

Ruth 2:1-11 The Power Of A Noble Character!

Last time we looked at v18-22 of Ruth chapter one under the heading, 'Time to go home and face the music'. We saw from v18 that "Ruth was determined to go with Naomi." She had unwavering resolve. Acts 17:10-11 that like 'the Bereans' she "was of a far more noble character." And I said that to get this unwavering resolve, this "noble character" in the things of Jesus' Kingdom, we must know Him! So like "the Bereans," to "receive with great eagerness" the preaching of His Word and also, to "examine daily those things to see if they are true."

So finally the two women arrive in Bethlehem. That journey of humiliation, of pain, and reflection. And I suggested that we must all make that trip at times. When we've either said or done something really stupid, and try as we might, we can't escape the consequences of our actions! It is, always painful, and yet it is also always a blessing, as we are forced to see ourselves as we really are. Even as God sees us as we stand in His presence. And I explained that even though Naomi had been brought extremely low, it was only that God would lift her up to even greater heights!

But she did receive the reception she feared. "Can this be Naomi all the women exclaimed." The words cut to the heart of this woman who had already lost so much. And though she blamed God for her situation, the fault was all hers and that of her husband! Yes all was gone. The husband, the sons, the wealth and pleasures which her name means. Call me "Mara. Which means bitter." So as is Satan's plan, she counts God as her enemy.

Yet as I also explained, if she had remembered her Bible studies she would have known that the waters of Exodus 15, were bitter already, and it was God who made them sweet! Moses throws the piece of wood in and the waters become sweet. Even as the cross of Jesus is applied to our lives, and the bitterness of sin and alienation from God are made sweet, in forgiveness and reconciliation. And why? Exodus 15:22 "For I am the God who heals you." So the soil of Naomi's heart is made ready for the restoring work of God!

And so we begin chapter two. 'The Power Of A Noble Character!' V1 "Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing whose name was Boaz." Friends, what's interesting at the outset is that the narrator sets the scene. But he's not saying that Ruth knew of these things. As though Naomi had said to Ruth that there is this guy named Boaz, he's the one you need to seek out, no. Because this plan didn't come from Naomi at all. And we will see that this idea flows deep from within Ruth's heart of love for her mother-in-law. And also the practical way that love is expressed. Service! Yes selfless, sacrificial love.

So on the one hand we have this "man of standing." It's a picture of importance. A man of stature. A respected man. And we also see, a man who is loved by those who worked for him. Yes we have Boaz on the one hand then on the other hand, v2 we have "Ruth the Moabitess." And let's again remind ourselves of who the Moabites were. They are descended from Lot's incestuous sexual encounter with his eldest daughter. There is a history of enmity and hatred between Israel and the Moabites. The Moabite women seduced the ever-willing Israelite men, into both sexual and spiritual adultery after they came up out of Egypt. And the Moabites had totally annihilated Israelite towns in the past! So the word Moabite would have been a byword. A word of contempt, when referred to by an Israelite!

I grew up in the western suburbs of Sydney in a place called Hillview. But across the main road to the north was a place called Green Valley, and at its centre was Miller's village. And in those days you did not want to be from those places. It was the same in the Lord's day. John 1:45-46 "Phillip found Nathaniel and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law, and about whom the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth the son of Joseph. Nazareth! Can anything good come out of Nazareth?'"

Yes, as sad as it may be, there are certain places which carry the stigma of being from them. Green Valley, Miller, Redfern, Mount Druitt, just to name a few in days gone by. Well to the Israelites, Moab was all of them rolled up into one. And of course, this is where Ruth comes from! The words "Ruth the Moabitess" occurs six times throughout this book. This is not a description which someone would have coveted. And yet even so, with such a heavy legacy to bear, we will see that godly character overcomes even the heaviest baggage to carry! The "man of standing" on the one hand, "the Moabitess" on the other. V2 "And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi." So the first thing which we can learn about Ruth's newly found faith in the God of the Bible, is that her faith had hands and feet.

John 15:12-13 "my command is this, love each other as I have loved you. For greater love hath no man than this, that he laid down his life for his friends." Now Ruth didn't know the words, but she had them written upon her heart! Her mother-in-law is not only still in mourning, she is also still consumed with her bitterness toward God. And yet let us now see how, by His Providence, God begins to lift her out of that bitterness! What does the scripture say? Romans 5:8 "For while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." You see, contrary to what many suggest, we don't go looking for God, He comes looking to claim us. And there are also times when He comes to reclaim us and bring us back! Again brothers and sisters, notice, "and Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi." And what did she say? Well three small but very significant words which in effect spell out 'I love you mum'. And the words are "let me go." Can you see? She's not going to wait around till Naomi comes out of her depression and bitterness. They need to eat! Yes this was Naomi's town, she had all the connections, but someone has got to put food upon the table. This is the young woman's idea, moved by God, in love and service!

You know what's really amazing here, is that this young woman has so much scripture written upon her heart that she has never even read. James 2:17 "in the same way faith by itself if not accompanied by action is dead." 1 Timothy 5:3-8 we read: "Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practise by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. Give the people these instructions, too, so that no one may be open to blame. If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

Yes love is about doing for others in response to what has been done for us. We are not working our way into heaven, no. Because of Jesus heaven already belongs to us. But until we get there, like Ruth, in prayer we step out the front door each day, to see what God will do. We call it faith!

Proverbs 31:10 "a wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies." Proverbs 31:30 "Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised." Boaz says of Ruth in chapter 3:11b "all my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character." Beloved, clearly, Ruth was not a "Moabitess" but a "Berean" at heart. "Let me go"

she says. And I want you to notice what it is that she's volunteering for. "Let me go into the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favour." This was not going down to your dad's shop and serving a few customers in the holidays, this was working at harvest time from sunup to sundown. Bent over the whole time, picking up single stalks which have been missed by the harvesters. And then when evening came the breeze would blow, and then the job of separating the grain from the stalk and husks could be done. My back aches just at the thought of it. It was all day long and it was backbreaking work! 'Let me go.'

Yes Ruth's young faith had both hands and feet. She wasn't some Princess in waiting. Friends, what an example she is, (not only to Naomi and all who would see her) but also to all who have read of her life for thousands of years! So often we can complain and blame God for the situations in which we find ourselves, which more often than not, are of our own making. Yes we belly ache and complain about our lot in life, but not Ruth. She chose first to go to Bethlehem, not knowing what would await her. And after their reception, she knew full well that she was the outcast in that land. And yet with her servants heart, she would walk out the door putting herself in danger to provide for this woman that she now called mum! "Let me go." I don't know where I'm going but I'll step out in faith and God will provide. What was she doing? Going looking for work. She's not just sitting back and waiting for dinner to come from the heavens, no. She will go out the front door and actively seek God's provision. Yes she'll keep busy and God will provide!

You know it's interesting, the bible says six days you shall labour, not six days you are going to get paid. There is a lot of work we can do in Christ's Kingdom (and other things) for which we don't get paid. But we can work, we can be busy as we receive God's provision from His hands! A life of laziness is a sin. "Arise O sluggard" the Bible says. And also, "if a man doesn't work he doesn't deserve to eat." Well, in her heart, it seems Ruth knew all of these things. She believed God would provide, so she would go out the door and seek that provision for Naomi and herself. Again notice what she says. "Behind anyone in whose eyes I find favour." She doesn't know these people or where she's going. She only knows that wherever she goes most likely, she won't be welcome. And may well be in danger. As she would be considered fair game, by anyone who finds her! And yet all of these things being considered, she went out! Again dear friends, this is real faith. She sees a need, and the solution, and then goes out the door.

Often we can be very good at identifying a need or a ministry, can't we. Yes we can be very good at seeing a need for someone else to do. And even criticising the way those things are done by others. While we ourselves are happy to sit on our hands and do nothing. Well Ruth was not like that, as she shows us the way! The way of faith. True faith. As she steps forward in the sovereignty and Providence of God. Psalm 13:5-6 "But I trust in your unfailing love, my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me." And this is what she was doing as she acknowledges, that our whole life is in God's Hands. Proverbs 16:9 "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps."

And next I want us to notice these wonderful words of God's determining. "As it turned out." Now again let's be clear, Ruth had no idea of Boaz or where his fields were. And certainly, did not seek them out. Now those words "As it turned out," are simply clear evidences of that "determining" of that, guiding hand of the Almighty. Remember, He leaves no thing to chance! Psalm 139:1-3 "O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise, you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down, you are familiar with all my ways. V13 "for you created my inmost being, You knit me together in my mother's womb." And 15-16 "My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in

the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

Beloved, can you see how intimately God knows us? If He sent His Son to die for us, do you not think that He will do all that is needed to care for us? Well of course He will. But like Naomi here, we don't see it at times. Yes, "as it turned out she found herself working in the field belonging to Boaz who was from the clan of Elimelech."

Brothers and sisters, these kinds of things have happened to Darlene and me so many times throughout our lives as Christians. They've happened at the right time. Not when we've wanted or how we wanted, but that way which God had determined. They are "as it turned out," moments! "You know when I sit and when I rise. You perceive my thoughts from afar." Yes we are intimately known and cared for by God. Whatever comes to us be it ease or hardship ultimately, they all come from His Hand for our benefit and blessing! You see Boaz was the man all along that God intended for Ruth. And as we will see, their first child would be called Obed. The father of Jesse, the father of King David. And all of the line of Jesus! We have been seeing the character, the noble character of this young woman.

And now, we will begin to see that same character in the man whom God had chosen for her! V4 "Just then." Now was this a chance meeting? No. I've already said that God leaves no thing to chance. No this is another one of those "as it turned out," moments. "Just then Boaz arrived from Jerusalem and greeted the harvesters." And notice the words he uses. "The Lord be with you." He says. It's not, what a great day guys. Or, It's a great day for work. Or anything along those lines, no. He invokes the name of God. That His blessing would be upon them in their labours. Now that's the way to start the day isn't it. Acknowledging that God is with us in all things!

You know, this really is something which we as Christians should do more of. To in some way seek to acknowledge God in every part of our lives. Doing this we acknowledge that which is due to him. "The Lord be with you" "The Lord bless you" they reply. And as we read between the lines, not only is Boaz a man of standing and respect, as I mentioned earlier, he is also a man who is loved by his workers. As they pronounce a blessing upon the boss, so to speak. Surely the worth and character of a boss, is clearly reflected in the respect and admiration of those who work for him. This guy was not only a man of standing in the community, he was man of God who lived out his faith. You see, it is clear from their response that he treated his workers well and not only that, he ran his property in accordance with God's law, concerning providing for the poor the foreigner or stranger in town. You see, the harvesters were not permitted by God to go back over the field a second or third time. And as the commentator Ian Duguid explains, this was in a real sense, God's welfare for the poor, the needy and the stranger in town! Yet notice, that they didn't get it brought to their door, no. This was a 'work for the dole'-like scheme. I've said it before brothers and sisters, it's terrible that you can sit at home, even for years, and be given money out of the pockets of those who do work, or have retired and have worked for all of their lives. And when the idea that people work for their welfare is mooted, do-gooders jump up and down saying that this is demeaning and robs people of their rights. Well what absolute rubbish. This is a God ordained biblical principle. If people on welfare knew they wouldn't get their money without doing 3 days of work, they'd be out the door early each day. This was the reality for Ruth and anyone else who had no means. There was provision to be had in the fields, but no one was going to give it to you on a platter, it was going to take hard work! Well as salutations are exchanged, Boaz notices someone new. V5 "Whose young woman is that?" Not who is she? But in effect, to whom does she belong? I've never seen her here before. From whose family is she? Where does she fit in society, that she is gleaning in my field? We know this is the gist of the

conversation by the foreman's reply. And there again are the words, "she's the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi."

But what we are not told, is that behind the scenes, the story of Ruth has spread throughout the whole city! So what we learn here, is that though we come from the most despised of places, Noble character, (godly character) overcomes even the greatest of prejudices. Because although he begins with "the Moabitess from Moab," what he goes on to say is both a testimony and a tribute to that Noble character!

V7 "she went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter." And in v11 we learn, that though Boaz had not even met the young woman, he'd already drawn a picture of esteem and admiration for her in his mind. Look at what he says: v11, 'I've been told all about what you have done for your mother in law since the death of your husband; how you left your father and mother and your homeland to live with a people you did not know before.' And we read in 1 Peter 2:11-12: "Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world to abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans, that though they accuse you of doing wrong they may see your good deeds and glorify God in the day He visits us." What Peter speaks of, Ruth was doing over 1000 years before. And notice, (unlike what so many in Christianity espouse and desire today,) that it wasn't miracles, it wasn't the spectacular, it wasn't clever words or schemes which had so impressed so many throughout Bethlehem, it was the testimony of a humble, faithful and noble character. Which was evidenced in those practical loving ways of service!

Yes Beloved, a godly and noble character, trumps and overcomes the deepest and darkest of prejudice and baggage we may carry, while also testifying to the work of Christ within us! Let us all pray, that such a character, God made graciously plant deep within us. That our lives too, like that of Ruth, and all of the glorious Saints throughout the millennia, would testify to the truth of the gracious work of God within us! Yes, "let me go." These words spell out "I love you mum." "Let me go."

Let's Pray!