realized this young woman was not one of the poor people he knew. It could be that Boaz’s question was more along the lines of who does this young woman work for – it could have been that Boaz wanted to know what family does she belong to – what clan does she come from.

I believe it is error to interpret this as Boaz assuming she is a slave or servant of someone.

Read Ruth 2:6 and make notes:

The foreman answered the question – and he answered it with an ethnic slur – “She is the Moabite who came back from Moab” with Naomi. He could have simply said it was Naomi’s daughter-in-law. He could have said this is the young woman that was with Naomi when she returned. But he just had to make sure he said she is a Moabite.

The ethnic tension is mentioned several times in the account of Ruth. The ethnic tension is mentioned so many times, not just because there is so much prejudice against Moabites – but because this ethnic tension plays a part in a bigger message that is found in the book of Ruth – and we will get to that.

This simple statement by the foreman actually says a lot. Besides saying something about her ethnicity – it says this young woman has no owner – she has no family – she has no husband.

Read Ruth 2:7 and make notes:

Now, if the foreman had simply stopped with what was said in v6 – he would have adequately and honestly answered the question by Boaz. But the foreman says, “and that’s not all” – or “and there’s more.” The foreman takes the time to tell Boaz that this young woman – asked for permission to glean in the field. A poor person did not need permission. It was a law of the land that the poor were to be allowed to glean the harvested field. The fact that Ruth asked permission tells us something more about the character of Ruth.

There are those who have looked at this text and have decided that Ruth was a brash and bold young woman. They interpret the request to glean “among the sheaves” as a request to do something unusual – and leads them to present a woman on the offense before others have the chance to put her down because she is a stranger.

Understanding the customs and practices of that day makes that interpretation unnecessary and probably wrong. The customary practice was for one of the harvesters to cut the grain and stack in little piles. Another harvester would be right behind them tying the stacks or piles together so they could later be placed onto a cart.

Those gleaning a field would be walking along behind the harvesters – picking up the heads of grain that have fallen to the ground while being cut and piled. The gleaner did not take grain from a stack or pile of grain. To be caught doing that could result in being cast from the field – even executed if the owner desired.

Since the stacks and piles of grain were not picked up until all the cutting and tying were finished – the gleaners would be moving in and out “among the sheaves” picking up the loose heads of grain – to be “among the sheaves” was usual and normal for the gleaners.

To see Ruth as some revolutionary – forcing her way into the community – is to miss the beauty of the story being given us. To see Ruth the way she is portrayed in this account – is to see something of instruction and example and encouragement. Ruth was poor – Ruth was an alien in the land of Judah. Ruth was not asserting herself – Ruth was not out demanding her rights – Ruth was not demanding that those who have be forced to meet the needs of her and others who “do not have.”

Did Ruth have to ask? NO! Then why did Ruth ask? Why didn't Ruth just get into the field and start gleaning? And if someone came up to her and said, “stop gleaning and get out of this field” – she could have put her hands on her hips and looked them in the eye and said, “I know my rights – you can't stop me from gleaning in this field” – why didn't she do something like that?

Ruth was showing the utmost respect for the people and the customs of this new land she was now living in. Ruth knew they had a practice of allowing the poor to glean – but still she walked up to the person in charge and asked “please let me glean in the field.”

The foreman told Boaz – and us – something else about Ruth – he said, “She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.” We don't know what time “until now” is – but it was long enough after “from morning” that it required a “short rest” – and if it had not been some lengthy time it hardly seems the foreman would have taken note of it.

If Ruth had worked 30 minutes in the field and then went for a break – the foreman would probably had something different to say – like lazy, sorry worker, etc. But the foreman seemed to be impressed with Ruth's work habits that day. Ruth went to work and has “worked steadily”.

In much the same way that it “just happened” for Ruth to be in a field owned by Boaz – and it “just happened” that Boaz came by – well, it seems that it “just happened” that the foreman told Boaz that Ruth was a respectful person and that Ruth was a hard and steady worker.

You can see delightful coincidence in all of this if you want to – but I see the hand of God in this. God prompted Ruth and led her to this specific field – because God knew which of the many fields Boaz was going to visit today. God prompted the foreman to tell Boaz more than “this is the woman that came back with Naomi.” God prompted this foreman to tell Boaz about the characteristics that he noticed in her – Because God knew what characteristics Boaz would find attractive – and God wanted Boaz to notice Ruth.

What do we take home with us from this text?

.#1. There are no coincidence for God’s people.

There are consequences for our decisions – so some of the bad things we experience are a result of our own bad choices – some of the good things are a result of our good choices – but in those times when we find ourselves at the right place at the right time – and things just fall into place for us – do we “feel lucky” – or do we stop and thank God for leading us here at this time – even though we may not have been aware that He was leading us – until now that we see how blessed we are to be here at this time.

The New Testament will later teach believers that God gives us the Holy Spirit to guide us and to lead us. And what a marvelous job He does of it.

.#2. Respect Others Instead Of Demanding Rights.

People who spend their energy demanding their rights might get the basics “of their rights” fulfilled – but very few if any will give them anything more than they absolutely have to give them.

I can share from personal experience – there are marvelous and wonderful fruits from treating others with respect – instead of demanding our rights. I can tell you of a manager in a secular business – he asked each employee to do things – he didn't demand or command – he did fire one employee shortly after becoming the manager – but that seemed to be enough to get the message across. The employees who worked for this manager knew that he had the authority to terminate their employment – he knew he had the authority to terminate their employment – when he asked them to do things – they knew and he knew there was an implied order – they would respond in nice ways – the whole attitude of the place changed in just a matter of months – the employees started talking to each other in nice and respectful ways – and sure enough – they started treating the customers better.

It not only made it a more enjoyable place to work – it made business better – that made the managers paycheck better. A more pleasurable place to work and better pay – yeah, it's a good thing!

Giving Respect to others pays wonderful dividends. God's Word tells us straight forwardly - "Give and it will be given to you." (Luke 6:38)

.#3. A Good Work Ethic

Ruth was gleaning in a field! She didn't have a quota she had to meet. Whatever amount Ruth took home, would have been acceptable. Whatever amount she took home would have been more than she and Naomi had. Ruth was gleaning in a field! She couldn't be fired for not working hard enough – fast enough – long enough – or good enough.

Gleaning is just picking up the leftovers – what kind of standard would anyone place on that job? The quality of the job Ruth was doing that day wasn't about gleaning. Because of Ruth's work ethic – she was noticed – and the person who noticed her told someone – and the someone they told was someone important. And because this someone was told about Ruth's work ethic – her life – and that of Naomi are about to change considerably.

The same principle is true today. It is rarely about the specific task we are doing right now. It is about the work ethic and the quality of the job we are doing right now. Perhaps the smaller and un-important the task appears the more important it is that we do an excellent job.

We never know who is watching. And even if we do know who is watching – and everyone of them seems really unimportant in our life. We don't know who they are going to tell someday about the kind of job we do – and what kind of work ethic we have.

Some years ago, when that manager I spoke about a few minutes ago – he and his wife felt very strongly that they needed to move back to their home state. He offered to take a step down and a pay cut if the company he worked for would allow him to move back. He even offered to pay for his own move. The company policy didn't allow for that – so after some prayer – he resigned and we moved back to his home state.

By the way – I do not recommend people quit there jobs until they have another one to go to. He was in his home state a few weeks – his savings diving rapidly – and the he received a phone call from a man in another state some distance away. This man said he had made several phone calls trying to track him down. He told this man that he had heard that he no longer worked for the company he had left. He had been told about his work ethic and standards. He wanted this man to come to work for his company. He was willing to pay for him to travel there to meet him and others - and that he could start work right away.

He had to ask who told him these things. He gave the name of the person. It was someone with whom this man had crossed paths briefly in the company he had left. He would never have guessed this person would have any influence in his life or career. And it turned out, he never would have guessed this person would have known someone of importance – that he could tell them anything about him.

Later in the New Testament believers will be told “whatever you do – do it as if you are doing it for the Lord.” Today – how many of us as Believers in Jesus Christ as our Savior – how many of us approach the small – seemingly meaningless – task – as something we are doing for the Lord?

Remember – If there are No Coincidence – then this small unimportant job – is no coincidence either. Remember – If there are No Coincidence – then meeting this small unimportant person – is no coincidence either.

Nothing that comes our way – is a coincidence! No one we meet – is a coincidence! So with each and every person with whom we come into contact – let us treat them with respect as a person whom God loves dearly – let us treat each person as someone for whom Christ died – so that they could be saved.

Each and every task that is given us to perform – let us do this task as if it is the most important thing we will ever do – even though we are sure in ourselves – it is “just taking out the trash” – even if to us “it is the job that nobody else would do” – let us go about each task as if it is something we are doing for the Lord Jesus Christ – because it is!

As Christians – while we should not lie down and allow people with evil intentions to take everything away from us – we should not make everything about “our rights.” We certainly should protect those things God has so graciously given us – but whether we are affluent or poor in worldly goods – our lifestyle and words should be about respect toward others.

As Christians – our work ethic – Does In Fact Stand Out – What does our personal Work Ethic say to those who observe us? “Oh, this is just getting the dust off of the ceiling fan – there is no reason to be too thorough – after all it will just get dusty again”- “Oh, this is just some volunteer work – no one else seemed to want to do it – and I can’t get fired”

Ruth – 08 – Character of Life

Do we approach each task as though we are doing this personally for Jesus? In spite of the way some people have perverted the prosperity message – not all saved people are prosperous in worldly goods – and while it is rather normal and to be expected that lost people who are poor – would be loud and public in their demand to have their “rights” - it hurts the cause of Christ – when saved people who are poor in worldly goods – have more to say about their “rights” than they have to say about what Jesus means to them .

When we have more to say to others about how we are making sure that we “get our rights” - than we have to say about how others can receive Jesus as their Savior – then we are hurting the cause of Christ and actually interfering with others receiving Christ as their Savior!

There is much in the book of Ruth – about the kind of life we should live – about the character of our person – about the way we treat others – about the standard of the task we perform – A model for those who have – and a model for those who have not.

Where are we – you and me – in the areas of seeing things as a delightful coincidence - Treating all people with equal respect – and performing each task to the highest standards?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

What has happened – is believed by some to be a coincidental crossing of paths by Boaz and Ruth. While I - not for a minute believe it was anything other than a divine appointment – I do agree with the others who think we will now see something of the true nature of the man Boaz.

Okay, Boaz goes about his fellow Jews in the community and presents himself as a man of noble character. But what is he like on the inside? Sure, he acted with respect toward a new and unknown woman he saw gleaning in one of his fields. He didn't go to her and talk with her and thereby disrespect her – instead he went to someone else and asked them about her. This would be the respectful thing to do in that culture. But now that the foreman has told Boaz that this new woman is a Moabitess – will he continue to treat her with respect as a human being – or will we see prejudice and bigotry that could be hiding on the inside come to the surface? Will Boaz treat Ruth as the disgusting Moabite – or will he treat her kindly?

Read Ruth 2:8 and make notes:

Boaz goes directly to Ruth and communicates to her personally. When he didn't know anything about Ruth, he showed her the respect of his culture and did not approach her and talk with her. But after the foreman revealed that Ruth was not the wife of someone – nor was she engaged to someone – and that she had no family to which she was accountable – there were no restrictions on speaking to her. There was no one who could or would take offense.

Boaz had something he wanted to say to Ruth – and if we send a message through someone else – there is always the likely-hood that the message will be delivered somewhat differently than the way we sent it. A few words here and there might be changed – the tone of voice might be different – the overall message just might be heard differently than what we wanted them to hear.

Boaz delivers his message personally. First, did you notice how Boaz addresses this foreign woman from a disgusting people? - “My daughter.” This phrase alone communicates to Ruth that Boaz is offering his family covering to her. Remember, the foreman communicated that Ruth has no husband and no family. Boaz is offering Ruth a family to which she can belong.

Some years ago, when my wife and I was doing youth ministry – from time to time we would take the youth on a trip. When we did, I would tell the kids that while we are on this trip “I will be your dad.” I would always tell the kids if someone started bothering them – or making them nervous – they could come up to me and ask a question – just any question – and address me as “dad” – that would tell me that someone was making them nervous – and if the jerk was close enough to hear – it would tell them this person had some family protection there – that this child was not in this place without a family.

When I made this offer – I wasn’t saying to any of them that I wanted to adopt them – I wasn’t saying that I wanted any of them to come and live at my house. I was simply offering a level of public protection. And it was used from time to time – and it did help.

That is something along the lines of what Boaz is offering Ruth. Boaz comes up to her and calls her “my daughter” – in that culture this isn’t saying that I want to be your dad – or that I want to adopt you – it is saying that I offer you my family covering.

And remember some of the things we have said about that culture – when those working in the field see Boaz speaking with Ruth personally – even if they don’t hear what he says – that personal communication tells those who do see – that Boaz and Ruth have some kind of relationship – and in that culture – that probably means family. Because a man from one family would not talk to the woman of another family without permission.

Now for those who are close enough to hear what Boaz says – when they hear him say “my daughter” – there is no doubt or confusion to them – they understand that if they mess with Ruth – then they would be messing with Boaz’ family.

Ruth can accept this offer or she can refuse it. Should she refuse the offer and tell Boaz to take a hike - then she would have no protection. But if she accepts his offer – then she automatically and instantly has protection.

Let's look at what Boaz offers Ruth – in addition to family protection: “Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls.” “Don't go and glean in another field” – “don't even go away from this one”

It was necessary for gleaners to go to as many fields as they could – when gleaning, one only gathers a few heads of grain here and there – they have to cover a lot of ground to come up with a small basket of grain.

Boaz could have said, “don't glean in a field owned by anyone else – only glean in my fields” – but instead Boaz encourages Ruth to stay right here in this particular field instead of going to another field – that means not even another field owned by him.

At first glance that is asking a lot! If the instruction is to not glean in any other field – that sounds like a limitation. If this is the only field in which you are going to be allowed to glean – it would sound as if you are being cut off from whatever provision you might otherwise get from gleaning. To be allowed to glean in only one field would mean the collection of very little grain. But as we will see as we read on – Boaz has something much better in mind than just getting the benefit of gleaning. And then Boaz says to Ruth, “Stay here with my servant girls.” This is a very significant statement!

Those who are servants of Boaz would have basically an unlimited access to the field – the grain – and to the facilities and resources. Those who are gleaners are limited to picking up only those heads of grain that have fallen to the ground – the gleaners must not touch the harvested grain. A servant could basically touch any thing they wanted to touch.

Boaz was not saying that “I am making you one of my servants.” What he was saying is that Ruth was being given a place of safety and provision among his servant girls. That would be even better than being given the “most favored gleaner status.” Boaz has more to offer Ruth:

Read Ruth 2:9 and make notes:

It is believed by most - that men typically did the cutting of the grain and laying it in piles or rows. Then women came behind them and tied the grain into bundles that would later be placed onto a cart and taken out of the field. Gleaners would be expected to stay at some distance behind those tying the bundles. That did a couple of things – (1) it prevented the gleaner from being in the way of the women tying the bundles – (2) kept the gleaners from the appearance of messing with the grain that should be tied into a bundle.

Boaz tells Ruth to stay with the girls – that would mean she would be right behind the men who are cutting the grain. To anyone passing by, Ruth would look like she was one of the servant girls.

While it didn't happen all the time – apparently it did happen from time to time – that a person of bad character might be passing by a field being harvested and would go into that field and abuse one of the gleaners. By giving Ruth a place right behind the men doing the harvesting and among the servant girls doing the tying – Ruth was given a place of safety from any passing wicked person.

This level and position of safety is rather a significant offer – when we consider it is being offered by an Israelite to a Moabite. And there is more!

Boaz tells Ruth that he has instructed the men “not to touch you.” When we do a word study on this – we discover this same word was used in the O.T. for physical beating – sexual crimes – and a variety of different physical offenses. So this is basically saying the men are not to harm Ruth in any way whatsoever. And there is more!

Boaz tells Ruth that “when she gets thirsty” – “go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.” In that culture – it would be the normal thing that a servant girl – especially a foreigner – would be expected to draw water so that the men of Israel could drink. Boaz is saying, that I want you “a foreigner” – to drink the water drawn by an Israelite man – drink the water that was provided for and intended originally for the Israelite men.

That should awaken some New Covenant concepts within us. This place offered to Ruth has a couple of physical aspects to it that we should not overlook:

.1. the gleaners, if they get thirsty – would probably have to leave the field – at least go to the edge of the field to where they may have left some water – to get a drink – and then return to their place – if another gleaner hasn’t already taken their place – and to protect their place – most gleaners would push themselves to a point near dehydration – just to make sure they could get as much grain as possible.

Since Ruth was allowed to drink the water that belonged to the men – that means she didn’t have to leave the field. One of the servants would follow along with the men and have water ready for them whenever they wanted it. It was important for the harvesters to be able to drink and keep on cutting grain. Since Ruth didn’t have to leave the field and return again – Ruth had more gleaning time and less non-productive time.

.2. another thing about Ruth being in this physical position – being right there with the girls tying the bundles – Ruth had first picks – long before any of the other gleaners came along – Ruth was right there – she had access to the larger pieces

What favor Ruth is being given! Who could have ever guessed – maybe even imagined – that a Moabite would ever be shown such favor among the Israelites?

Read Ruth 2:10 and make notes:

We saw it earlier in Ruth's actions and words. Here again we see an absence on Ruth's part of demanding rights. It is as though Ruth sees herself completely at the mercy and generosity of the Israelite people. Ruth's actions reveal she probably had a very vulnerable feeling.

“To bow” - the way it says here – Ruth would have had to drop to her knees – then bend until her face touched the ground. This is a position of complete humility. It demonstrates the distinct difference Ruth recognizes between her position in society and the one she sees Boaz holding in society.

Then she asks the question that all of us probably ask when we first read this account – “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me-- a foreigner?” Why have you recognized the unrecognizable in your society? Why have you noticed the unnoticeable in your culture?

The word translated “foreigner” speaks of one who is not only from outside the family – Not only from outside the clan – but one who is from outside that nation – from a different people altogether.

Read Ruth 2:11 and make notes:

Boaz answers Ruth's question – but only in an indirect way. He doesn't give her a specific reason – he doesn't tell her if there is something about her that he likes the look of.

It doesn't tell us who told Boaz – only that he has heard about the sacrifices Ruth has made in order to help a widow of Israel. Ruth didn't just help Naomi – Ruth was willing to leave her family and her homeland – in order to make sure a widow of Israel had her needs met. Ruth left what was familiar to her – to go to that which was completely unfamiliar to her - a place she had never been before. This is what Boaz has heard about Ruth.

Read Ruth 2:12 and make notes:

Boaz speaks a blessing upon Ruth – “May Yahweh repay you for what you have done” - “May you be richly rewarded by Yahweh – under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” There is nothing about this account that would tell Boaz that Ruth is here to take refuge under the wings of Yahweh. Just because a foreigner is in the land of Israel does not mean they desire to take refuge under the protection of the God of Israel. But, it is reasonable to understand – that if he has heard about how Ruth has helped care for the needs of Naomi – that he has also heard what Ruth said to Naomi – “I will take your God to be my God.”

Boaz isn't saying anything about how disgusting the practices are among the people where Ruth has come from. Boaz isn't saying anything about how Ruth might contaminate those she comes into contact with – because we can just imagine what happened to her as she was growing up – I mean after all, don't you think being treated that way has probably warped her mind?

Ruth – 09 – Be An Encourager

Boaz says, I have heard of the quality of character you have displayed toward a widow of Israel – and I believe Yahweh – the God of Israel – repays people good things when they do good toward others – especially when they do good toward one of His people. So Boaz is wishing God’s fullest blessings to fall upon Ruth.

Boaz used the phrase “repay” you – Boaz acknowledges that it has cost Ruth something personally in order to help meet the needs of one of Israel’s widows – Boaz is speaking a blessing upon Ruth that says he is asking Yahweh to “Re-Pay” Ruth everything it has cost her.

Read Ruth 2:13 and make notes:

Ruth accepts the offer from Boaz to have the protection of his family. “May I continue to find favor in your eyes.” Her words translated “my lord” does not mean she is referring to him as god – but it is better understood in our culture as her calling Boaz “sir.” Ruth is giving honor and respect to one to whom honor and respect is due.

Ruth acknowledges that Boaz has taken away some of her fears and concerns – “you have given me comfort” – she doesn’t have to worry about how she is going to be treated. Ruth doesn’t have to keep looking around to make sure someone isn’t coming toward her with the intent of harming her – abusing her – or taking away what she has.

Ruth acknowledges that Boaz has spoken kindly to her as though she were one of his servants – “though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls.” Here, once again, Ruth lets us know that she is aware of her inferior social status.

Can you imagine the anxiety Ruth has experienced since the death of her husband? The fears and concerns about how she is going to feed herself – who would protect her if someone comes to harm her. And when she goes to this foreign country – knowing how they feel in Israel about Moabites – how is she going to be treated - how high her anxiety level must have risen when she set out to go into a strangers field – and to glean among the other poor people for whatever she could find to pick up.

And then Boaz comes up to her and in a few short words – He takes away any reason for anxiety and fear – and gives her a feeling of safety – perhaps for the first time in several years – at least for the first time since the death of her husband she has some level of hope of provision. Wow! What a relief Ruth must be feeling at this point.

What are we to take home with us from this message?

.1. Encourage Those Who Are New To The Walk.

Boaz encouraged Ruth by letting her know that he had heard about the good things she had done. How many New Christians – or even those who might have been saved for a number of years but have not grown in their knowledge of the Word or grown in their relationship – How many of these immature Christians – feel like Ruth felt?

They often see themselves as far inferior to the other Christians they meet. They often feel they have to ask if it is okay before they do just about anything.

I am disappointed to have to say this – but in far too many churches today – The attitude toward these Christians appears to be more of a chastising attitude than an encouraging one.

What a difference we could make in a Christian's life – just by saying we know about the good they have done - and that we openly and publicly wish God's Blessings upon them.

.2. Be Willing To Be Part of God’s Method.

Boaz didn’t just say “I pray that God will bless you” – “I pray that God will pay you for the good you have done.” Boaz had already given from his own resources toward Ruth being blessed – by the time he said “I pray that Yahweh will bless you”

If you want someone to be blessed by God – if you are praying that God will bless someone – Stop and consider – “God, are you wanting to bless this person through me.” It’s kind of empty to tell someone that you “sure hope God blesses them” – and you don’t even offer them some of your beans.

That’s kind of like the minister who took a job working as a life guard at the beach during the summer – he never left his life guard chair – but from time to time he would look at the water and say, “I see that hand” – and just keep sitting on the life guard chair. Wouldn’t we all agree that it would be much better if he would leave the chair and go to the person with the hand raised?

It’s not right for me to say “it is time” for us to begin encouraging those who feel inferior or inadequate – It’s not right for me to say “it is time” for us to start blessing those who we are asking God to bless. The truth is that it has always been the time. God does sometimes divinely and miraculously communicate a personal message of encouragement to someone – God does sometimes miraculously provide for one of His people. But most of the time – in fact God’s usual mode of operation – is that God encourages a person by sending the message through another believer.

This is a pretty cool system – when that happens – the person who needed encouragement gets encouraged and the one who delivered the message gets blessed. And when God wants to provide for one of His children – He almost always sends that provision through one – or several – of His children – and that too is an equally cool system – because here too – both the recipient and the deliverer get blessed.

Ruth – 09 – Be An Encourager

It is clear that Boaz understood this principle – but it seems the great majority did not. And because God’s people really struggled with this concept – later in the N.T. Jesus will tell a parable about the religious leaders passing by a dirty injured person and wishing him well - but not helping – and then along comes a Samaritan who picks him up and takes him to a place to be cared for – and then uses some of his own resources to help meet that need of this injured person’s care.

So, where are you and me today? How do we respond to those Christians we meet – who act – and sometimes speak – as though they are not as good as the rest of the Christians? Do we agree with them? Do we chastise them for being so immature? Do we verbally flog them for not doing better? Or do we speak to them the good things they do and encourage them with a blessing?

How do we respond to those who we think need to be blessed by receiving God’s provision? Do we just tell them we hope God meets their need real soon? Do we just say a public prayer that God will meet their need soon? Do we just go around and tell others to pray that God will meet their need? Or do we give of our own resources – and then do all of the above.

In short, how are we doing in the area of encouraging other Believers? How are we doing in the area of helping other Believers to be blessed?

Ruth – 09 – Be An Encourager

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

The last lesson looked at Boaz and Ruth's conversation in the field. In this lesson, we will look at things that happened and were said at mealtime. There is obviously some time span between the last text and this one – but the book of Ruth doesn't give us much information in regards to times. It could have been only an hour or so – or it could have been half the day.

As we read the text, it is apparent there is more work in the field following this meal. This could have been a late afternoon supper meal – after which they worked two or three more hours before going home – but it is more likely the mid-day lunch meal. It was customary to feed the workers in the middle of the day so that they would have strength and energy to work in the afternoon. It was also customary for the workers to go home in the evening and share the supper meal with their family.

Read Ruth 2:14 and make notes:

Again in this text, we see Boaz treating Ruth more like a member of his family than a stranger from another land. Certainly better than an Israelite would be expected to treat a Moabite.

Boaz invited Ruth to come and sit where he was sitting. Boaz invited Ruth to have some of the bread that had been cooked for the workers to share – he even invited her to dip the bread into the dip that was customary for bread.

For Ruth to be accepted as a gleaner – would be about as much as anyone in Israel would be expected to do. Ruth is a Moabitess and there is no place of acceptance for Moabites in the minds of Israelites. But Ruth is poor and the Israelite code required the poor be allowed to glean from the harvested fields. For

Ruth – 10 – Faithful / Diligent

Ruth to have been given some position that could be seen by others as a “most favored gleaner” status – would have been considered something exceptional. For a foreigner – most especially a Moabite – to be given some favor in the efforts to glean would be something that would make the community talk.

But Boaz seems to have come to grasp a principle that Peter would learn in the N. T. – if God accepts someone – then so should we. Boaz elevates Ruth – who had come to them in the status of “a disgusting Moabite” – and has elevated her way beyond some favored gleaner status – to be given a place among his circle.

Please don't lose sight of this – if Boaz had simply given her something to eat and drink – the whole community would have said “what a kind a generous man this Boaz is” - If Boaz had left instructions that Ruth was to be allowed to eat when and with the harvesters when they ate – how well Boaz would have been spoken of.

But Boaz offered Ruth a place not only among the harvesters – but to come and share a meal that he too was sharing. This says to us that Boaz was accepting Ruth personally. Boaz wasn't just telling others he thinks she should be treated humanely or kindly. Boaz is saying to all who can see and hear – I accept her as a good person – one of notable character and I accept her as someone I will associate with.

Ruth's beginning was in a disgusting Moabite family. Her life's experiences as she grew up would be far from anything we would want our children to experience. As an adult, Ruth found herself as a widow – without any means of support or safety – then she finds herself as a poor looked-down-upon foreigner in a strange land. But today, Ruth is sitting with one of the respected families of Israel. “Ruth, you've come a long way baby” !

Ruth obviously accepted the invitation to join Boaz and his workers – for it tells us “When she sat down with the harvesters” - Boaz then offered her some of the roasted grain. Ruth ate all she wanted and “had some left over.” Having “some left over” is a thing we see a number of times throughout the bible – and we see it when Jesus feeds the multitude in the N.T.

Ruth – 10 – Faithful / Diligent

It could be that Ruth had some left over because she has not been accustomed to having much to eat since her husband died. When we go for a while eating only small amounts of food – we find we are unable to eat very much food at one time. That could be what happened here. But the original language here has several words that are difficult to translate into modern day language.

Many Bible scholars believe it is likely this text is saying that Boaz piled or heaped up the serving of roasted grain given to Ruth. It might very well have been Boaz' intention that Ruth had some left over – so that she would have something to eat to take home to Naomi. But I would like to say that it is reasonable to see God putting it into the heart of whoever served the roasted grain to Ruth – that God put it in their heart to give a very large portion to say to Ruth that the fortunes of these two poor widows is changing.

Their need for sustenance is being met. From this time forward Ruth and Naomi would not go hungry again. And to follow a theme from the last lesson – Boaz' generosity at this point is the first fruits of the reward he is asking God to pour out on Ruth.

Read Ruth 2:15 and make notes:

The way this verse reads – we get the impression that Ruth got up from the meal to go back to gleaning while the others are still eating. This is another place we see something of the character of Ruth. Even though she has been generously offered something to eat and drink – she was here to gather grain to provide for herself and her mother-in-law. Ruth doesn't show any signs of thinking “hey, if this guy is generous – maybe I won't have to work anymore – maybe he will just provide for us.” Ruth finishes her meal – and then gets back to work – for that is what she is here for.

Ruth – 10 – Faithful / Diligent

Boaz is uncertain of just how much Ruth knows about Israelite code – or understands the rules of gleaning. Boaz instructs his harvesters to not say or do anything that would “embarrass” Ruth – even if she should be seen gleaning “among the sheaves”.

Normally gleaners would be verbally chastised or scolded if they were seen getting near the sheaves of cut grain. The gleaners could be forcefully removed from the field if they were seen actually taking grain from among the sheaves. The harvesters could – and often did – use bodily force to protect the grain of the one who owned the field.

The generosity of Boaz has already far exceeded that which the Israelite law would call for. This instruction to simply allow Ruth to gather grain from any place she so desires – is well – beyond extraordinary.

Read Ruth 2:16 and make notes:

I’m can’t help but think the harvesters were thinking to themselves “are you sure” - when Boaz said what he did in v15 about letting Ruth glean wherever she wanted to. But when Boaz said what he did here – some of them must have at least thought “you want us to do what?”

Do you remember from the last lesson – we pointed out that to place Ruth among the harvesters would allow her to glean a greater quantity of grain? Giving her that kind of opportunity to increase her food quantity would surely be enough to make the average person feel pretty good about themselves.

Ruth – 10 – Faithful / Diligent

What is having the harvesters to actually leave a few stalks out of the bundles going to do to Ruth's grain gathering? It's like Boaz doesn't want to leave anything to chance. By allowing Ruth to glean immediately behind the harvesters would seem to ensure an increased quantity of grain. But just in case the harvesters are really efficient and don't drop much grain – Boaz tells the harvesters to leave “some stalks” out of the bundles – and this will make sure Ruth gets plenty of grain.

It certainly could be argued as to whether Boaz realized it or not – but we can say that Boaz was treating Ruth with the same kind of generosity that Yahweh had treated Israel. In other words – we see in Boaz – a characteristic of God – God doesn't just give to His people – God gives generously – and almost always gives beyond what we deserve.

Read Ruth 2:17 and make notes:

An ephah is about $\frac{3}{5}$ of a bushel – or a little over a half bushel. Most Bible scholars agree that this measurement was of the grain after it had been threshed. The threshing process is where the grain is beat to remove the outer husk. This threshing would often be carried out near the field where the grain was harvested. Removing the outer husk makes the grain a little lighter – and reduces the load one has to carry home.

Before you think too lightly of the amount of grain Ruth collected – let's consider some information. $\frac{3}{5}$ bushel of barley would weigh approximately 29 pounds. And remember this is the weight after it has the outer husk removed. So Ruth carried quite a load out of that field that day.

Ruth – 10 – Faithful / Diligent

From some records that have been discovered from that era – the ration for a male worker at that time was about 2 pounds per day. While it wasn't recorded – it is expected that the women normally received a smaller ration. But if we stick with the male ration – this means that Ruth collected in one day – the equivalent to about half a month's ration.

Even today – if someone could earn half a month's pay in just one day – they would be doing well. And even considering that Ruth is providing for her and Naomi – Ruth is bringing home food for at least a week for both her and Naomi.

We are not told of the kind of expectation Ruth had when she set out to find a field in which to glean. It is reasonable to believe her expectations of the amount of grain was way below what she received. Ruth was blessed beyond her expectations. And as a result – so is Naomi – The one she is trying to help.

There are two things we should take home with us and put into practice in our lives:

.1. Accept Others Based On God's Leading.

Regardless of what we have been taught by our families or our culture about persons from a certain kind of people group – we should be looking to God – and listening to God as to who we accept – and to what level we accept them.

There probably would not have been one person in all of the land of Judah that would have found fault with Boaz for restricting and limiting the actions of Ruth. There probably would not have been even one person in the whole land that would have thought any less of Boaz if he had simply refused to give her the time of day. Even though she had helped Naomi – and was even trying to help Naomi at this time –that doesn't give her acceptability – for you see there was this underlying expectation that foreigners were to be servants and to help meet the needs of Israelites.

Ruth – 10 – Faithful / Diligent

We don't know what Boaz was told exactly – we don't know what Naomi said to Boaz about Ruth – or if Boaz heard everything through someone else and never spoke with Naomi personally regarding Ruth. We also don't know if Boaz received some personal word from God about Ruth. But the way Boaz was treating Ruth was by no means the usual way any Israelite would have treated a Moabite. So Boaz was seeing something or hearing something – or discerning something - that led him to accept this Moabitess – and do so personally.

Some years ago, I knew a man that gave regularly to a missions work in a certain part of the world. A time came when the missionary to that country came to the states and brought one of the native people who had become a minister. The missionary naturally contacted the man who had been giving to the work and offered to bring this native minister to his church to speak and to share. The man replied that he did not want that kind at his church!

A long story shortened some what – the man knew he had a prejudice and bias against these people – he felt he was easing his guilt by giving to a missionary who ministered to those people. He didn't care if God had called this man to the ministry – he didn't want to have anything to do with him.

How often do we refuse to accept another person due to our own personal prejudices – regardless of the call God has placed upon them – or the gifts that God has seen fit to give them?

To be the kind of Christians God wants us to be – and the kind of Christians that can help bring this area to know Christ Jesus personally – we have to follow God's leading - and not that of man as to how we accept other people. Boaz is a good example of that!

.2. Be Diligent And Faithful Workers.

When Ruth first set out in her task to glean fallen heads of grain – did she have any thoughts of grandeur? Probably not. Most of her thoughts were probably about safety – being allowed to glean – and taking something home to this person she has committed to help.

Do you wonder – would Boaz have taken as much interest in Ruth – if the foreman had said something like “well she has been here all morning, but she sure doesn’t do much work. Do you wonder – would Boaz have taken as much interest in Ruth – if the foreman had told him – “she sure does have a lot to say about her rights.”

Boaz had already heard about Ruth helping Naomi – but what would his response have been if she had been something other than a faithful worker? How much did it impact Boaz to hear that Ruth actually asked permission to glean in this field before she set about gleaning?

Since the Scriptures don’t tell us how much these things played in Boaz’ actions – I can’t tell you for sure. But I have been something of a student of human responses for a number of years now - and believing that people then were pretty much like people today – I can offer some observations and some suggestions.

One thing that I have observed is that most people like to help others who are in need. That really isn’t just a Christian trait. I have observed many non-Christian people who reach out to help someone who is in need.

But here is something else I have observed – people like to help people who are trying to make it for themselves. People tend to step back – or stop helping altogether – when they see this person isn’t even trying.

The book of Proverbs has some very hard things to say about people who are lazy. The Apostle Paul in the N.T. tells us that a person who won’t work shouldn’t be allowed to eat. He wasn’t talking about those who are unable to work – he was talking about those who “won’t” work.

Ruth – 10 – Faithful / Diligent

Boaz observed a faithful worker in Ruth. Boaz observed Ruth not being distracted by all kinds of things – but doing the task she was assigned to do.

How much did that impact Boaz in his decision to be generous to Ruth? I can't say for sure, but people being what people are – I believe it played a big part.

Please don't let that statement take away from the fact that God was ultimately behind this provision – and this generosity toward Ruth. Of all the fields in Judah – God directed Ruth to this field. For God knew how He wanted to provide for Ruth and Naomi - and God knew which of the many field owners would take notice of the work habits of Ruth. And God knew which of the many field owners would be in a place to be a kinsman redeemer for Naomi. But what if Ruth had not done her part of being a diligent and faithful worker?

We have to give God something to bless if we want to be blessed. Psalm 1:1-3 talks about the person who delights themselves in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night – it says “Whatever he does prospers.” When we don't do anything – there is nothing to bless. When we do very little – then there is very little to bless. When we do what we can – with faithfulness and with diligence to get it done – we give God something to work with – we can and will see His blessings.

This isn't just speaking about our career – though it applies very well there. This is about the way we apply ourselves to all that we do. How faithful are we to accomplish the tasks we agree to do for the Lord? How faithful are we in our efforts to glean from the Word of God?

Here is another way to examine ourselves – how much do we start – that we don't finish? Do we go about the tasks we set out to do – as if we are doing them for the Lord? Do we need a little help in the area of diligence?

Ruth – 10 – Faithful / Diligent

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

We have arrived at the end of a section in the book of Ruth. Things are about to make a major change. The life of Naomi and Ruth is about to turn a corner and they will never be the same again.

Read Ruth 2:18 and make notes:

When Ruth arrived back in town where she and Naomi were staying – she brought a couple of surprises to Naomi. The first was the unusual amount of grain she brought home. It was an unusual amount for a gleaner. As I have shared before, the original language of the book of Ruth is difficult to translate. The original text could be saying “and her mother-in-law saw what a large amount she had gathered.”

The second surprise was when Ruth brought out and gave to Naomi the left-overs from the meal she had eaten with the harvesters in the field. We can only imagine – but Naomi had probably been fidgeting all day – wondering how Ruth was doing – wondering how Ruth was being treated – wondering if Ruth might be able to bring as much as a whole days worth of food home. Perhaps Naomi was even thinking – when Ruth gets home, it will be worth staying up late – just to be able to roast some of the grain and eat a hot fresh meal for a change. And Ruth comes in with – not only a large amount of grain she had gleaned – but Ruth brings in food already cooked – all Naomi had to do was to eat.

The simple detail that Ruth took home to Naomi the food she had left over from her meal – tells us once again about how tender and caring Ruth was toward Naomi. If Ruth had come home and shared with Naomi that the owner of the field had allowed her to eat with the harvesters – Naomi would have probably thought good things about the owner of the field – and probably would have been happy that Ruth received some nourishment to enable her to work strong and long in the field. There probably would not have been any complaint about “why didn’t you bring me some” - because it would have been an unusual request to ask “do you mind if I take some home?”

Ruth – 11 – Confidence Not Fear

We can only imagine how Naomi’s mind must have begun to race – and the questions that must have flooded to the forefront – she is amazed at the large amount of grain gleaned – and Ruth brought home supper – ready to eat. How – what – who ?

Read Ruth 2:19 and make notes:

I can’t help but think, Naomi probably fired these two questions out in a rapid fire method. “Where in the world did you go today?” – “In who’s field did you work?” I think most of us can understand Naomi’s excitement seeing this much grain brought in and supper to boot. This is the first good thing that has happened to Naomi since early in chapter one.

Naomi was so excited that even before Ruth is able to answer even one of Naomi’s questions – Naomi speaks forth a blessing on whoever it was that allowed Ruth to gather so much grain – and bless this man – whoever he is – that allowed Ruth to eat in the middle of the day.

Naomi was from this area – Naomi had lived many years – Naomi had seen people glean in the fields – she knew that no one would have been able to glean this quantity of grain. That Ruth has this much grain means someone helped her. Naomi is thinking and saying – “bless this person, whoever they are.”

Some want to debate whether Naomi’s words were intended to be a blessing upon this unknown person – or if Naomi was simply saying something akin to “best wishes” upon this person. This is wasted time – there is no reasonable argument against Naomi’s proclamation being both a blessing upon this unnamed benevolent person and at the same time best wishes.

Ruth – 11 – Confidence Not Fear

The original language word is “baruk” – it translates to “blessed is” or “blessed be” – and this word is usually followed by a name. It is a common phrase throughout the O.T. for someone to say to another “blessed be” this person or that. Today we might say it this way “be blessed” – “may you be blessed” – “I wish you to be blessed.” This phrase used by Naomi says that she wishes this person to be blessed with the power that brings prosperity – this person who has shown such generosity - Naomi wishes that they receive even more than they now have.

Finally, Ruth gets a chance to speak - “Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. "The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,"

Ruth seems to answer the question about who – more so than the question about where. Ruth tells Naomi about the “one at whose place she had been working” - Ruth tells Naomi “the name of the man.” And let’s face it – the real interest for Naomi would have been “who” – a whole lot more so than the “where.”

I remember when I traveled for a living – when I would be gone for several days and return home - I might be asked “where” I had been – but there was a whole lot more interest in the “who” did you meet? – what were they like. There was more interest in the “who’s” than the “where’s” or the “what’s.”

Ruth understood Naomi would be more interested in the who than the where. And that’s where she place her emphasis when answering Naomi’s questions. The name “Boaz” will always mean something to Ruth because this is the man who treated her with respect – was generous toward her – and offered her protection. The name “Boaz” means a great deal more to Naomi – because this man is recognized to be one of those who is qualified to be a kinsman redeemer – and this could mean provision and fellowship for the rest of their lives – not just a few days.

Ruth – 11 – Confidence Not Fear

Read Ruth 2:20 and make notes:

When Naomi heard the name “Boaz” – this triggered three more statements from her. The first is to restate the desire for this person to be blessed – but now it is more personal – it is no longer a wish for some unknown person to be blessed – it is now a desire for Boaz to be blessed.

The second is that Boaz has not stopped showing kindness to the living and to the dead. This statement has caused some people to struggle – arguing about what kindness can be done for someone who is dead?

Boaz’ kindness to the living is easy to see – look at how he treated Ruth – a living breathing person who needed some assistance. Boaz didn’t measure her by her ethnic origins – Boaz measured Ruth on the basis of being a human being in need.

Please don’t allow someone to drag you into a meaningless argument about the kindness to the dead. In that culture – when a man died and left no children behind – it was the practice that a close relative would marry the widow – have children by her – and the children would carry on the name of the dead husband – this was to ensure that no family among the Israelite people should become extinct. And to do this was seen as showing kindness toward the dead man. When Boaz made sure that Ruth and Naomi had plenty of food to eat – in that culture Boaz was seen as having shown kindness toward the dead husbands of both Naomi and Ruth.

And then Naomi’s third response to hearing the name “Boaz” - "That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers."

Ruth – 11 – Confidence Not Fear

Naomi didn't ask Ruth if she would like to get married again – Naomi might be too old have children herself – but Naomi is not too old to be interested in having grandchildren. “Hey Ruth, do you realize this man Boaz – is qualified to marry you and to give you children?” – “and do you realize that if you have children by someone who is a close relative of my son – that these would be my grand-children?”

This reads as though Naomi just might be seeing this man as an answer to the prayer she offered back in chapter 1 - after her husband died and both her sons died. Do you remember what she prayed – what she wished could happen for both of her daughters-in-law?

Look again at Ruth 1:8. For a woman to have a husband in that culture – meant protection and it meant provision. Naomi didn't want either of her daughters-in-law to be poor and constantly in need. She wanted a good life for them. One returned to her Moabite people to seek such a life and one went with Naomi to take care of Naomi. How much – we can't be sure – but it is reasonable to think Naomi is seeing her wishes for Ruth to have a possible fulfillment in this man.

Read Ruth 2:21 and make notes:

Ruth now tells Naomi – “oh, there is another thing – he asked me to stay with his workers until they had finished harvesting ALL of his grain.” And this verse once again – as happens many times in the book of Ruth – this verse mentions Ruth's ethnic origin. Ruth has been accepted by one Israelite – but Ruth has not been accepted by the community as a whole.

Ruth – 11 – Confidence Not Fear

The barley harvest lasted approximately 1 month – the wheat harvest lasted approximately 1 month. The wheat harvest began at least 2 weeks after the barley harvest began. Depending upon the season – the barley harvest could start a little earlier – the wheat harvest could start a little later – so the total harvest time between barley and wheat could last anywhere from 6 weeks to 2 full months.

The prospect of getting to stay with the harvesters that work for Boaz was exciting. There are at least 2 reasons why this could be exciting.

The first is - what if they keep allowing Ruth to gather grain like they did this first day? If they did, it's possible that Ruth could bring home enough grain to feed both of them for a full year. The second reason this was exciting – if Ruth kept working in the fields owned by Boaz, that pretty much insures that Boaz and Ruth are going to see each other from time to time.

Now don't think this is school girl and school boy thinking. I have known people who are in their “middle age” years as well as their “senior years” – who change their daily routine – just so that they might see again someone they have met. I have known people to go out of their way to shop at a particular place – all because they might “see” this certain person again.

This is a people thing – and has very little to do with age. Can anyone smell romance in the air? I can't help but believe that Naomi was hoping to smell romance in the air – I can't help but believe that Naomi was desirous of seeing a romance blossom Between Boaz and Ruth.

Read Ruth 2:22 and make notes:

Ruth – 11 – Confidence Not Fear

Naomi continues to refer to Ruth as “my daughter” – this remains in contrast with the continuous reference to Ruth as the “Moabitess.” Naomi offers sound “motherly advice” – first that Ruth should work only in the fields owned by Boaz – and second that Ruth should remain among the “girls” in the fields.

By Ruth remaining only in the fields owned by Boaz – Ruth will be protected from abuse that would likely take place in the fields of others. In the fields owned by Boaz, Ruth will not be subjected even to verbal ethnic abuse and especially not physical abuse.

By Ruth remaining with the “girls” in the fields – Ruth isn’t likely to develop some relationship with one of the young men – and thus get in the way of Boaz fulfilling the kinsman redeemer duties.

If any man married Ruth – and treated her well – surely Naomi would be happy for Ruth. This would mean Ruth would be provided for and Ruth could have children. But if that person wasn’t a kinsman redeemer, that would mean the end of Naomi and Elimelech’s family line.

I’m not sure it is safe to say Naomi was scheming at this point – because the text doesn’t read like scheming. But it is reasonable to believe these thoughts were part of Naomi’s considerations in her counsel and advice given to Ruth.

Read Ruth 2:23 and make notes:

This section closes with the simple statement that Ruth did indeed stay with the servant girls of Boaz. And that she gleaned with them until both the barley harvest and the wheat harvest were finished. So Ruth was in the fields of Boaz for at least 6 weeks – and possible as long as 2 months.

How much provision was Ruth able to bring home for her and Naomi? It doesn't tell us, because that piece of information isn't important to the message. How many times did Boaz and Ruth meet during the harvest season? We aren't told that either – because that isn't important to the message.

So what is the message we should take home with us?

.1. Go Boldly Ahead Without Fear.

As we read this section of the Book of Ruth along with the previous section – we can't help but be reminded of Sarah and of Rebekah. Ruth, and Sarah, and Rebekah, all found themselves in a place to be taken advantage of – or even to be abused by others – and yet in all three cases – God provided a means of escape from the danger – and gave each one of them a place of protection. Because each of these women had a divine purpose to fulfill – their divine purpose was an unknown purpose to them at the time of their danger – but we can see how God protected them – even delivered them – to keep them for their divine purpose.

We have far too many Christians today – who believe God has asked them to do something – but they never even try – because they are afraid. The most common fear is the fear of failure – “What if I fail?” – “What if I am wrong?”

You might hear someone say – the only people who never fail – are those who never try! But the truth is this - those who never try – so that they will never fail – have already failed – for they have failed to be the person God created them to be – they have failed to do the work God has gifted them and called them to do – so by never trying they are in fact the greatest failure.

God recorded several instances where He protected and delivered someone so that they could fulfill His purpose for them. If God had this recorded several times – the first thing we should be able to determine is “hey, this must not have been a fluke” – and the second thing we should be able to determine is “God must want us to know this.”

Ruth – 11 – Confidence Not Fear

I am not saying that we should go out and just do dumb things and then expect God to protect us in spite of our stupidity. I am saying that we should go ahead and try to do what we believe God has asked us to do – or called us to do. If we fail – then we learn from our mistakes – and then we do it better. But we go about whatever it is that we believe God has called us to do with the confidence that if someone tries to harm us – God will not allow us to be destroyed until we have the opportunity to do what He has created us to do.

When we grasp the concept that God is the one watching over me – that God is the one providing my protection – how much confidence will we have? God has not given us a spirit of fear – but God has given us the spirit of power – the spirit of love – and a sound mind.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Ruth – 11 – Confidence Not Fear

(this page for additional notes)

When chapter 2 ended – the famine these 2 widows had been experiencing was also over. Chapter 2 ends with Naomi and Ruth having plenty to eat.

Read Ruth 3:1 and make notes:

The way this chapter begins, we can't help but think that somewhere during the harvesting season – Naomi's bitterness has disappeared. Naomi has apparently found release from her bitterness and desire for isolation. We see Naomi attempting what would be seen as a parental duty in that culture.

And the way the text reads, it would appear Naomi is setting about this parental duty with some enthusiasm. The words used in this text are the same ones used in chapter 1 when Naomi expressed what she desired for her 2 daughters-in-law. So Naomi is treating Ruth like a daughter – Naomi has decided she should do the things necessary to help Ruth find a “home” – or rest – and to have provision for the rest of her life.

From everything we have read so far – even though Naomi confessed to being a bitter woman everything in the text lets us know that Naomi was not a dumb cookie. Naomi apparently considered that she would one day pass away – Ruth would need provision after Naomi's death.

It would one thing for Ruth to endure widowhood in a strange land during Naomi's lifetime, but it would likely be a whole different ballgame to be a widow in a strange land after Naomi dies. Again, we must look at things in the context of that culture – so the only obvious solution was to find Ruth a husband.

Ruth – 12 – Proper Presentation

Read Ruth 3:2 and make notes:

Naomi first reminds Ruth that Boaz is “our relative”. The original language indicates – not just a relative – but a “close” relative. In our culture that might not have any significance beyond what it says. But in that culture, when a widow speaks of a “close” relative – that speaks about responsibilities and possibilities – of hope, provision, and family.

Some have suggested that the kindness Boaz showed Ruth earlier was like a knock of opportunity upon these widows door. And Naomi has decided she wants to answer this knock.

Gleaners would typically attempt some level of winnowing the collected grain each day as they gathered it – the harvesters and field owners usually collected all the grain and hauled it to a designated location for winnowing at a later time. The location for winnowing was carefully selected. Winnowing was where they would crush the outer husk loose from the grain and then toss the grain up into the air. The plan was to have the wind blow the husk away and allow the heavy heads of grain to fall around the winnower.

When it has been really hot during the day, it was usual that a breeze would begin to blow as darkness set in. The temperature change would cause currents of air to move about. It was important to make sure the wind was not too strong so that the grain did not get blown away.

Ruth – 12 – Proper Presentation

Understanding the process, may explain how Naomi was able to tell Ruth “when” Boaz would be winnowing his grain. She could see that the conditions were going to be right tonight. The winnowing would be done as it is getting dark and probably for a short time after dark. It might be unsafe to attempt to travel home in the dark and it might be a good thing to stay with the grain to protect it from theft during the night.

Read Ruth 3:3 and make notes:

Naomi has apparently given this some thought. Her instructions were clear – “Ruth, now don’t just run down to the threshing floor” - instead, she was to prepare herself for this mission. First, she is to bathe herself – get clean – she is to remove that which causes her to smell bad and she is to remove the stains that make her look bad. Second, she is to put on some perfume – Ruth is to take upon herself those things that will give her a good and pleasant aroma. And third, she is to put on her “best clothes”. She was to make herself look as attractive as she could. In other words, after she has taken off those things that made her look and smell bad, she is to “put on” those things that make her look and smell good.

In short, Naomi instructed Ruth to look and smell in such a way as to be attractive. Nothing in this text suggest “alluring” or “enticing” or “seductive” – only attractive.

But we must not overlook the instruction – “don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking”. “Ruth, DO NOT rush right up to Boaz and present yourself.” Naomi has thought this through – she has calculated the “right time” for Ruth to approach Boaz.

Ruth – 12 – Proper Presentation

Read Ruth 3:4 and make notes:

After he has worked for a few hours beating grain – then throwing it up in the air – he is going to be tired. After he has stopped the work, he will sit down to eat and drink. A man who is physically tired, then gets to put food and drink into his stomach – this man is going to have no trouble going to sleep.

If Naomi intended for Ruth to go to Boaz as soon as he lay down – there would be no need to “note” the place where he is lying. It should be obvious that the instructions meant for Ruth to wait until Boaz has had time to go to sleep before approaching. That is why she need to note “where.” It may be that Naomi expected others might spend the night there as well – this too would make it important to note carefully where Boaz lay – to make sure she didn’t go to the wrong person. Can you imagine – just how much darkness would be needed to cover the embarrassment of approaching the wrong man in this situation?

It is unfortunate that some Bible students have tried to make this into some kind of illicit sexual contact between Boaz and Ruth. While this may sound harsh to some, I have to say this: There is nothing promiscuous in this text and to try to interpret some of the phrases here as having sexual overtones is the fruit of a perverted mind.

Let’s consider Naomi’s instructions for a moment – in the context of that culture – not ours:

“go and uncover his feet and lie down - He will tell you what to do." By uncovering Boaz’ feet – it is likely to cause him to wake up – but not necessarily at that moment. How long would it take for his feet to get cold? How long would it be before Boaz would wake up and realize his feet were uncovered?

Ruth – 12 – Proper Presentation

It might be a few minutes, or it might be several hours. With all the thinking and planning Naomi had put into this plan – this is one of those variables she could not know. Naomi tells Ruth that he will tell you what to do – but she can't tell how long it might be before that happens.

While Boaz is almost guaranteed to go to sleep quickly following the strenuous work of winnowing – and then getting his stomach full – somehow, I don't see Ruth doing much sleeping. However long it takes before Boaz wakes up – I imagine Ruth was lying there with her eyes and ears fully alert. And her mind was no doubt running full speed – just waiting to see what Boaz will say and do.

When Boaz does wake up – and discovers his feet is cold – the natural thing to do would be for Boaz to raise up to cover his feet. At this point he is going to find someone lying at his feet.

What is the message in this? Ruth's action of lying at his feet sends a message to Boaz – the message is that she is presenting herself as a humble petitioner. “I desire something from you – and I have placed myself beneath your feet.” How much more humble could a person present themselves to someone to whom they wished to make a request?

When Boaz does awaken – and “tells her what to do” – it could be “get away from here and leave me alone.” This is another variable that Naomi cannot predict or control. She cannot know what Boaz will do – nor can she control what he will do.

Please don't lose sight of the fact that Boaz can say “no” to whatever Ruth asks of him. There is nothing in this situation that requires Boaz to do or to grant anything. This positioning is nothing more than a most humble way to say “I need something from you.”

Ruth – 12 – Proper Presentation

And let us not overlook the reality that Naomi took a certain gamble with Ruth in this. Naomi was betting on what she believed to be the integrity of this man Boaz. The reality of this situation that Naomi has placed Ruth into – is that Boaz could awaken in the night – find a woman at his feet – then take sexual advantage of her. That certainly is not what Naomi is hoping will happen, but it is a possibility – if this man Boaz has something less in the area of moral integrity than Naomi believes.

There are a number of questions that can be asked at this point. Why didn't Naomi just approach Boaz during the day and ask him if he will fulfill the kinsman redeemer responsibilities? Why didn't Naomi approach the town elders and ask them to have one of the kinsmen redeemers fulfill this obligation? And a number of other questions. But the account doesn't give us the answers to any of these. We don't know why Naomi decided to go about it in this way.

Do you remember how many times we have been told in this account that Ruth is a Moabite? It could be that Naomi wasn't certain how Boaz or the town elders would respond to a Moabite in the kinsman redeemer setting. Maybe Naomi wanted to spare Ruth the public humiliation should the answer be "no." At least in this setting, it would be only a couple of people that knew such a request had been made and refused. It may be that Naomi was uncertain – because it doesn't appear that any of the qualified kinsmen redeemers had come forward and offered to fulfill these duties since Naomi had returned home.

Read Ruth 3:5 and make notes:

Ruth's response – a simple “I will do whatever you say” – no questions – no words of concern – just simple compliance to the wishes of Naomi. This indicates once again the level of devotion Ruth has toward Naomi. If this is what it will take to make Naomi feel better – then this is what I will do.

Message of us today?

There are two things we should take home with us from this text. And they are connected.

#1 God's Provision Comes Through Human Actions.

Maybe it would be helpful to mention something at this point. Earlier, Naomi expressed her wishes for her daughters-in-law. Naomi expressed these wishes in the context of these wishes being Yahweh's provision. At this point in the account of Ruth, we see Naomi thinking that human means just might be the fulfillment of this divine provision.

Some get disappointed when they see Naomi apparently attempting to answer her own prayer to God for provision for Ruth. But the proper view and understanding of this text just might be that it has always been God's plan to have an interaction between divine provision and human actions.

Maybe Naomi understood that we humans are responsible to seize the opportunity provided by God. Naomi may have understood that God acts through a person's actions. So, when a person's actions result in success, it is God's success and God's provision that has taken place. In other words, a person's actions are the means of executing God's plans.

This may sound familiar from a previous message from Ruth – kind of like hearing the chorus of a song again after the second verse – When we are praying for God to do something – we should also be asking God, what do you want me to do toward this end? Maybe God's answer is “nothing” – perhaps He desires to accomplish this through someone else. But maybe – just maybe – God wants us to put forth some actions – so that He can bless our actions – so that our prayer can be answered.

#2 Choose Your Bait Wisely!

When we go fishing – there are two principles that are very important. First – we choose our bait according to the kind of fish we desire to catch. Secondly – we choose bait that is attractive to the fish – not necessarily attractive to us.

There are a GREAT MANY fishing lures for sale in stores all over this country – and the most they ever catch is the inexperienced fishermen. Most people go into the store and choose fishing lures that look good to them. The wise fishermen – don't care how the lure looks to people – they select a lure that attracts the fish.

I could address this comment to young people – but the truth is that all of us need to consider this comment. What kind of person are we trying to attract with the way we dress – and the way we conduct ourselves in our daily life? If we dress like a hooker – then we will attract those looking for a hooker. If we dress like someone looking for a hooker – then we will attract a hooker. If we dress and conduct ourselves like people with no respect for ourselves or others – then we are going to attract other people with no respect for themselves or others. If we dress and conduct ourselves with respect and dignity – then we will attract people who have respect and dignity.

So, the question is rather simple – what kind of person are we attracting? Are people approaching us looking for someone to have some kind of illicit relation with? Are people approaching us looking for someone to encourage in all kinds of worldly and fleshly activities – or do we find people approaching us – asking for help to become a better person?

Do we find people approaching us – asking for things like; help them find a good church – or a better relationship with God?

Here's the connection between the two points in today's message:

The more we make ourselves available to be used of God in answering prayers – The more we attract people with good and noble intentions. The less we make ourselves available to be used of God in answering prayers – The more we attract people with bad and unhealthy intentions.

Ruth – 12 – Proper Presentation

Let's examine ourselves for a moment:

Like Ruth – are there some things in our life that we need to take off and put down – because these things could easily give someone the wrong message from us? Like Ruth – are there some things we need to take into our life – to give us the proper appearance and aroma among the people whom we meet?

We should re-evaluate the kind of bait our life is presenting to the fish in the world.

Ruth took time to prepare herself – to make sure she presented the right message - instead of the wrong message. We should we prepare ourselves – before we go out to meet the people of this world - so that we present the right message - wo that those we meet – those we work with – do not get the wrong message.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Ruth – 12 – Proper Presentation

(this page for additional notes)

Naomi had given Ruth instructions – on how to approach Boaz at the threshing floor - late one night – for the purpose of asking Boaz to fulfill the duties of a kinsman redeemer. Naomi told Ruth to go to the area of the threshing floor - stay out of sight and don't let anyone see you there. After Boaz goes to sleep – Ruth is to go up and uncover his feet. And then she is to lay down at his feet and wait until Boaz wakes up.

Read Ruth 3:6 and make notes:

Very simply stated – Ruth went to the threshing floor – and Ruth did “everything” Naomi had told her to do. This would be a good place to remind ourselves – in this verse and those we have read before – which tell us about Ruth doing what her mother-in-law tells her to do – there is no legal or family obligation that requires this kind of obedience from Ruth toward Naomi. This level of obedience indicates a love for Naomi.

This principle is still true today – When we truly and completely love someone – We find ourselves being obedient to what they ask of us. Not out of compulsion or legalism - but out of complete love for that person. Its true in all kinds of relationships – those within a family as well as friendships. When we love ourselves more than the other person - we find it more difficult to obey their request.

Read Ruth 3:7 and make notes:

Ruth – 13 – Humble Obedience

It is unfortunate that there are those who conclude that Boaz must have drunk wine to excess – and that is why he was in “good spirits.” The original language in which this text was written does not use words that would typically be used for drunkenness. The words used are merely those which indicate a person is in a good mood. And to be practical about this – as we will read in just a few minutes – Boaz awakens during the night – and has every indication of thinking clearly when he does.

With the most simple reasoning – it would be fair to think the account would read a little differently had he been awakened and was suffering the headache from having drunk too much wine. That’s not the way the text reads. The weather has been perfect for threshing grain, Boaz had a successful evening threshing grain. Boaz had eaten a good meal. His body is tired, his hunger and thirst have been adequately satisfied. As he goes to lie down to sleep, he has a smile on his face. Boaz goes to sleep watching the beautiful stars move gracefully across the sky above him.

We are not told how much time passed – but I can’t help but wonder if Ruth could hear her heartbeat as she waited in the darkness for Boaz to drift off to sleep. Can you imagine the kind of excitement that must have been coursing through her veins. But the time came when Boaz was asleep – and then Ruth “approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down.”

I shared with you in the last lesson that I am convinced that this was not a sexual encounter between Boaz and Ruth, so please don’t go there. But we must not overlook the real risk that exists in this situation. A man and a woman who are not married to each other they are sleeping next to each other – somewhat alone in a secluded place from town. If there is even a slight lapse or flaw in the integrity of either person – the scene could become unwholesome very quickly. But it did not!

Read Ruth 3:8 and make notes:

Ruth – 13 – Humble Obedience

There are plenty of people who have presented ways of calculating what the “middle of the night” would be – trying to tell us what hour this would be. But when we consider the majority of this account has purposefully omitted details and has stuck with the big picture – it would seem that this is probably not a good use of our deductive reasoning.

In keeping with the rest of the account of Ruth – it would seem to me that it is better understood that the “middle of the night” was not meant to be a technical expression – it was not intended to mean the exact middle hour of all the night-time hours – but simply that sometime during the night Boaz was awakened.

When he does wake up – he discovers a woman – and this woman is not lying beside him – she is laying at his feet. And it is not unreasonable to think she may have been lying there with her back against the soles of his feet. Neither is it unreasonable to think that Ruth was not sleeping. Can you not see her laying there mentally analyzing every little sensation of movement? “Is he waking up?” - would be the question she must have asked every time she thought she felt some movement.

A man goes to sleep all alone – in a secluded area – awakens during the night and discovers he is in a compromising situation. There is a woman lying at his feet. Who is this woman? What does she want?

Being an upright man of integrity – will he be angry that someone is trying to compromise his reputation? Will he be embarrassed? Will he be delighted and start thinking “how fortunate I am that a woman wants me”?

Read Ruth 3:9 and make notes:

Ruth – 13 – Humble Obedience

It is interesting to consider that Boaz could tell it was a woman lying at his feet – but he could not tell who it was. Maybe he could see the apparent female form – maybe he could smell the aroma of perfume. We are not told how Boaz knew it was a woman – only that he did.

This question asked by Boaz is important to note. He asked “Who are you” instead of “what do you want” – or “what are you doing.” If Boaz could know “who” it is – he would then likely be able to know “what” they might be up to.

As we noted earlier, Boaz seems to be a person that takes note of the people around him. He likely knew the vast majority of the people of his community. He knew the reputations that accompanied those people.

For most of us today – there are certain people that we begin to become uncomfortable when we see them coming. They have a reputation, and when they are near us, we expect to be exposed to something of that reputation. This causes us to try to spend less time with certain people – and spent more time with others. We may even put forth some effort to avoid some people altogether.

There were no doubt some women that would have caused Boaz to jump up and move away – should he discover they had come out to the threshing floor in the middle of the night. Because that would not be good for his reputation. So, for Boaz, to discover the “who” is of primary importance.

And look at how Ruth answers – “I am your servant Ruth,” she said. “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.” Ruth told “who” and then she stated “what” she wanted from him. “I am YOUR SERVANT Ruth.” That simple phrase in that culture says – I will do what you tell me to do. And she declares this before she makes her request known. This means that I am not going to pressure you to grant my request. If I am presenting myself as “your servant” then I cannot demand that you do anything.

Ruth – 13 – Humble Obedience

And when Ruth says, "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer" - there was no confusion about what Ruth wanted. This means – “I want you to marry me – and to have children with me – so that my late husband will have children in Israel.”

For a man to throw the corner of his garment across a woman – signified that he is offering to become a covering for her. While it did include marriage, it also included physical protection and physical provision. If the woman did not want to accept this man’s offer – she would throw the garment back off of her.

It is also important for us to note – that while the O.T. Israelite custom of a kinsman-redeemer was in place – there was no legal requirement for a kinsman-redeemer to do so. The kinsman-redeemer provision was to make it possible that no family line would become extinct. But the Israelite code did not require anyone who was qualified to redeem their kinsman.

It was looked upon as a worthy and noble thing to do. But they had the freedom to choose – and they could say no. Ruth pointed out to Boaz that she knew he was a kinsman-redeemer and she stated forthrightly that she wanted him to fulfill the duties of a kinsman-redeemer – but he had the freedom to say “yes” or to say “no thank you”.

Read Ruth 3:10 and make notes:

Boaz was not offended by Ruth’s request – and here is another place I will disagree with what some interpret in this account. There are those who see Boaz being very flattered by Ruth’s interest in him. That is not what is taking place here. Consider the rest of this verse – “this kindness.” Is it “kindness” when someone says I want to be with you or I want to marry you?

Ruth – 13 – Humble Obedience

Boaz was a wealthy man – if he was thinking about himself – he might have said “you are greedy” – or he might have said “you are a gold digger” – or “you just want to marry me because I am wealthy.” Consider what this must refer to: “this kindness” versus “that which you showed earlier”

Had Ruth shown kindness toward Boaz earlier in this account? It isn't recorded if she did. But it is recorded earlier that Boaz was impressed with the kindness Ruth showed Naomi – by being willing to leave her family, her people, her land, and to stay with Naomi to take care of her. That is the earlier kindness Boaz is talking about.

So what is “this kindness”? Boaz is not a dummy – he realizes that Ruth is asking a “kinsman-redeemer” of Naomi's family to fulfill those duties. Boaz recognizes that “this kindness” is that Ruth is seeking to give Naomi a continuing lineage. Ruth could be seeking a husband that meets her desires and her needs - but instead Ruth is doing what is best for Naomi.

Boaz notes that Ruth has not run after younger men – whether rich or poor. This lets us know there were available young men – some rich – some not so rich. Boaz is noting that he is aware he is not the only choice. Boaz is really impressed with the integrity and the commitment of Ruth toward Naomi.

Read Ruth 3:11 and make notes:

“And now – don't be afraid” - “I will do for you all you ask” - “Ruth, everyone in town recognizes you as a Proverbs 31 woman.”

Ruth – 13 – Humble Obedience

Read Ruth 3:12 and make notes:

Just when Ruth is about to hear wedding bells going off in her head – Boaz says, “but wait” there is one who is more qualified than I am. In the Israelite custom – this privilege to be a kinsman-redeemer belonged to the closest male relative. Remember, its not an obligation – it is a privilege. If the closest male relative does not want to take advantage of the privilege to be a kinsman-redeemer, then the privilege goes to the next closest male relative.

If Ruth had any personal attraction to Boaz, this statement must have caused her heart to stop. But it reveals the integrity of this man – I will not take from another what is their rightful privilege.

Read Ruth 3:13 and make notes:

By asking her to stay the remainder of the night, Boaz protects Ruth physically and protects her reputation. Should she try to go home during the night – she could encounter evil people who might harm her. If someone should see her leaving the threshing floor during the night – there would be no end to the rumors about Ruth.

Ruth – 13 – Humble Obedience

Boaz makes a commitment to settle this issue “in the morning” – Boaz is the kind of person that does not let things slide - he takes care of business.

There is something important that appears to be missing from this text. And it is especially important in light of the fact that there are those who claim that Boaz and Ruth became engaged that night. This text does not say that Boaz covered Ruth with the corner of his garment. If Boaz did not cover her, then they were not engaged. If they were engaged – wouldn't it be rather strange that Boaz would be willing to allow someone else to marry Ruth?

Boaz being the man of integrity that he is – did not toss the corner of his garment over Ruth as she requested – he did make a commitment to fulfill the kinsman-redeemer duties - if the one more qualified chooses not to do so.

Read Ruth 3:14-15 and make notes:

Ruth stayed the remainder of the night – but she lay at Boaz' feet – not beside him. Boaz' instruction “don't let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor” - meant for Ruth to be careful that she is not seen leaving - and don't tell others when you get back to town. This protected both of their reputations.

V15 once again shows the generous heart in this man Boaz. According to his plans – it is possible this other relative will marry Ruth and take her and Naomi in. And yet, Boaz sends Ruth back to Naomi loaded with just about all the barley she can carry.

Ruth – 13 – Humble Obedience

While there is some difference of opinion among Bible scholars as to which measure to use – the amount is significant using either of the measure. The amount of barley would be between 58 – 95 pounds. And this was likely to be threshed barley ready to use. This is why it states he “put it own her” – this would be too much weight to carry in the hands. He probably helped Ruth get this loaded onto her back and shoulders.

The purpose of the grain was most likely to help meet the needs of these two widows. However, this probably would stave off any suspicions about Ruth’s character. Should someone see Ruth traveling back to town with this large portion of grain – it would be more likely they would think she has been working at the threshing floor than to think anything inappropriate about her. Women of ill repute would not be given so much grain. Then Boaz went back to town.

What do we take home with us from this text?

It could used as a reference in a message about keeping our integrity. Boaz makes a good example for this. But that is not the message God wants us to take home with us from this text today.

.1. Approach God With Humility.

This account of Ruth presenting herself to Boaz is a tremendous picture of how you and I must present ourselves to God.

.A. Evangelistic

The picture of Ruth, placing herself at the feet of Boaz is a picture of how we must present ourselves to Jesus for redemption.

Ruth was seeking redemption – it was a physical redemption which included family – she understood Boaz to be a redeemer – so Ruth places herself at the feet of Boaz – to show with her actions as much as with her words – “I humble myself before you”

Ruth – 13 – Humble Obedience

Probably by the time we reach adulthood – everyone of us has experienced someone say the words - “I’m sorry” – but the tone of their voice and maybe their body language told us they are not sorry. Unfortunately, a great many people are coerced into saying to God the words “I am sorry for my sins” and/or “please save me” - but their lifestyle indicates these words are not coming from their heart – only from their mouth.

If we want to be saved – we can’t approach Jesus with a “let’s make a deal” attitude. We can’t approach Jesus with the “aren’t you blessed I finally decided to come to you” attitude. We can’t approach Jesus with the “I don’t need forgiveness but I will go through the ceremony” attitude.

At Jesus’ feet – with a heart that says, “I give myself to be your servant”

.B. Bible Promises

Too many Spirit Filled people these days come to God with some promise they have found in the bible - and they start trying to beat God over the head with this Bible promise – as if they are going to make God do what they want Him to do.

We are going to be much more successful – if we present ourselves and our request - in the manner in which Ruth approached Boaz. When we come humbly before our God – and make sure that our words line up with our lifestyle and body language – when we say “I am your servant” – then make our request known to him.

Ruth said clearly and concisely what she wanted Boaz to do – but only after she declared her surrender to him. As children of the Living God – we can boldly come before our Heavenly Father – and clearly and concisely make our request known – but this should follow our declaration in word and deed- that we are His servant.

When Jesus was walking on the earth in a physical body - he made his personal desires known to the Father but Jesus also said “I’ll go along with what you want Father.” As Jesus was drawing near the time he would be crucified – he expressed his personal desire that things could happen some other way.

Ruth – 13 – Humble Obedience

Jesus wanted it to be “some other way” so much - that when he prayed - he strained so hard that his blood came to the surface of his skin. That’s putting a lot of emphasis on our desire. But after Jesus made known to the Heavenly Father how much he wanted it to be different - He then said, “never-the-less, not what I want, but what you want”

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Ruth – 13 – Humble Obedience

(this page for additional notes)

We ended the last text with Ruth leaving the threshing floor in the early morning hours heading back to Naomi. And while separated by some interval of time, Boaz also left the threshing floor and headed toward town. He was going to talk with the elders of the city and with the one person who was a closer relative to Naomi than he was.

Don't you imagine this had been a fitful and restless night for Naomi? Naomi had sent Ruth out to a threshing floor on a secret mission. The plan put Ruth in a risky situation. Did Naomi spend the night in a fitful effort to sleep? Did she anxiously pace the floor? Did she make frequent prayers throughout the night? Did she from time to time, go and peek out the door to see if she might see the form of Ruth coming home through the dark of night?

The account doesn't tell us anything about how Naomi spent that night – so we don't know for sure. But it is reasonable to think, Naomi did some or all of these things while she waited to see how Ruth did in this secret – and might I say, very important – mission.

Read Ruth 3:16 and make notes:

We see at this point that Naomi is still identified as Ruth's "mother-in-law." This could be used as further evidence that Boaz did not cover Ruth with the corner of his garment. The phrase used here helps us understand – that at this point in time – Ruth's family relationship has not changed – Ruth and Boaz are not engaged.

An important agreement was made last night between Boaz and Ruth – but it was not engagement to be married. The agreement was simply – if the person more qualified than Boaz would not fulfill the kinsman-redeemer duties – then Boaz would surely do so.

Ruth – 14 – All Eligible

Naomi, no doubt, greeted Ruth with excitement – and she asked the obvious question – “How did it go?” Of course, being human – we can read into this short summary question – all of the little questions that we know are in there – “are you Boaz’ wife?” – “Did the plan succeed?” – “Did he see you before he went to sleep?” – “How did he respond when he awakened and discovered you at his feet?”

In keeping with the pattern of the book of Ruth – we don’t read all the details of what was said and what happened – the text simply states that Ruth told Naomi “everything that Boaz had done for her.”

We can’t help but wonder what was Ruth feeling and thinking at this point. Did Ruth feel like a young bride again? Was Ruth excited at the possibility of getting married to Boaz? Was Ruth worried that this un-named other relative might agree to fulfill the kinsman-redeemer duties and she will find herself married to someone she doesn’t know? Was Ruth animated and beaming as she reported the nights events to Naomi – or was Ruth non-emotional and simply giving a factual account of the events?

Read Ruth 3:17 and make notes:

While the book of Ruth has more to tell us – these are the last recorded actions and words of Ruth - in this book. So, on the one hand - we should be careful not to overplay these words – but on the other hand we should also be careful not to dismiss them too quickly. Should we think the last recorded words of someone would be insignificant or un-important? After Ruth finishes giving the report of last night’s events and conversation – Ruth says, “and there’s more” – Then Ruth tells Naomi about the grain.

Ruth – 14 – All Eligible

The things said between Ruth and Boaz last night are not repeated here in this text. We're left with having to go back to the earlier verses to see what each said – But we are told something here that wasn't recorded in the earlier account. Ruth explains why she has this grain – Boaz told Ruth that she “must not go back to her mother-in-law empty-handed” – it just doesn't say “why” she should not go back empty-handed.

Some have suggested Boaz was already fulfilling some of the duties of a kinsman-redeemer by making sure these two have food. But if Boaz was not yet the kinsman-redeemer – would that have been appropriate? We have seen already – Boaz is not the kind of person that will take that which belongs to another.

Was Boaz simply trying to fulfill the duties of a righteous Israelite – by providing food to widows? Or, was it simply that God was at work here – and Boaz had nothing specific in mind – he was only responding to the inspiration of God and being obedient?

I am convinced it is the latter – let me share why. A Hebrew word used here – is exactly the same word used earlier in the book of Ruth. Earlier when Naomi had voiced her bitter outcry against Yahweh – Naomi claimed Yahweh had left her “reqam”. When Ruth was about to return to Naomi early this morning, Boaz said “you must not go back to Naomi “reqam.” The Hebrew word “reqam” is used in the O.T. to speak of being empty-handed - of having an empty stomach - of being empty of joy or peace - and of being left with nothing at all.

At the beginning of the book of Ruth – Naomi experienced three kinds of emptiness: one was famine; being empty of food – the second was family; being empty of husband and children – and the third was poverty; being empty of worldly goods. The careful choice of wording at this point was most likely on the part of God – with Boaz, and then Ruth, - only being obedient servants of God.

Naomi's false accusation against God – is being refuted. Naomi's false accusation against God – that God does not provide – is being refuted. Naomi's false accusation against God – that God does not care about widows – is being refuted. And Naomi's prayer – to this same God that she has falsely accused – is being answered.

Ruth – 14 – All Eligible

When Boaz sent Ruth home that first day of gleaning – and had allowed her to gather grain beyond the reasonable limits of gleaning – that was a message that the famine for Naomi and Ruth had ended. When Boaz sent Ruth home this morning with this large amount of grain – this was a message that Naomi’s and Ruth’s needs are going to be met generously. God chose carefully the word He wanted Boaz to use. And God chose carefully the gift that He wanted to send to Naomi.

Boaz was inspired by God to send “grain” to Naomi. This grain was not only a message that your stomach can be – and will be filled. But grain is a type of seed. As long as a family has seed – there is hope of future food – for they can plant the seed they have to grow more seed. Seed was also a message that there is hope that there will soon be seed in the womb.

The “reqam” that Naomi had complained about - and the “reqam” that Naomi had prayed to have removed – was being taken care of. There would be no more “empty” stomachs for Naomi and Ruth. There would be no more “empty” family for Naomi and Ruth. This particular gift – and the words which accompanied it – spoke loudly and clearly to Naomi.

Read Ruth 3:18 and make notes:

The same Naomi that felt she had to take some action in order to ensure Ruth would have provision after her death - The same Naomi that put together a plan that placed Ruth into a risky situation in an effort to make things happen - This same Naomi is now counseling Ruth to “wait.”

Ruth – 14 – All Eligible

The Hebrew phrase used here to say “wait” – is used in other places of the O.T. to say - “stay put” and to “stay calm.” I wonder if Ruth is able to do that – “Stay calm?” Before this day is over – Ruth is going to have a husband – she just doesn’t know who it is going to be.

Do you know of any any woman who could “stay calm” - If we told her that before this day is over – you will have a husband – we just don’t know who that will be ?

We spoke earlier about Boaz knowing the people of his community – and knowing the reputation of the people. It seems Naomi knows something of the reputation of Boaz – Naomi tells Ruth that Boaz is the kind of person that will not rest until this matter is resolved today.

Boaz is not the kind of person who procrastinates – he is not the kind of person who leaves loose ends – he is not the kind of person who starts things but doesn’t finish them.

Wouldn’t it be nice – if all Christians today – had that kind of reputation?

Let’s consider how things have changed at this point:

Naomi and Ruth no longer have a lack of food -

The family Naomi lost suddenly has hope of being restored -

Ruth, who began as a Moabite – a stranger and somewhat unwelcome in the land of Israel - and later Became a handmaiden and a servant –

Has now suddenly become an eligible woman -

Ruth, who was once despised – Has suddenly become a worthy woman - a Proverbs 31 woman - a woman of noble character among the Israelites.

Message for today?

We could make an example out of Boaz' character that he finishes what he starts. That would be a very good thing for every Christian person to be known for. It would be a good thing – and it would send a valuable message to the lost world around us - If every Christian was known to be the kind of person that will not rest until each thing is settled. And if you are ever led of the Lord to teach on good Christian lifestyle characteristics – I encourage you to include Boaz in your Biblical examples. But for us today – here is the message God is wanting to drive home:

.1. God Will Use Anyone.

We saw in an earlier message from the book of Ruth that we need to be careful that we do not reject the ministry of someone based upon human criteria - such as their ethnic origin – their nationality – their language – and other distinctions that matter only to man.

From the beginning of this book through to this point – Ruth is referred to over and over as a “Moabite.” Her family of origin remained an issue throughout this account - Because it probably was an issue in the minds of many of the people in and around Bethlehem.

And yet, when we finally get to the place in the account that we have arrived today – It's finally become obvious to “the whole town” – That Ruth has conducted herself and Ruth has lived her life – More in alignment with the Israelite standards than many of the Israelites by birth were doing.

Ruth – the one that many could only see as a “Moabite” – was the one through whom God met the needs of Naomi – after she lost her family and livelihood. Ruth – the one that many could only see as a “Moabite” – was the one through whom God would restore the family Naomi so desperately prayed would be restored.

Ruth – 14 – All Eligible

There is such an over abundance of Christians – who are walking around thinking “I am unworthy” – “I can’t be used of God” – etc. It would have been something – if God had used a Moabite to minister to Israelites – When Israelites where in some other county. But God used a Moabite – in Israelite country – God used a Moabite right there in the city of David – To minister to the needs of an Israelite.

It is very doubtful – that left to their own – any Israelite person would have ever considered the possibility that a Moabite could ever “rise to the level” of righteous living that all Israelites are “just born with.” But God elevated a Moabite to a respected and honored place among the Israelites. And if God can use and promote a Moabite in the heart of Israel - Then God can use you and me any time and any place - That we will make ourselves available and obedient.

In the Name of Jesus – I beg you to never again say – Or believe – that God can’t use you because _____. If we will be available and obedient - We can be a useful tool and minister for the Kingdom of God.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Ruth – 14 – All Eligible

(this page for additional notes)

With the close of Chapter 3, we ended all the recorded actions and the words of Ruth. But the close of this chapter left several things unresolved. One of these unresolved issues is the lack of an heir for Naomi. This is the issue that is being addressed at the beginning of chapter 4.

This chapter has some notable differences from the previous chapters. Different from chapter 2 – here in chapter 4 it will be choice and not chance that is clearly driving things. Different from chapter 3 – here in chapter 4 things are done publicly in the daylight – not secretly in the dead of night in a remote place.

What has been something of a private matter known only to Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz – is becoming a very public matter and will be settled legally in front of appropriate witnesses. Most of the events recorded in the book of Ruth so far have been primarily conversations – and this event can be called a conversation as well – but this conversation is much more formal and takes place in the form of a legal proceeding – very un-like all those recorded prior to this one.

Since what we are about to read is the record of a legal process – it is important to make a couple of comments about this before we get into the text. This legal process is more of an administrative legal process and not a judicial legal process. No crime has been committed – so there is no one to be found guilty – there is no one to win or lose a law suit.

This matter to be settled is one of redemption – the laws being carefully adhered to are laws concerning the rights of family inheritance – care of widows within the family – and the provision for childless widows.

Read Ruth 4:1 and make notes:

Just like Naomi had said he would do – Boaz gets busy at settling this issue. First thing in the morning – Boaz sits down at the town gate – right where everyone entering town would have to pass. Whether a person is returning from an all night stay at one of the threshing floors – or whether they are leaving the town to go out to one of the threshing floors or to go out to any other job – they would pass through the town gate.

Why waste time searching for this kinsman when you know he will pass through this gate at some point in time? Why waste time trying to locate credible witnesses when you know some acceptable witnesses will pass through this gate?

Some like to read this text as Boaz giving a command to the kinsman – ordering him to “sit” much like one would command an obedient dog. That would seem out of character for the man we have come to know as Boaz. For me, it is preferable to read this more as an invitation on the part of Boaz.

I find it interesting that this “kinsman” who is a closer relative to Naomi than Boaz - remains “un-named!” In the earlier text Boaz informed Ruth that there is someone more qualified than he to be the kinsman-redeemer. Boaz may have mentioned his name to Ruth, but his name isn’t recorded in the text. Here when “the kinsman-redeemer he had mentioned” comes along – it is recorded that Boaz calls him “friend”.

The original words used here have been a problem for translators for many years. No one is really sure what an exact translation of these words would be. It seems all translators agree that the words are intended to call to someone without using their name – but exactly what the English words would be is unclear.

So, we find translations like “Hello there” – “Say, can you come over here” – “Hey, I want to talk to you” – “Ho”, which we might say “Yo” – or “pardon me” – you get the idea.

Is this person nameless in order to protect their reputation? Would it look bad on them if the report showed who it was that refused to perform the kinsman-redeemer duties? This is like the parable of the “rich man” and the beggar in Luke 16:19-31. We are told the name of the beggar is Lazarus, but the rich man is only called “a certain rich man.”

Ruth – 15 – Recognize Value

It might cause some to look down on that person – or maybe to look back from a historical perspective and look down upon that family line – it might. But since the kinsman-redeemer duties were not mandatory – that seems a very unlikely reason to avoid using their name.

It is much more likely that the reason is simply that their name isn't important to the message intended in the book of Ruth. The only important name is the one who chose to fulfill the kinsman-redeemer responsibilities.

In years to come, when people read this account, since the names given are of real historical people – it stops any legitimate accusation that this is a parable. It is a real historical event – and the message this event carries has real significance to people today.

Read Ruth 4:2 and make notes:

We are not sure how many elders the town of Bethlehem had – we are only told that Boaz invited 10 of the elders to be witnesses. There are texts in the O.T. that tell us a particular town had a certain number of elders, so we know that various towns had sometimes large numbers such as one town was said to have 72 elders.

The O.T. Israelite tradition required things to be established with the testimony of 2 witnesses. So, Boaz could have only called on 2 – but he called on 10 – it doesn't tell us why.

Ruth – 15 – Recognize Value

Read Ruth 4:3-4 and make notes:

Boaz is not only a just man – he is a kind a considerate man as well – but he conducts this kindness and consideration of another in the presence of legal witnesses. The first thing to note is that Boaz addresses the other kinsman first rather than the elders. This is a family matter and should be worked out by the family – it really should not be decided by legal authorities. Boaz seems to ask only that the legal authorities certify the agreement and settlement that the concerned family members have come to.

There is nothing in this text that even hints that Boaz is asking the elders to make any judicial decision. It is very clear that Boaz only intends for them to be witnesses to the discussion and the agreement. Any important agreement should have a witness – and what witness in the community would carry any more authority than an elder? By Boaz asking elders to be the witnesses to the agreement, he has removed the possibility of the agreement being challenged later – at least any accusation that the witness is not a reliable witness.

Also, the words translated “our brother Elimelech” - are to be understood in the context of the customs of that day – not necessarily ours. The term “brother” in that culture was used to refer to any close relative – another male of the same clan or tribe – not necessarily a literal brother as we use the word today.

Boaz certainly doesn't beat around the bush! Boaz states clearly that Naomi is going to sell the piece of land that belonged to Elimelech. “I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it” – and I am doing this in front of these witnesses. No one has the right to redeem this property until you have passed on it. If you will redeem it, please do so – if you are not going to, then I will. So, this un-named kinsman says “I will redeem it.”

Ruth – 15 – Recognize Value

Read Ruth 4:5 and make notes:

Some have accused Boaz of being tricky and sneaky. There are those who read this text and see Boaz as not telling everything - and manipulating the proceedings the way he wanted them to go. But I see this very differently. I see Boaz as presenting the most simple facts at first – there is a widow who is selling the property owned by her late husband – no one has the right to purchase this property until the nearest of kin has the opportunity – you are the nearest of kin – and if for any reason you won't or feel you can't purchase the property – then as the next of kin – I will redeem the property.

Then when this un-named person says – “okay, I will redeem the land for our relative” – Boaz being the man of integrity – rather than the trickster – he makes sure the person is aware of all the issues involved here. So Boaz makes sure he knows Naomi has a daughter-in-law and that redeeming this property would mean having children by this daughter-in-law to carry on the dead man's name. Some one who was trying to trick another might not tell all these facts.

In the context of a kinsman-redeemer, the whole purpose of redeeming a piece of property would be to perpetuate the name of the deceased man's name, family, and inheritance. Fulfilling the duties of a kinsman-redeemer had nothing to do with acquiring more land for your current family and increasing the inheritance for your children by your current wife.

Read Ruth 4:6 and make notes:

How long did the un-named relative consider the matter? Was he sitting there silently for several minutes weighing the issues – or did he answer quickly – we aren't told. The words this un-named person used are rather interesting. These words that are translated "I might endanger" - are used in other places of the O.T. to speak of warfare, of pest, and devouring of crops. He used some very strong terms to say "I can't afford to do this."

There are those who have decided this un-named person backed out of fulfilling kinsman-redeemer duties when he found out it included marrying a Moabitess – and this may be the case – maybe this man was just too much of a bigot to marry Ruth. But this may be an undue – and unfair assessment of this person – let's consider this from a practical side for a moment.

We know from an earlier text that Naomi admitted to being too old to have any more children. What if this un-named person wasn't all that wealthy. What if he didn't have a large amount of savings and what if he didn't have all that much in the way of worldly wealth – like lands, houses, business, etc. So if it was simply a matter of buying the land to keep it in the family and Naomi wasn't able to bear any more children – if he took all the available cash he could raise to purchase the land – he would struggle for a while but eventually his current children would at least get to inherit and divide a larger inheritance than the currently have to look forward to.

But if buying this land took all of the cash he could raise – when this new wife had her first child – which would carry on the deceased husband's name – all the land he purchased would immediately be set aside for that child's inheritance – to be divided only with any other children that might be born to this new wife – it would not be shared with the current children.

The current children of this un-named person would have their inheritance decreased by the amount of money this man paid to purchase the land. Let us also not overlook – that when children are born to this new wife – there would be some increased expenses to raise these children.

Ruth – 15 – Recognize Value

If it was a matter of only purchasing the land – even if he had to pay for it the rest of his life – it would increase the inheritance for his current children. But to purchase the land to give to other children would decrease the inheritance for his current children.

For Naomi and Ruth to be able to continue having a family line – was simply too high of a price to pay as for this un-named person could see. The risk was just too high for this un-named person to do what was necessary for Naomi and Ruth to have a continued lineage

It is entirely possible that this un-named person’s financial situation was such that he felt it would not leave a sufficient inheritance for his current children and that is why he said “I can’t afford to do that.” There is no reason to assume he is a mean, stingy, prejudiced person. The cost was more than he could afford – the potential loss was more than he was willing to risk.

When we look at the simple wording of this text – there isn’t anything in it that reads as though any condemnation is directed toward the one who passed up privilege to be a kinsman-redeemer. There isn’t anything in the words of Boaz – or any of the elders – that speaks against the actions of this person.

This unnamed person may be seen as doing nothing more than recognizing the fact that he cannot manage to be a kinsman-redeemer at this time - “he cannot afford it” – “he cannot handle that right now” – “that is too much risk for him to take” – and any number of ways you want to say it.

And if that is true – then while we don’t have reason to look down on this un-named person – we have reason to brag on Boaz – for Boaz was willing to take on that very risk – to take on that financial burden – to be willing to take the risk that he might decrease the inheritance to his current children in order to provide the family for Elimelech’s lineage.

Ruth – 15 – Recognize Value

Read Ruth 4:7-8 and make notes:

There has been a lot of discussion through the years – by a number of Bible scholars – as to what this “removing of the sandal” meant. Without going through all the suggested meanings – let me share with you the most simple meaning. A bare foot indicates weakness or limitations – a foot with a shoe or sandal upon it indicates strength and endurance.

For Moses to take off his shoes when in the presence of God – helped to symbolize how weak and limited Moses was compared to God – he recognized God’s Lordship. When David went barefoot – he was indicating that he recognized that he was powerless and his humiliation before the Lord God.

When this un-named person would take off their sandal and handed it to Boaz – they were saying that I submit to you – I recognize your power and your strength in this transaction while I admit to my weakness in it.

What is the Message to us?

Recognize Our Value!

Boaz is a pretty good picture of Jesus Christ as our redeemer. Boaz risked all that he had in order to be a kinsman-redeemer for Naomi and Ruth.

Naomi – a picture of a family member in a fallen state. Ruth – a picture of a pagan who had never been a member of the family – but was adopted into the family.

Ruth – 15 – Recognize Value

The Bible tells us Jesus was with the Father in Heaven. He had all of heaven available to him. Not only was everything created by Him – but everything was created for Him – and everything that was created was being sustained by Him. That pretty much says that Jesus had a high and exalted position. Jesus risked all that he had in order to redeem you and me. Jesus left the Glory of being in the midst of the Heavenly Father's throne. Jesus came to pay the price necessary to buy the field where in the treasure was found – just so our name could be continued in God's kingdom.

What if Jesus failed to live up to the standard? What would Jesus have in the kingdom, should he have failed?

A person who is lost might not be expected to recognize the risk taken – let alone the price paid – to redeem us. But as saved people – we need to stop and take inventory – we need to stop and re-evaluate.

If Jesus was willing to take the level of risk he took - And if Jesus was willing to pay the enormous amount required to be paid in order to redeem us - At least to Jesus – we must have seemed worth it. If our worth and our value was considered to be such in the eyes of Jesus - Shouldn't we hold ourselves in a similar view?

I may have started out of low value - I may have started out of disgusting beginnings - I may have been used in degrading ways - I may have committed hideous actions - I may have even at times initiated some of these things - But today – I have had a high price paid for me - And that makes my worth to be just as high - As the price that was paid for me.

I might look to you like the old picture that some look at and decide it is too old – Too cracked – and pass it up - and then the Art Collectors bid against each other to the millions of dollars just to have it - Because they recognize the value of it.

We all understand the principle – Anything is only worth – what someone is willing to pay for it. Even though I might not like it or want it - If others are willing to pay great prices for it - Then the reality is that this item is worth a great deal

Ruth – 15 – Recognize Value

For those of us who are saved – Regardless of what we – or others – have thought in the past - Today – we are worth a great great value - Because we have had a great great price paid for us.

Today – I've been redeemed by the Blood – And I am so glad I am. Regardless of how I look to others - Regardless of how I sound to others - I have great worth !

And so does every other saved person. So, when are we going to conduct ourselves - And our lifestyles in that manner?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

The last lesson from the book of Ruth – brought us to something of a peak. It would be fair to say it was the “meat” of the meal - or it was the major point of the whole account. But there is more in the book of Ruth – And it has one more message for us today.

So, if the last message was the “meat” of the meal - Then today’s message can be called the gravy. I prefer to see the last message as the cake we have been waiting for and today’s message is the icing that makes the cake really sweet.

The last message left us with the surrendering of the kinsman-redeemer privilege to Boaz. And we have the commitment from Boaz to fulfill the duties of that privilege. So in one sense, we might ask, what more do we need to hear? Let’s get into today’s message and taste the icing.

Read Ruth 4:9-10 and make notes:

Boaz wasted no time in exercising the right of redemption that had just been handed over to him. The last recorded words of Boaz in the book of Ruth are solemn, precise, and they are detailed. In this judicial setting, Boaz made his statements with formal precision. Boaz did not address the kinsman, but instead addressed the elders and the people of the city.

Boaz had invited the 10 elders, but apparently people of the city had stopped to listen to what was going on. Neither the elders or any of the people were asked to be judges, only that they be witnesses to the transaction that had just taken place, in public and in front of reputable witnesses.

Some seem to have a problem with the fact that the sons of Elimelech are mentioned as having property. If you have ever been part of settling an estate following the death of a family member, this text won't be a problem. In the settling of an estate even today, there is wording in the legal documents that say something to the effect of "all heirs" or "all those who would make a claim."

The situation is most likely that these two sons were not fully grown when Elimelech and Naomi left Bethlehem – the property that would be Kilion's or Mahlon's – would be what they would have inherited from Elimelech after his death. Elimelech died while he and his family were in Moab. At that point the two sons each inherited their portion of their father's property in Bethlehem.

However, neither of them returned to Bethlehem – only Ruth, the widow of Mahlon, and Naomi, Mahlon's mother.

Boaz was just saying in the legalese of that day – that he was purchasing from Naomi – anything and everything that would be considered to have belonged to Elimelech and his descendants. Then Boaz stated publicly that he also acquired Ruth – and Boaz identifies Ruth both as a "Moabite" and as "Mahlon's widow."

Even in this part of Boaz's statements, we see he is making sure everything is said in legal precision. In whatever way anyone in the community may refer to Ruth, Boaz is making sure that they understand that it is "this Ruth" that he is accepting as a wife.

It would probably be foolish to say that Boaz didn't find Ruth attractive – to suggest that this was nothing more than Boaz simply trying to help out a couple of widows, is to ignore the reality of human beings. But look at what Boaz made sure was stated in this legal proceeding – Boaz said, I accept Ruth - "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 the town records." He made it part of the legal proceeding that his purpose in this marriage was to "maintain the name of the dead with his property" – to make sure that "his name will not disappear from among the town records."

As I read the book of Ruth, I get the distinct impression that Boaz found Ruth very attractive. But Boaz was not going to allow his personal attraction to Ruth to interfere with doing the right thing as far as the property and the name of her dead husband was concerned. Boaz charges the 10 elders and the crowd of people who have gathered – “you are witnesses.”

Read Ruth 4:11-12 and make notes:

All of those assembled responded to Boaz’s charge – “we are witnesses.” And the people let us in on something significant regarding Ruth – who has been referred to as a “Moabitess” so many times in this book. They let us know that Ruth has been accepted into the covenant community of Israel. The people of God’s covenant community have accepted this foreigner into their community.

They declared their hope and wish for “the woman” coming into your home – that the “Lord will make her like Rachel and Leah” - who built up the house of Israel in the beginning. May this marriage give you “standing in Ephrathah” and may it make you “famous in Bethlehem.” Good standing in the state – and famous in this city. “Through the children of this marriage – may your family become like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.”

It was the typical well wishing at a marriage that the couple would have many children – so that part isn’t anything unusual for that area and that time – But these people were saying they hoped this marriage would be like the two most notable families in their religious history.

To say they hoped Ruth would produce children like Rachel and Leah would be saying we hope she has as many children as those two put together – and from these two came all the twelve tribes of Israel. To say they hoped the family from this union would be like that of Perez is significant. Tamar is the young woman whose husband died before she had children – Judah, her father-in-law, kept putting off her having his youngest son to bear children for his dead older son. Tamar, a foreigner herself, tricked her father-in-law into providing her with a child she had twins – during the birth it was recognized that Perez “pushed aside” his twin to be born first. Perez kept this reputation of pushing for what he wanted throughout his life.

Those who are part of the covenant community are wishing upon this union of Boaz and Ruth – both prosperity and prominence.

Read Ruth 4:13-17 and make notes:

The child was named “Obed” – it means “one who serves.” Many people believe “Obed” is a short version of “Obadiah” which means “servant of Yahweh.” Knowing the name of this child is not so important from the standpoint of what the name means – but it is important in knowing who he was.

Read Ruth 4:18-22

Obed - this man, who was born of a foreigner who was accepted into the covenant community – was the grandfather of David, the famous King of Israel. And if you go to the book of Matthew in the N.T. – and read the part that most people just skip over (Matthew 1:1-17) – you will see that “this Obed” and his “ex-foreigner” – “ex-outcast” mother – are in the lineage of Jesus Christ – the savior of the world.

Ruth, from the worst of backgrounds – Ruth, from the most unacceptable people - rose above her ethnicity – rose above her label as outcast – and was accepted into the covenant community of God’s people - and was so accepted that she found a place in the lineage of Jesus Christ.

Message for today:

#1 We Are Accepted!

God cares for all the Ruth’s of this world as much as Boaz cared for the Ruth in his life. God cares for all the “outcasts” and all the “foreigners” of this world. God desires to redeem all of these “Ruths” - so that they can and will have fellowship with His covenant community.

Ruth – 16 – Accepted

If a person who was born into a people of incest - If a person who was raised in a society of pagan practices - If a person who as so thoroughly despised by the covenant community of God's people - can not only be accepted into the covenant community - But can be given a place in the literal lineage of Jesus Christ - Then there is not one of us who cannot be given a place in God's covenant community - Not only by the people of God's covenant community - But also by God Himself.

So, what is holding you back from accepting your place in the Covenant Community of God? What is holding you back from participating in your part of the Covenant Community of God.

“I'm accepted – because Jesus was rejected” - in my place. “You are accepted – because Jesus was rejected” - in your place.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group: