



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



HG25: Ruth (2/4) *The Greatest Of These Is Love*

Ruth 2:1 - 23

Home Group Study Notes

24th January 2010 - Pauline Woolnough



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources that might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)

God's provision for the poor, throughout the Bible (and we see this in our study of Ruth) was simple and effective. And, whilst we in the 21C don't have fields for others to glean from, we can support organizations who work for the poor (both at home and abroad) by doing such things as sponsoring a child; buying a goat and shopping ethically, etc. Share the way in which you (can) do this with your Home Group.



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing some Songs of Praise, or listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers; etc.





Looking Upwards (40 mins) *Bible Study*

Read through the text for this study, Ruth 2:1-23, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers with your Home Group.

1. We see that it is Ruth, encouraged in her young faith, who believed that God will provide as she goes out to glean in the fields whilst Naomi has lost her way. It is only later on, vs20, that Naomi praises God once more. For those of you who have been Christians for some time, do you ever feel that your older more mature faith lacks the passion and vibrancy of your more youthful one?

2. Ruth and Naomi both needed their situation to improve but instead of just waiting for things to change, Ruth took the initiative and went out to glean in the fields. Once there, God provided. She met Boaz and her life changed. God needed Ruth to take the first step in order to implement His plan for her life. Is there something in your life you need to change? Are you willing, like Ruth to take the initiative and do the hard work and show God how important your need for change is?

3. Ruth had nowhere else to go to other than to God for help, and through Boaz her situation was redeemed, she was rescued. By going to the field and gleaning she was willing to be seen as someone who was in need. How willing are we to share our needs with our home group? How honest are we with one another about the state of our spiritual health?

Her sister, Orpah, went back to Moab, to her father's house - maybe she would have a husband and a comfortable life back there but Ruth was saying: 'Look, it's better to be poor and live among people who have a God like the God of Israel, than be married and living in comfort, or be a well-paid reaper anywhere else'. People were born into the Jewish faith but Ruth was a believer by choice putting her faith in God voluntarily. What a girl!

We are so fortunate in where we live, we have food, comfort, good lives, but given the choice of whatever the world has to offer, any amount of riches, even at the threat of persecution, what we need to be able to say is: "I'd rather have Jesus, just give me Jesus. I'll take God's protection in the face of any threat, I'll seek God's shelter in the face of danger." Ruth had nowhere else to turn and sometimes we need to reach that place of nowhere else to go before we find the outpouring of God's grace and His favour. God rescued Ruth and Naomi and He used Boaz for that purpose. Ruth went on to marry Boaz and they lived happily ever after. God brought them together and I believe because of that, their relationship would have been a strong and loving one. God is love, that's what He does and what He wants above all for us is to live within loving relationships with partners, friends and family. God rescued us personally through His Son Jesus, those of us who know him, and accept him as Saviour *have* been rescued, but so often it doesn't feel like we have a happy ever after ending. Life drags us down, we become weary, we can end up drifting and eventually become lost. We need to be rescued, spiritually saved and revived once more by God's Spirit.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:1-3: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" and by that He means, like Ruth, be humble and unpretentious, knowing your need of God. We can be well fed, well educated, have full and rewarding lives but our spiritual lives can be poor. If you want to know how spiritually poor you are think about your prayer life. What is your individual prayer life like? What is the prayer life of your home group like? What is the corporate prayer life of the church like? We will never live as God intended us to live like, and draw on his love, see his blessings in our lives, and find His guidance if our prayer lives are shallow. If that is the case then we are guilty of pride believing we can fully provide for ourselves and have little need from God.

I know personally that there are many in the congregation who feel spiritually tired, we hanker after times when we were more aware of the presence of God in our lives. I know that there are some people who feel all adrift and at sea desperately hoping that a life raft or a rescue boat will come along and take them once more into harbour and safety. I know this because I also feel like this at times.

Because of this what I would like you to do next week in your home groups is, rather than spend a lot of time discussing and answering too many questions on this study I want to suggest that you turn down a few lights, maybe light some candles, get comfortable and spend about half an hour together quietly in the presence of God. If your spirit feels undernourished, share it with one another and tell the Father. If you have lost that sense of intimacy with God and perhaps even at times shy away from it, tell the Father, and ask Him to help you recapture it. If you want your spirit revived and your passion and longing for Jesus restored, tell Him, and if you feel in need of rescue wanting to be dragged out of the doldrums that you find yourself in then tell the Lord, express your needs and your longings to Him and then know that just as Ruth sought shelter under the Lord's wings so can you.

This is the message of the gospel in the Old Testament and the New Testament. God's love for each of us is endless, it knows no bounds, and he will have mercy and show favour to anyone who humbles himself like Ruth and takes refuge under His wings. I urge you all to do it and then see what God will do.

Later at lunchtime Boaz invites Ruth to, “*come over here have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar*”, v14. How could she resist? She ate her fill and there was even enough left over for her to take home for Naomi. He then told his men to allow her to gather some grain from the sheaves and to leave some out for her. So after a long day gleaning and as a result of Boaz’s generosity, Ruth was able to take home an amount measuring the equivalent to anything between 13 and 25 kilograms. I don’t know how she managed to carry it home! It was a very successful day for Ruth and when she went back home, Naomi was of course delighted.

In vs20 Naomi says: “*The Lord bless him! Naomi said to her daughter in law. “He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead. She added, “That man is one of our kinsman redeemers.”* Naomi was referring to the Lord’s kindness because it was the Lord who brought the famine to an end enabling them to return home. It was the Lord who bound Ruth to Naomi in love and led her to stay with her, it was the Lord who guided Ruth to Boaz’s field, she didn’t just happen to come to his field, and it was the Lord who brought them together. Finally, Naomi could see that God had not abandoned them, that He *had* been involved in their journey so far and she could also see Him at work in what was unfolding. The light of God’s love broke through brightly once more for Naomi to see Him. Naomi referred to Boaz as one of their “kinsman redeemers.”

We will look at this in more detail in the following chapters but Old Testament law provided that a kinsman could buy back an estate which had been lost through poverty (Leviticus 25:23-55) and this kept the land in the possession of the family. The kinsman had to be willing and in a position to redeem but the widow seeking redemption had to make the first move.

In Deuteronomy 25:5-6 we see that if a married man died without a son, one of his brothers was to marry the widow and bear children who would carry on the dead brother’s name. The kinsman was also to ‘redeem’ (or buy back) any of the deceased man’s property as well, which the first born son would then inherit. Of course, we see the obvious parallel with Jesus whose love redeems us from a life of sin and hopelessness. He purchased us not with money but with His precious blood as He sacrificed Himself for us by dying on the cross, making us His possession and securing for us our eternal inheritance.

The reason God showed mercy to Ruth was because she sought refuge under His wings. She looked to God for shelter and counted his protection better than anybody else’s. Naomi’s other daughter in law returned to her family and went back to Moab to worship a false god. Ruth chose to stay with Naomi, she chose to leave the old religion behind and she set her heart on God and placed her hope in Him. Staying with Naomi didn’t earn Ruth God’s favour. He didn’t reward Ruth because of anything she did for Naomi. She earned His favour because she sought His protection, and when someone does that, God’s honour is at stake. He then does what He loves to do above all else, He rescues those who come to Him in faith and trust Him for their help. *We* did nothing to earn God’s favour or grace but He gives it to us when we seek His protection offered to us through the blood of His Son Jesus Christ. But even when we are in that place of acceptance with God, and when we’ve become His children we can still fail to receive His abundant favour and help in our lives because we are content to rely on ourselves for our provision. Too often we leave coming to God as a last resort, and He becomes our safety net, to be considered when all other avenues have been explored. When we have used up our own resources, and when we are absolutely desperate - we might as well try prayer.

We All Need To Be Rescued: Psalm 84:10 says: “*I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of the wicked.*” That is what Ruth was saying in chapter 1 when she chose to turn her back on her old way of life and its what she is reminding us of here. She surrendered to the sovereignty of God and, in chapter 2, we see her living in poverty.

“The Heart of Revival is the Revival of the Heart”

What does that statement say to you? Is your heart in need of revival? Does your spirit feel undernourished? Has your passion for Jesus and His work faltered? Has your longing for intimacy with the Father and your desire and need to spend time with him lessened? Is your prayer life suffering? If any of these questions say something about where you are at the moment then you need God to rescue you - and all He is looking for are some honest answers. Be honest with one another and share how you feel, you may discover that you are not alone.

Now, if possible, turn down those bright lights, light a few candles, get comfy and, in safety with one another, be still and wait in the presence of God. His heart beats with a passion to show us His love for us, we are His cherished children, loving us so much that no price was too much to pay to redeem and rescue us. At times, we all need to be refreshed by God to have our vision of Him and His love for us restored - don’t leave your meeting without discovering this. After your quiet time, share with one another what God said to you and commit to spend more time like this in prayer.

(Leaders note, you may want use some of the following to read quietly during the quiet time: Isaiah 46:3-4; Jeremiah 31:2-3; Extracts from Psalm 139)

Prayer

My Jesus, our Jesus, in faith we know that we are carried, at your heart, and in your hands.

He says: “I have made you and I will bear: I will comfort and carry you.” “I have loved you with an everlasting love.”

We say: “Let me rest in you with closed eyes in perfect trust, receiving all, from you, *in* you my Jesus.” **Amen.**



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG25: Ruth (2/4) *The Greatest Of These Is Love*

Ruth 2:1 - 23

Home Group Sermon Notes

24th January 2010 - Pauline Woolnough

God's Compassion For The Poor: Leviticus 19:9-10 says: "*When you harvest your crops do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields and do not pick up what the harvesters drop ... Leave them for the poor and the foreigners who live among you, for I the Lord am your God.*" Anyone picking up the crop in this manner was called a gleaner, whereas an employee of the farmer would be a reaper. Ruth wasn't too proud to do lowly and menial work and to admit that she was hard up and in financial need. She could probably still have gone home to her own family and been a reaper in someone's field but she had made her choice to stay with Naomi so now the only job vacancy open to her was that of a gleaner

Right from the very beginning, God set up systems that would allow the poor and needy to provide for themselves and enable them to work, this applied to both Jews and foreigners alike. He knew that many would need help, some would be without money or jobs, women would be widowed and rather than them have to rely on handouts or worse, starve, He made it law that a farmer was not allowed to harvest the crop around the edges of his field. Anything that was dropped was to be left for those in need to pick up. The purpose of the law was to feed the poor and also to stop the wealthy landowner from hoarding and keeping more than he needed for himself. God provided the world with an abundance of everything, no one needs to go without. Naomi would no doubt have been teaching Ruth about her faith and God's laws so, although Ruth was young in her faith, she knew enough about the law and God's love for the poor, for her to take advantage of this system and go to a field to glean, or pick up any dropped grain. Although Naomi had become bitter, it was Ruth, in the midst of very difficult circumstances, who believed in God's word against all the odds.

How often do you hear non-believers justify their disbelief because millions in the developing world today go hungry? It's easy for people who don't know God to accuse Him of not caring but here we see how he made provision for them. Today, statistics show that around 25,000 children die each year due to poverty. In developing countries, it's estimated that 27-28% of children are underweight or else their growth is stunted, and in 1997 it was estimated that all that was needed to put every child in school by the year 2000 was less than 1% of what was spent on weapons every year - of course, it didn't happen. It's no surprise to God that there will be over 6 billion people living on earth in 2010. He knew this would be the case and He made ample provision for everyone to be adequately cared for and fed. Many blame Him, but it's not God's fault that about 4 billion people are underfed: it's ours. We see in Ruth and the law in Leviticus that God's love for the poor took their needs into account. He cares very much for them, it's the rest of us that don't.

God's Guidance: So often we can't see God's involvement in our lives, we fail to see Him leading us and we are blind to His love and provision for us. Like Naomi, we can be bitter about how life has treated us, we fail to trust God and we're unhappy with our lot, but bitterness never changed anyone's circumstances, only faith in God can do that.

Ruth and Naomi were living through a difficult period, mourning, and with no men to fend for them, but it was Ruth who maintained what faith she had, she believed in God's word, she believed He would provide and so it was Ruth who set out to pick up left over grain and see if anyone would help them. Her trust is rewarded, vs3: "*As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech*" Suddenly things are not quite as bleak as Naomi had made out in the last chapter. She had implied that there were no men in her family for Ruth to marry but in Boaz we have a very eligible man, who just happens to be a relative of Naomi, and he's wealthy and, by the way he addresses his workers, he's a man of God: he's quite a catch in fact. Ruth ended up in the very field where she would meet the man, who would rescue her and Naomi and eventually marry her. What a coincidence, what a bit of luck, but of course we know that luck had nothing to do with it!?

Proverbs 3:5-6 says: "*Trust in the Lord, with all your heart; and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths.*" That's what Ruth was doing. She was trusting the word of God and when we trust in the Lord's word He guides us and our lives change. The Lord led Ruth to Boaz - she didn't know of Boaz before or that he was the wealthy relative of her dead father-in-law, but it was God plan for each of them that they should be brought together.

Boaz was a good man, an influential man, a godly man but he was still a man, and Ruth caught his eye, in fact, I think he took a bit of a shine to her, after all it was God's plan for them to be together. He asks his workers: "Who is that girl over there, who does she belong to, is she married, who are her family?" When told that she is with Naomi, Boaz welcomes her, tells her to stay working in his field alongside the girls and that his men won't bother her. Now, although gleaners were allowed on the field they were only really tolerated by farmers, they certainly weren't welcomed - they put up with them because God's law said they had to! Yet Boaz goes beyond the normal requirements of hospitality offering Ruth comfort breaks and drinks when she's thirsty.

Although pleased, Ruth seems somewhat suspicious, she is grateful for his help but wary of the attention, he's a stranger, what does he want? She asks Boaz why he is helping her so much, especially when she is a foreigner. Vs11-12 are important, he is rather enthusiastic in his response saying that he is well aware of Naomi's story and how Ruth deserves to be helped and blessed by his God. "*Boaz replied, 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 and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.*"

God's Grace: When Ruth asked why Boaz was showing her such favour, or grace, he told her it was because of her love for Naomi and her willingness to leave her own family and serve her in a strange land, vs11. He explained that he was not rewarding her, rather it was God who was showing favour because she had sought His protection and His help. "*Under whose wings you have come to take refuge.*" And we have a beautiful picture of God as a strong winged Eagle and Ruth as a threatened little eaglet coming to find safety under the Eagle's wings. Vs12 implies that God will reward Ruth *because* she has sought refuge under his wings.

This is a theme that runs through the OT Psalm 57:1 says: "*Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed.*" Note the word '*for*.' "*Have mercy on me for in you my soul takes refuge.*"