



### 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?



### HG26: Ruth (3/4) *The Midnight Meeting*

**Ruth 3:1-18**

### Home Group Study Notes

14th February 2010 - Revd Paul A. Carr



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)

Wednesday 17th February is Ash Wednesday and marks the beginning of Lent a time, traditionally, when Christians abstain from certain foods, as we remember Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness. What, if anything, might you be giving up for Lent this year? Is this *giving up* a helpful discipline for the Christian, or should more emphasis be placed on things we could *do* during the period of Lent?



### 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 3:1-18, 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:** Is your faith a fatalistic faith or a faith that believes in the sovereignty of God? What might Romans 8:28 mean to you, as you consider events in your own life, and events in the lives of other Christians?

**2:** Impatience can, sometimes, be a dangerous thing. Have you ever wavered in your faith during a time of crisis simply because you feel as though God has forgotten about you?

**3:** Naomi has experienced a huge change of heart during this story. From feeling bitter in ch1, she is now pursuing God's blessing – and she was determined to get it one way or the other. What can you learn from Naomi's persistence in seeking God's blessing in your life?

There was no need to worry, vs10-11, as Boaz understood perfectly what she was saying and was struck by her motives and devotion. She could have sought after younger men, but Ruth was of such a noble character herself that she realised there is more to being a good man than having good looks – so there's hope for some of us then! Ruth wanted to fulfil her obligation of providing a male heir for Naomi's family, she also wanted to fulfil God's will, which was more important than fulfilling her own desires - that could have been had by returning home to Moab. And Boaz saw that, which is why he speaks of the 'kindness' she has shown. He uses the word 'hesed' which we saw at the beginning of the book, the covenant-love which God himself shows towards his people, that is the sort of love she is showing too - putting her new family obligations before her own, even in being willing to marry this much older man. So yes, for a woman like this Boaz will do anything to redeem her, vs13.

Well, *almost* anything, because there is one fly in the ointment, someone else is first in line! Just when we looked like we were in for a happy ending, there's a snag. There was another relative who was a nearer kinsman-redeemer than he was and so legally had first call on Ruth vs12. In the Hebrew system of Levirate marriage, the closest relative had first choice. Boaz has to put his wedding plans on hold. But he was going to do God's work, God's way. There was no question of him trying to take a short cut by casting God's law to one side and illegally taking Ruth as his wife. No, he too would have to trust in God. And as sensitive as ever to the needs of Ruth, Boaz tells her to wait until morning before she leaves. He doesn't want her character stained by idle gossip (vs14). And then he wonderfully provides for her and Naomi, using her shawl as a carrier he pours so much grain into it that she staggers back under his generosity, vs15-17. Do you remember how both Ruth and Naomi arrived in Bethlehem 'empty?' Well now they are 'full' - a pointer to a greater fullness yet to come. Again, in Boaz we see a foreshadowing of Jesus don't we: the kinsman-redeemer *par excellence*.

The last verse in this chapter, vs18, makes me laugh. Naomi has been planning and scheming all this time and now that God has taken care of her mess she tells Ruth to just relax and not worry about it. It's easy to relax when you know that things are going to work out, but true obedience is when we relax and not worry about things that we are not sure about. What we must strive for is the ability to trust God in all things at all times.

**Conclusion:** When faced with the task of securing our redemption, Jesus didn't put his Heavenly Father's Scriptures to one side, yielding to the devil's continuous temptation to take the easy way out. Was Jesus deluded by the language and flattering sweet talk of Satan during his 40 days in the wilderness? No. He was committed to fulfilling his purpose of coming to this earth: which was that His bride, the Church, was going to be purchased with a broken body and spilt blood as he allowed himself to be nailed to a tree to satisfy the demands of God's justice, the innocent one suffering for us, the guilty ones. And the same generous offer is open to each of us. Those who pursue God's blessing will be blessed. Those who trust in God's protection will be protected. Those who come to him burdened will find rest. Those who come to him empty will go away full. His promises do not change, because his loving character does not change. His is a love, which will not let us go and which will be with us whatever circumstances we find ourselves in life.

She enters that barn trusting that she is under the protective wings of refuge. She has heard of the promises of the LORD, she has already experienced something of his gracious provision, the signs look favourable, *but* 100% success is not guaranteed beforehand. That is where trust comes in. And you may well be here this morning wondering whether God will accept someone like you? You have been looking into the Christian faith, it seems to make sense, but you cannot be absolutely sure. And if you were to become a Christian, putting yourself under the wings of refuge, then what? What will your family say, your friends? Will you keep it up? I am quite sure that similar doubts went through Ruth's mind as she slowly made her way into that barn.

Would any friendship be formed, any marriage entered into, any venture made without that element of risk? Would anyone get out of bed in a morning unless they were given an absolute guarantee that nothing was going to go wrong? Of course not. And so it is with that most important relationship of all, our relationship with God. He has given us just enough light in his Word regarding his character and his purpose for our lives, to enable us to take one step at a time, but no more, so that our dependence upon him remains fresh and living moment by moment. I don't know what decision you may be having to make this coming week or how it will turn out, but I do know this, if you are a believer, the one who has called you is faithful. His wings of refuge extend even to you. And it is in Ruth's request in vs9 that we see her really launch out in expectant faith, taking a risk. Now this is very clever. What she is saying is deliberately ambiguous. On the one hand the phrase in Hebrew means 'marry me'. To 'spread the corner of your garment' is a little like a woman today asking for an engagement ring to be placed on her finger. On the other hand the word for 'garment' is the same word used back in 2:12 for 'wings' spread your wings over me, the 'wings of God's refuge' which Boaz commended Ruth for seeking.

So do you see what she is saying? 'You prayed for my blessing Boaz, since I sought the protective wings of the Lord. Well, you are my dead husband's relative, a kinsman-redeemer. Shouldn't you do more than pray for me? You have a responsibility under God's law to provide for me. Don't you see Boaz, you could be the answer to your own prayer. Maybe God is calling you to be the protective wings he wants to spread over me. So marry me'. Was it a leap year? You can't say Ruth is backward in coming forward can you?! Again do you see how true piety is practical? So what happens? Will she be thrown out as a wanton opportunist?

**Boaz: Reflecting God's Character, vs10-18:** An advert in a paper read:

*SBF seeks male companionship, ethnicity not important, good-looking, I love to play, long walks in the woods, hunting, camping, fishing, riding in your pick-up truck, cosy winter nights by the fire, a candlelight dinner will have me eating out of your hands, rub me the right way and watch me respond, I'll be at the front door when you get home from work wearing only what nature gave me, kiss me and I am yours, call 404-875-6420, and ask for Daisy.*

How many men are tempted by that? 15,000 men called the Atlanta Dogs Home about a yellow Labrador named Daisy! But would Boaz be swept off his feet by Ruth's words?

**4:** Naomi used 'common sense' in encouraging Ruth to make a special effort for Boaz, vs3. Paul suggested that there is no conflict between being spiritual and using common sense. Can you think of any examples in your own life, the life of others and/or the life of Emmanuel, where this might be true?

**5:** Paul spoke about faith, always having an element of risk. Have you ever taken a 'leap of faith' such as Ruth? What were the consequences of this? Might God be prompting you to take a risk at this moment in time? If so, what might that be?

**6:** As keen as Boaz may have been to marry Ruth, he wasn't prepared to ignore the rights of his relative and cast God's law aside, rather, he trusted in God's timing and sovereignty. Can you think of a situation where you: a) Have taken a situation into your own hands and lived to regret your decision; b) Have not been so hasty, waited and trusted in God, and received His blessing in your situation?



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



## HG26: Ruth (3/4) *The Midnight Meeting*

Ruth 3:1-18

### Home Group Sermon Notes

14th February 2010 - Revd Paul A. Carr

**Introduction:** Some three months have passed since the barley harvest and nothing seems to have happened. You can imagine what these women were going through? Waiting is difficult for us at the best of times, isn't it, but when you are in the middle of a crisis and there is no end yet in sight, waiting can so easily turn into restless longing. And that is when we impatiently ask the question: Where is God? Why doesn't He *do* something? Well, we are back to the central theological message of this book, that of the hidden and active and sovereign God who is continuously at work amongst his people even when it *appears* that nothing is happening. Sometimes God disappears completely into the tapestry of everyday life and we assume he has forgotten us. But nothing could be further from the truth: He is still working, perhaps not in the way we would choose, but he is at work nonetheless achieving his eternal purpose through us and for us. And we need to remember that, don't we? When we are experiencing the waiting game: God is still present, for he is a God who keeps his promises: 'I will never leave you, nor forsake you' says the Lord. And that is precisely what Ruth and Naomi were about to discover. This morning I want to look at ch3 under three headings:

**Naomi: Pursuing God's Blessing, vs1-5:** We've seen a bit of a turn around as far as Naomi is concerned, haven't we? From asking people to call her Mara (bitter) 'because the Lord has forsaken me' (1:20) she is beginning to see the hand of God on her and Ruth's life – especially with the arrival of Boaz on the scene.

One of the greatest blessings that God can give, according to the Bible is 'rest.' And that is the blessing Naomi seeks for her daughter-in-law according to vs1, 'My daughter should I not try to find you *rest*', which is a better rendering than 'home' as the NIV describes it. Now that one word 'rest' is expectant with meaning. In the Scriptures it carries overtones of Eden, after God created the world he pronounced it very good and *he* rested, proclaiming the seventh day a special day of 'Sabbath' rest. It speaks of harmony, wholeness, satisfaction and peace. It was the promise made to the Israelites when slaves in Egypt: 'My presence will go with you and I will give you rest.' said God. But because of our rebellion against Him we experience unrest: a disturbed conscience, troubled relationships, wars, constant friction. But God's desire in redeeming us is to restore us into a state of harmonious relationships: rest or peace with himself and peace with others. So the greatest blessing anyone could ever receive is 'rest' or to use another Bible word 'salvation.'

And that is what Naomi wishes here for Ruth, obviously expressed in this culture in terms of having a family provided for by God, but invariably pointing *us*, to the ultimate rest which will come in heaven (remember Jesus' words in Matthew 11:27).

So Naomi had her priorities right; she wanted the best for Ruth, not so much a big house and well to do surroundings, but the *rest* which the Lord gives to his people: an expression of his covenant love. I wonder, what it is that you want most of all for those you love? Those of you who have children, for example, maybe not your own, but grandchildren, nephews, godchildren. What is uppermost in your hopes and prayers for them? A good education; great career; marrying into the right family? What about them becoming faithful followers of the Lord Jesus, and so knowing the rest he offers? That should be our passion, as it was Naomi's.

But far from this being a mere pious hope on the part of Naomi, she takes practical steps to secure it. Sure, this book speaks of God's hand invisibly at work in all the so called 'coincidences' but it also emphasizes the part we play in co-operating with God, real faith is always *active* faith. Have you noticed the feminine planning that went into all of this? First, the beauty treatment, vs2: 'I think a little splash of Chanel No. 5 wouldn't go amiss tonight my dear,' says Naomi. 'And what about that nice little black number you look so pretty in?' Then secondly, the right moment, vs3-4 'Night time is much more romantic than the day, don't you think?' And you need to catch him in the right mood. So go down to the threshing floor, after they have been celebrating the gathering in of the harvest, he is bound to be in good spirits then. But don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet, and lie down. He will tell you what to do.'

Now, I don't think Naomi is being particularly manipulative here. In this culture, it is just good old fashioned common sense. And being spiritual and full of common sense are not necessarily in opposition to each other. If we seek for people to receive God's blessing of 'rest' - salvation - and all the riches which come with it, then without being underhand we, too, need to be wise in commending ourselves and our faith to people and avoid unnecessarily putting them off. And this principle of practical common sense - which the Bible calls wisdom - applies to all our witnessing: in the home, to friends, at work. So let's see how this works out with Ruth, trusting in God's protection

**Ruth: Trusting in God's Protection, vs6-9:** Now you have to give Ruth full marks for courage if not outright audacity. Can you imagine the enormous risk she was taking? By approaching this man in pitch dark she was gambling not only with her dignity but her chastity as she lay at his feet, which in this culture is the place of submission. If he chose to take advantage of the situation she would have no defence. What on earth did she think she was doing uncovering a man at that time of night? Had she read the man's character properly? Was he sober? Would he understand her motives correctly? It was one enormous risk she was taking all right. John Wimber used to spell faith RISK! But faith, by definition, involves an element of risk otherwise it wouldn't be faith. But of course, this is not the reckless risk of a teenage joy rider; it is the calculated risk of someone who knows her God.