

The Beautiful Kindness of the Redeemer

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 January 2023

Preacher: Ali Sewell

[0 : 00] Great, well, let's have a look at that chapter together. It'd be worth keeping it open in front of you if you do have a Bible there as we carry on through this book, this great chapter in this great little book.

And as we start, I suppose, before we really dig into this chapter, I wanted to ask a question. I don't know if it's something that you will have thought about before or not. It's something that kind of made me stop and take stock a little bit, I suppose, as I was preparing for this morning.

And I hope it will shape how we look at this passage this morning. And the question is this, that why in the Bible are these kind of narrative stories, these true stories like Ruth recorded for us?

The Bible, you might know, is a pretty big book made up of lots of smaller books and different types of books. There are letters, there's poetry, there's kind of law or legal books and various other categories.

And if we believe, as we as a church do, that the Bible is God's word to us, that the Bible isn't just written about him, but it's written by him as he inspired the different authors.

[1 : 15] So if this is God's word to us, why does he choose to write it in these different forms? Why do we get stories like Ruth? If I'm honest about myself, I'm probably quite a kind of a step-by-step thinker.

I'm much more science-y than arty. I'm left-brain, not right-brain. That means I can't write a poem, but I can solve an equation, which is not massively helpful on Valentine's Day or special occasions, things like that.

But because of that, I'm perhaps naturally drawn to parts of the Bible which have this kind of logic, we might think, in the New Testament of the letters of the Apostle Paul.

You know, God has done A, therefore B, therefore C. That kind of resonates perhaps with how I'm wired. Perhaps you're the same or perhaps you're the opposite. And so is that the reason for different styles of writing in the Bible?

Is it kind of different strokes for different folks? Well, I think actually there must be more to it than that, because actually the whole of the Bible is for all of us. Some bits might feel more natural.

[2 : 18] Some bits might feel more like a struggle. But actually, we'll limit ourselves. We'll struggle to grow in our faith if we just kind of ignore those parts we're not as sure about.

This book of Ruth is a book that we all need. Because actually, God, in his perfect wisdom, he communicates in these different ways, these different styles, because different types of writing are better at communicating different things.

So why do we have these narrative stories like Ruth in the Bible, a story which in so many ways seems kind of almost quite low-key? Well, it's because stories like this help us not just know what is true, but are also here to help us feel that truth as well.

You'll have experienced that when you read a novel or watch a film, that actually stories can affect us emotionally in a way that a textbook never could.

And I wanted to mention that just as we start, because if you're like me, there is almost this kind of temptation just to kind of pull the facts about God from a chapter like this and almost put the story to one side as if it's just kind of the packaging or the wrapping that we can get rid of.

[3 : 31] But actually, what I hope that we can do this morning is keep these truths about God in this beautiful story that he's given them to us in.

And in that way, not just learn stuff, but really feel it, really want it, really experience it for ourselves as well. So that's our plan. That's our goal this morning.

To do that, I've kind of got a bit of a summary of this chapter, which is true for Ruth and Naomi. And as we work through their story, I hope we'll grasp how amazing it is that this can be true in our story, in our lives as well.

And that summary is this, that God provides hope and restoration through the kindness of a Redeemer, which leads to grateful praise. God provides hope and restoration through the kindness of a Redeemer, which leads to grateful praise.

Let's think about that together. First, that God provides hope and restoration. Did you notice what a warm, what a positive, what an encouraging tone this chapter has as we just heard it read to us?

[4 : 42] Angus began this Book of Ruth last week, our first kind of series of the new year with chapter one. And there's no doubt that was a pretty downbeat chapter. It had funerals. It had sorrow. It had emptiness. It had bitterness.

And actually, as Angus mentioned, I think that was a great way of starting the new year because it's real, isn't it? We face real difficulties. We have challenges that the calendar kind of flicking over has not magically wiped away.

Chapter one resonates with the world we experience. But chapter two here gives us a great contrast as it is this incredibly warm picture of hope.

It's this picture of restoration. It's positive. It's encouraging. It resonates then with the world that we want. It resonates with the life that we desire.

Look at the kind of the language and the themes through these verses. Ruth goes out hoping to find favor, she says, in verse two. And she does. I have found favor, she can say, in verse 13.

[5 : 43] Throughout this chapter, there are repeated acts of kindness. Ruth provided with water to drink, verse nine. Ruth given her lunch, verse 14, more than she can eat.

Even this whole concept of gleaning, which this whole chapter is based around. Gleaning was a beautiful part of God's law for his people.

It meant basically where those harvesting the crops, they were to leave, not harvest, what was around the edge of the field. They were to leave anything that they dropped, anything that had got left behind.

And that was to stay there. So that the poor and the foreigner, it says in God's law, could collect these for themselves, could have something to live off. Well, here is Ruth, this poor foreigner who has come into the land and through the outworking of this beautiful law, is able to provide in some way for herself and for Naomi, her mother-in-law as well.

It's a great scene where those with nothing are provided for. We see as well in that kind of positive aspect, just the security that is running through these verses.

[6 : 54] Perhaps something we take for granted, perhaps something we might miss on a first reading through, but Ruth has found a place where she can be safe. Remember back to chapter one, verse one, if you were here last week, it says, these are the days of the judges.

Again, that is a time, as Angus mentioned last week, where things were not good, where people were not living according to God's law, where a poor foreign woman out by herself might not have been safe.

And Naomi, in fact, is explicit about that in verse 22. In another field, you might be assaulted. We just get a kind of a hint of, a reminder of the kind of the danger that is in the background.

But here for Ruth in chapter two, she has found this place of safety and security, a place where she is cared for. And so with all that in mind, just imagine how Ruth feels.

She has left her home. She arrives in Bethlehem. She doesn't know anyone except Naomi, who feels she has been bitterly treated. Naomi, who has told everyone at the end of chapter one that she has nothing, even though poor old Ruth is just standing there right next to her, has come home with her, has pledged her loyalty to her.

[8 : 11] Ruth is in this new place. She is a foreigner. She is poor. She is alone. She has very little prospects, humanly speaking. In sticking with Naomi, she's chosen God's people.

She's chosen God's land. She's chosen to put her trust in God's promises. But actually, has she made a huge mistake? How is that going to work out for her? Think how she must be feeling, and then just think of the relief.

Think of the warmth she must feel at the end of this day recorded for us in chapter two. A day she found favor. A day she has been shown kindness.

A day she has been provided for and protected. A day that offers hope and provision going forward as well. You can just feel, can't you, how incredible that must have been.

You can imagine how she feels heading home to Naomi at the end of this chapter, that everything has changed. You can sense that, that her joy, that her excitement, and that is why we have these narrative stories in the Bible, so that we can feel that, so that we can be brought into these stories ultimately, so that we can think, I also want to feel like that.

[9 : 32] I also want this kind of hope and restoration that God provides. that we wouldn't just know about things in the Bible, but that we truly want it, because that is what the gospel offers to us as well.

That is what trust in God and his promises brings. The message of Christianity is that, although our lives may be tough, although we might feel as if we're kind of slogging along in chapter one of Ruth with pain and hardship, with emptiness and bitterness, that actually the truth is that God provides hope and restoration.

God provides hope and restoration, although for us that's different. It's not necessarily such a physical or a material restoration as we see here in Ruth, but actually it's better than that, because the gospel provides us with eternal hope.

The gospel provides us with a restoration into a relationship with the God who made all things, the God who made us. That the warmth, the joy, that the comfort we're supposed to feel here in Ruth's story is something that God is able to provide for us now and forever.

And I hope as we just begin in this chapter, this chapter makes us want that, makes us want that more than anything else, because it really is the greatest thing that we could ever have.

[10 : 58] And I suppose that then leads us to the question, well, where does this come from? You know, how does this happen, this hope, this restoration? How can we kind of get hold of that?

We do want this story to engage our emotions, but it's not all just about warm, fuzzy feelings, is it? It's also about the truth of what God has done, his actions, what God is like.

So how does God provide this hope, this restoration? And the answer really to that question is the very heart of this chapter, that God provided hope and restoration through the kindness of a redeemer.

That's the second part of our summary of this chapter this morning, the kindness of a redeemer. Let's have a think about that and see, again, what these verses show us and help us understand about that.

And as I say, really, this is the heart. This is the key of what this chapter is all about. If we're just to pick out kind of one point, this redeemer. The chapter begins, verse one.

[11 : 58] Now, Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. This new character is suddenly kind of introduced into the story.

We're told that he's worthy. We're given his name. That's a kind of a sign of significance of these characters, that he's a named character. He would be up kind of near the top of the credits at the end of the film. At the start of this chapter, we don't know what this guy is going to do, but we can't help think that there must be some significance to him and to his role.

And then we see that work out as God connects this man, Boaz, into Ruth's story. Verse three, Ruth happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz.

Verse four, and behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. Well, what are the chances, we think? And the writer here is very deliberately giving us a kind of a nod and a wink, that actually the very place which happens to be is Boaz as part of the field.

And at that very moment, here he is coming out from the town to visit his people. But the point really here is clear, that this is God who's got his hands on this. This is not just a random sequence of events, or isn't that lucky?

[13 : 16] You know, who'd have thought it? This is actually God who is providing. This is God who is at work. This is God bringing Boaz onto the scene.

And really we see from there, through the rest of the chapter, all the good that happens to Ruth. All that we've just been thinking about, it comes through Boaz.

It comes through this Redeemer. It's Boaz who offers this protection, inviting Ruth to stay in his field, ensuring, verse 8, that no one will touch her, that she won't be hassled, that she will have that safety that, as we said, cannot be taken for granted.

It's Boaz who offers her such great kindness, inviting her to eat and drink with his workers, bringing this outsider, this foreigner in. It is Boaz who offers this abundant generosity.

Generosity. And we mentioned about gleaning this provision, where rather than kind of hoovering up everything that was left for maximum productivity, that actually there was some left over for the least fortunate.

[14 : 23] You can imagine for some people that rule might kind of grate a little bit. You know, these are my crops. How close to the edge can we go? You know, let's just pick up a few of these bits that's left behind. We want to get as much of this stuff to the market as possible.

And yet actually this law doesn't grate on Boaz. He goes beyond that. Verse 15, let her glean, he tells his workers. But there's more. Verse 16, also pull out some sheaths from the bundle and leave it for her.

They're to deliberately leave extra for Ruth to collect. Boaz is essentially saying, leave some of my crop in the ground, on the floor, so that other people can take it, so that Ruth can have it.

And again, this isn't just a one-off. Verse 23, Ruth is gleaning in Boaz's field throughout the harvest. He keeps up this kindness and this provision. Boaz, in terms of his behavior, his manner, the way that he is presented to us in this chapter, I think is just one of the most attractive characters in the Bible.

And the first words we hear him speak, he has God's name on his lips. The Lord be with you, he greets the workers. He is a man who fulfills the law of God, not just the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law.

[15 : 40] He is a man who is characterized by generosity and kindness. And that kindness, which is such a big theme of this book of Luke.

And then really the kind of twist for Ruth at the end of the chapter, this big reveal that she was unaware of, is what Naomi then says in verse 20.

This man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers. The word redeemer in this context is someone who has a responsibility for someone else, for family, for relatives, a responsibility to protect them, a responsibility to help out those who have fallen into hard times.

Again, another part of God's law that was there to help prevent people getting kind of left behind, as it were, but provided a means where they could be brought up and brought back if they'd found themselves in unfortunate situations.

And we see here that Boaz is that redeemer. And through him, through his kindness, God provides hope and restoration for Ruth and Naomi. We'll see how that happens long term in the next couple of chapters.

[16 : 54] But again, here in this story, in this chapter, we're simply to grasp, to kind of feel what a great guy he is. Also to think, you know, wouldn't I love a redeemer like that?

Wouldn't I love someone who would deal with me in the way that Boaz is dealing with Ruth? We're supposed to see that if we want this hope and restoration, well, then we need this redeemer.

And again, the point for us is that we can have, that we do have a redeemer like that. What is true for Ruth, what is true for Naomi, is true for us, that God provides hope and restoration through the kindness of a redeemer.

Into the New Testament, that part of the Bible written after Jesus was born, we read in the book of Galatians, one of Paul's letters, that when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Jesus is that redeemer. Again, it is God in his providence, God in his love who has sent that redeemer, just like Ruth. We weren't kind of out searching for a redeemer, trying to hunt Jesus down high and low.

[18 : 17] No, God graciously brought Jesus into the picture, into our story, into our world. The work of a redeemer, it is God's work. It is God who sent Jesus.

It's God who provides this blessing through Jesus. And it is through Jesus. It's through this true redeemer, Jesus, who the famous preacher Charles Spurgeon once called our wonderful Boaz, that we receive the ultimate in hope and restoration, which is ultimately the forgiveness of our sins.

And our adoption, our adoption, as we read in those verses there, as sons and daughters into his family. That is the greatest blessing that there is. That is the ultimate hope that we're searching for.

Perhaps you're here this morning, and you're kind of interested in Christianity, interested in church, and yet haven't made that step for yourself yet.

Perhaps you're not even quite sure, what is that step? What does it really mean to be a Christian? If you've been here a while, you'll have perhaps heard of that, spoken about as good news. You'll have heard of the gospel.

[19 : 26] Literally, that's what it means, good news. But what is that good news? What does it really mean? What does it really look like? Well, we could summarize it by saying the good news is that Jesus offers redemption, that God does offer hope and restoration through the kindness of a redeemer.

And we see in the kindness of Jesus, the ultimate kindness. It's that sacrificial, proactive kindness that we saw in Boaz, but kind of cranked up to 11. As Jesus lays down his life in order to redeem us, that we might be forgiven.

As much as we might want someone like Boaz to show us favor, unmerited favor, as Boaz showed to Ruth, but what Jesus has shown us the ultimate in unmerited favor.

He's not a redeemer that we deserve or have earned, and yet one who acts out of his grace, acts out of his kindness to us, that Jesus in the gospel suffers in our place to redeem us.

That unmatched kindness that none of us deserve, but that all of us need. And again, as so wonderfully pictured by Boaz, it's through Jesus that offers that perfect protection as well, that safety, that means we are eternally secure, as God promises, that no one will ever take us from his hand.

[20 : 52] That through Jesus, our redeemer, if we trust in him, we are secure with him. And again, that nothing that can happen in this world, nothing that can happen this year, nothing that can happen in our lifetime can ever change that.

That if we trust in Jesus, we are safe with God. And perhaps that all just sounds a little bit too good to be true. Yes, maybe God has done something for kind of good churchy people.

Maybe God would help out people who help themselves or who are his sort of people who have done something good. But maybe you're sitting there this morning and thinking, but what about me? You know, I've done things I should not do.

I've not been a church person. I've made a lot of mistakes. There's a lot of things about me that no one sitting in this room knows. Surely God wouldn't have any time for someone like me.

And yet, isn't that what this book of Ruth is all about? Remember, Ruth is a foreigner, but not just any foreigner. She is a Moabite woman.

[21 : 56] We see that repeated time and time again throughout the story, Ruth the Moabite, Ruth the Moabite. And we can kind of gloss over that, glaze over that. But Moab was the ultimate enemies of God's people.

Moab was kind of the lowest of the low. I've heard it being described as the kind of the equivalent to us would be, you know, Ruth who'd come from ISIS or whatever it might be, a kind of shocking thing.

And yet here she comes to God's land and she has thrown her lot in with God's people. She has come, verse 12, as Boaz recognizes, to take refuge under the wings of the God of Israel.

And she is comforted and dealt with kindly by this Redeemer. And again, this story of Ruth reminds us that no one who comes to God, who puts their trust in his promises, will ever be turned away by this Redeemer.

The words of Jesus himself in John's Gospel, whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. And again, we see that pictured so beautifully in this book of Ruth.

[23 : 07] That encouragement, whoever you are, whatever you've done, whatever you think you know or don't know about God, to simply come to Jesus and he will not turn you away.

To simply accept that you need his favor, accept that you come empty, that you come as Ruth did. In verse 10, she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, that kind of posture of ultimate humility.

But that if you come to him, he will never cast you out, never turn you away. And that God provides hope and restoration through the kindness of a Redeemer.

Again, we see in Ruth the beauty of that Redeemer pointing us to Jesus and all that he's done for us. And for many of us this morning, you'll know that Redeemer.

You've trusted in Jesus. You've experienced and are striving to live out that hope, live in that hope and restoration that God has provided through him. You've accepted his kindness in the gospel that that is for you, that that is something that you need.

[24 : 10] So then the question becomes, well, what next? And what do we take from this chapter? Well, the goal, I think, as we see that picture so brilliantly in these verses is that knowing that comfort, knowing that hope, knowing that restoration, that we should respond in grateful praise.

That's what we had as our summary, isn't it? God provides hope and restoration for his people through the kindness of a Redeemer which leads to grateful praise. That's what we see at the close of these verses as Ruth returns, as Naomi sees the incredible amount of food that Ruth has brought home.

As she hears, this is from Boaz as that name rings in her ears and she recognizes that this man is their Redeemer and has started that work of redemption, of blessing them already.

Well, then in response, Naomi is revitalized, is rejuvenated. So far in this book, Naomi has, you know, fairly understandably, I think, cut a pretty dejected figure.

I remember the end of chapter one, she says she is empty. And she feels like God has dealt bitterly with her. Throughout chapter two, it's been Ruth who has been the active member of the household, going out into the fields to work, to see what she can do.

[25 : 28] But now Naomi, in response to the kindness of this Redeemer, is moved to praise. In verse 20, we get this great kind of burst of praise from Naomi.

May he be blessed by the Lord whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead. Naomi shows her gratitude to the Redeemer himself. May he be blessed by the Lord and her praise to that Lord, the Lord whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead.

No longer is Naomi saying that the Lord has dealt bitterly with her as she was at the end of chapter one. Instead, she celebrates the truth that actually God is faithful.

God has remembered and is continuing to remember. Is continuing to show kindness to her. Is continuing to work out his promises to his people.

That this is God's kindness coming through this Redeemer and her response is to praise him. It's worth noting here at this point, halfway through the book, all of Ruth and Naomi's problems have not magically disappeared.

[26 : 38] There's still a few twists and turns in this story to go. There's that kind of telling, ominous, final sentence of chapter two. You can see it there speaking about Ruth and she lived with her mother-in-law.

Good grief. But you know, that is supposed to be, we kind of think, oh heck, but that is supposed to be a reminder. Actually, this is not a stable situation.

You know, two widows living together in this time offers very little security, very little long-term prospects. You know, there's still a way to go in this book to get to full, to real fullness.

But because of this hope, because of these seeds of restoration which God has provided through this Redeemer, even now, there is grateful praise. And of course, as we finish thinking about this passage for ourselves, our prayer is that that is the response that we would be moved towards.

Because that is what God has done for us in Jesus. We have this Redeemer. Then in response to that, that we would live lives of thankful praise. Again, it doesn't mean all our problems have magically disappeared.

[27 : 47] It doesn't mean that life is all simple. It doesn't mean that we're at the end of the journey yet. But if our trust is in Jesus, this Redeemer, it does mean that we can have certain hope.

It does mean that this restoration has begun, that we have been brought back into his family. And we can look forward to the fulfillment of that restoration when Jesus himself, the Redeemer, returns to make everything right.

If we're Christians this morning, are we people who are characterized by thankfulness to God? Day by day, do we remember his goodness to us?

Or do we find it so much easier to focus on the things that aren't quite as we like them? Are we people who are characterized by praise? Who find it natural to pray those prayers of adoration that we spoke about earlier, recounting what God is like, how great he is, proclaiming his faithfulness and kindness to one another and the world around us?

Is that the kind of people we are? I'm sure for all of us, we are not as much like that as we would love to be. We don't quite reach up to the response that we think is actually kind of appropriate to all that God has done.

[29 : 07] We don't do quite as much as we'd like. Our struggles and our stresses wrestle away our attention and our energy. And I close this morning by speaking about that not in any way to put a guilt trip on us and say, come on, you've got to do more, we've got to praise more, we've got to adore more.

No, but to point to this book of Ruth and say this is how we do that more. God gives us his word, God gives us beautiful, true accounts like this book of Ruth to remind us, to help us feel, to help us experience again that wonderful truth of the gospel that God provides hope and restoration through the kindness of a Redeemer.

We've seen that, we're offered that in Jesus and if we've accepted that, that wonderful, wonderful news that that offer which is there for everyone, then as we look at Jesus, as we see the wonder that we have a Redeemer like that for us, as we think of his incredible kindness, our natural response is to respond in grateful praise with the whole of our lives.

Let's pray together. Amen. Amen.