

# A QUIET TALE OF ORDINARY FOLK

## The Story of Ruth

### Preface

I am indebted to Malcolm Ryan for his valuable help in both the series of *Sound Words* radio programmes on the book of Ruth and this booklet which he has written to accompany it. As with all the *Sound Words* programmes, it is our desire that as you read this booklet God himself will speak to you and help you to understand something of the wonder of his grace. The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 5 verse 19 that *'God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.'* And it is Christ who is the Redeemer and Saviour of all who trust him. The history of Ruth and the way a man named Boaz came to her aid, is a wonderful picture of the way the Lord Jesus Christ comes to sinners in order to deliver them from their sin and its consequences. Malcolm Ryan has brought this out in a lovely way in this book, and it is our prayer that you will find Christ to be your Redeemer as you read it and apply the message of the Bible to your own life.

Derek French  
Summer 2001

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### Introduction

The Old Testament book of Ruth has been described as one of "irresistible charm" and as being a story of "perfection

and simplicity". It most certainly is. It is, to say the least, a work of art and has been admired and respected by some of the greatest writers, including men like Samuel Johnson, the literary giant of the 18th century.

In fact, he went so far as to make a copy of Ruth's story, then he read it to the members of a literary club in London. These people were under the impression that it was an up-to-date composition, something he had recently come across. And they all praised it highly. Only after this did Dr Johnson tell them that it was from the book they had previously rejected. It was from the Bible.

Of course, those of us who love the Bible know that God's words will always prove true, no matter who rejects them. But maybe there is someone who is not sure one way or the other; someone reading these words who is curious about what God has to say. Well, keep on reading, friend, because in this "quiet tale of ordinary folk" you might find what your heart has been yearning for.

Malcolm Ryan

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### Chapter 1 My way or his?

This is a true story of personal faith, with Ruth starting out as a member of a race hostile both to God and his chosen nation Israel. Israel at the time was ruled by national heroes known as judges. Between the invasion of Canaan (under Joshua's leadership) and the setting up of a monarchy, these were sad and sorry days when the

Israelites often turned from God and, as a result, suffered badly at the hands of their enemies. Yet we are going to see a chain of events, divinely set in motion, which will bring Ruth into the caring arms of a man called Boaz and into a knowledge of the Lord God of Israel.

Involved in this chain of events there are several other interesting people. The first of these is Elimelech – a man who did not live up to his name! His name meant “my God is King”. That was a wonderful name to have and should have described his character, except for the fact that Elimelech decided to take matters into his own hands.

Here is what happened.

It was probably less than a hundred years since the children of Israel had left the land of Goshen in Egypt and entered the promised land of Canaan. God had promised to lead them into this land and look after them there (Joshua 1:2-6). As they obeyed him, so this would bring the benefits of victory, peace and prosperity. By the same token, if they disobeyed it would lead to defeat, famine ... all sorts of misery (Deuteronomy 28). But in the book of Judges – which covers the period we are looking at – we read that in those days Israel had no king, and everyone did whatever seemed right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6).

Still today, millions live without any consideration for others. And maybe that is why the famous song, “My way”, has been so popular over the years. It appeals to self-will, the strongest of our desires.

### **Into the wilderness**

Doing things “my way” may get a round of applause from a world that seeks to please itself. But in our relationship with God, going our own way is never right. If a nation refuses to do the will of God, if an individual refuses to say, “Not my will, but yours be done”, then that person should not expect to be blessed. And because Israel did evil in the eyes of the Lord, it is hardly surprising that he allowed the fierce, camel-riding Midianites to sweep in, ravaging the land and ruining the crops (Judges 6:1-5). This resulted in a serious food shortage, which is why we are told that in the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land of Judah (Ruth 1:1).

It is at this point that Elimelech starts to think that he and his family might do better if they leave their home in Bethlehem and go to live somewhere else for a while. So on his say-so that is just what they do. Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons leave the place of God’s appointment – they leave “the house of bread”, as Bethlehem is known – and migrate to Moab on the far side of the Dead Sea. In other words, they go out of the Promised Land and into the wilderness!

But then, Elimelech was not the first and will not be the last believer to try to sort out a problem in his own way instead of seeking the help of God. Abraham had also done that. Called out of Ur of the Chaldeans, he was directed by the Lord to the land of Canaan (see Acts 7:2-4). And in his day there was a famine, the first of thirteen

recorded in the Bible. As each day passed without rain in Canaan, so the roots of plants strained for water and everything got scorched.

In the account of this in Genesis 12 we see no hint of prayer and no turning to God at this time. All we are told is that *“there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live”* (v10) – nothing in between, except we may assume that Abram panicked. What happened then, when he was out of God’s will, was the embarrassing episode of letting Pharaoh think that Sarai was his sister and not his wife (v12-13).

In the moment of difficulty Abram had been tempted to reach for alternatives. But Egypt, even though it had greener pastures, was not the real estate God had promised him. If only he’d gone to the Lord with his fears and hunger instead of striking out on his own. It was the same with Elimelech.

### **Swill of the sty**

When things do not turn out quite as we expected, it is so easy to take our eyes off the Lord. Then we see only the circumstances and, rather than trust him, we make our own arrangements. This is what Elimelech did. He saw the state things were in, sighed deeply, and decided to go his own way on this one. This was not a good decision! He should not have gone into Moab, whatever the conditions in the Promised Land. Several times in Israel’s history, God called for a famine to show his displeasure. And what with the state of moral decline that existed in the days of

the judges, things had really hit rock bottom.

Yet when a believer is where he is meant to be (and we are talking here about the Promised Land of God’s will), then God can bring him through. God can and will provide. He would have done this, too, if only Elimelech had trusted him. But no, out into the wilderness this man and his family went, the same wilderness where Israel had wandered for 40 years, unable to enter the land of promise *“because of their unbelief”* (Hebrews 3:19). This was ironic, don’t you think? And journeying some 50 miles, Elimelech with Naomi and their sons settled in Moab.

What was so bad about Moab? This name was thoroughly disliked by the children of Israel. And with good reason. There was, you see, a distant blood relationship involved. Moab, from whom this country got its name, was a son of Lot by an incestuous union with his daughter (Genesis 19:36-37). Lot was Abraham’s nephew, and in time the Moabites would become a thorn in the side of Israel. This led God to put up a wall, so to speak, between the two peoples. He did that because the Moabites would not show any hospitality to his people during their wilderness journey, and even hired Balaam to curse them (Deuteronomy 23:3-6). And, as if this was not enough, the Moabites worshipped horrible demon gods.

It was into these sinful surroundings that Elimelech took his family, far from where the name of God was known and honoured. Then, sad to report, Elimelech never got out

of Moab. He was a prodigal who stayed in the pigpen. Perhaps he even got to like the swill of the sty more than the house of bread!

What is the lesson here for us? The chorus of a well-known hymn sums it up:

*“Trust and obey,  
for there’s no other way  
to be happy in Jesus,  
but to trust and obey.”*

God wants us to live in obedience to his Word, the Bible. Never mind about doing what is right in our own eyes, it is what is right in his eyes that matters! So if today we find that we have been disobeying God, if we have been going our own way on something, let us humbly confess that to the Lord and seek his forgiveness. Having done that, let us ask him to help us live his way.

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## **Chapter 2 Life out of death**

The scene that is painted into the background of Ruth’s story is an unhappy one. But while we are in Ruth chapter one, let us learn from it what we can. As I often told our twin children while they were growing up, “Learn from your mistakes, but better still (and less painful!) learn from other people’s”. I then went on to tell them some of the stupid things I had done in the hope and prayer that they would be a lot less stupid! And I am grateful to say that, by the unmerited kindness of God and the good portion of common sense he bestowed upon them, they understood

quite quickly most of the time!

Prevention is better than cure, as they say. Elimelech was someone who did believe in God, but he was drifting. That is always a dangerous thing to do. Bit by bit, little by little, it can happen to any one of us. The light of faith that once burned so brightly in our heart flickers and becomes dim. And before we know it, we have lost that all-important vision of a great God doing great things. For Elimelech, this had disastrous results. The far country was about to become a graveyard for all but one of his family, starting with him. *“Now Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died”*, we are told (Ruth 1:3). What a waste of a life! Every breath he had taken in Moab had served only to underline the forsaking of what his name meant. And the principle at work here applies to anyone who goes against the grain of God’s will. Because when we no longer see God as King, life has little meaning.

So Naomi was left with her two sons. Their names were Mahlon and Kilion. The name Mahlon has been translated as meaning “sickly” and Kilion as meaning “pining”. A couple of unhealthy specimens, for sure! It makes you feel sorry for Naomi, doesn’t it? She had had a husband who did not live up to his name and a couple of sons whose names were all too suitable! Then we are told that these lads both went and married Moabite women. Since these women were unbelievers at the time, it is what we would be inclined to call an unequal yoke (2 Corinthians 6:14). One of them was called Orpah; the other was Ruth.

Ah, Ruth! That is who we are particularly interested in. The true and living God. One day a family had moved into the neighbourhood. A family of believers. Ruth had never met anyone like them before. They worshipped the very God of creation – the all-powerful, personal, spiritual being who has made all things and keeps it all going. For Ruth, this discovery must have acted like a magnet.

As time went by, Naomi would have talked about her faith to the boys and witnessed to her daughters-in-law. Ruth, for one, showed much interest. She doubtless asked questions about the God of the Hebrews, and Naomi told her about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the amazing story of Joseph. She spoke about the exodus, Moses and the Passover lamb. Then, of course, there were the wanderings in the desert. Ruth learned how Balak, the king of her country, had hired Balaam, a prophet from Mesopotamia, to curse the Israelites. And having failed to do that, how he had taught Balak to corrupt them. This was why the law cursed Moab.

There was so much to tell and Ruth took it all in: Joshua and the conquest of Canaan, some stories of the judges – a real history lesson that thrilled her heart. Why? Because here she learned about the true and living God – one who was pure and holy.

### **New life**

Ruth was a very attractive person, both in looks and

manner. The meaning of her name has to do with beauty and friendship. You may therefore be wondering why she would ever consider marrying sickly Mahlon. Well, for the first time in her life Ruth has heard of the living God and her heart and soul are stirred. As a result, she marries into a family that knows him, and in this way she will get to know him even more. In God's sovereign plan this is a first step on a journey of surprises; some of them unwelcome, but all of them necessary. For within 10 years of this family settling in Moab, Mahlon and pining Kilion also die, which leaves Naomi, Ruth and Orpah – three women in grief.

But out of death comes life! The Lord Jesus said (John 12:24), *"I tell you the truth, unless an ear of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."* In saying this, he was referring to his own death and explaining spiritual truth by making a comparison.

When a seed is buried, it is as though it has died. Yet the seed that dies and is buried is equipped with everything it needs to make a new plant. That is to say, it contains an embryo and stored food. Then, when conditions are right – when the seed has imbibed sufficient moisture, taken in oxygen for the purpose of respiration and been warmed to the right temperature – it will germinate. And the plant that develops will go on to produce more of these reproductive structures we call seeds.

That's how one seed becomes many seeds, just as the Lord Jesus said it would. And to really bring home the point, in a book I have on the wonders of the plant kingdom, a former professor of botany at California State University writes, "It is one of Nature's contradictions that flowering plants ... should begin their lives as seeds, the cells of which show no signs of metabolic activity and, therefore, are technically dead." [Brian Capon "Botany for Gardeners" p26 (reprinted., London: B T Batsford Ltd., 1997)]. So, as in the example of an ear of wheat, we realise that death is the means of producing life. And out of the death of Naomi's family, as tragic as that was, we will definitely see new life, new life in Ruth.

Naomi, Ruth and Orpah. Two women destined for heaven, plus one who, it seems, never got there. For the Lord Jesus went on to say (John 12:25), "*The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*" Note the vivid contrast expressed in the words "loves" and "hates". Clinging to life in this world means losing life for eternity. Sadly, we will see this attitude in Orpah when it comes to the moment of decision, whereas the one who loves Christ instead will have his or her priorities right. Things of the world will be hated in comparison, as we will find in Ruth and Naomi.

But before we move on, let us consider this: through Naomi's witness, Ruth and Orpah had been challenged to forsake the false gods of Moab. And when they lost their husbands, they could each have gone to the Lord and found

comfort in him. In fact, the Lord can use the tough times in life to bring us to see our need of him, to cast our cares on him and to be still and know that he is God. And if our commitment to him is genuine, our faith will become stronger during periods of suffering and hardship as we see his faithfulness at work.

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### **Chapter 3 At the crossroads**

Naomi has kept her faith in the goodness of the God of Israel, and after the deaths of her husband and sons she is no longer content to stay in Moab. So when news comes that the famine in her homeland is over, she gets ready to return. As her daughters-in-law seem to be of the same mind, they set out with her on the road to Bethlehem in Judah (Ruth 1:6-7).

But then Naomi does something that may seem a little odd. She tries to persuade her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab. "*Go back each of you, to your mother's home,*" she says. "*May the Lord show kindness to you.*" And that is when the handkerchiefs come out! "*We will go back with you to your people,*" they reply (v8-10). Naomi is concerned, though. She is concerned about the genuineness of their commitment. And she continues to reason with them, explaining just what the situation is going to be when they get to Bethlehem. The Israelites and the Moabites did not have anything to do with each other. The Israelites would not have any dealings with the Moabites, just as later on they refused to have anything to do with the Samaritans. So if these young women go with her, it is not going to be

easy. For one thing, there will be little opportunity to marry again. Naomi, in all fairness, cannot think of one self-respecting Jewish man who would marry a woman from Moab. Ruth and Orpah have to face up to the cost and the decision must be theirs.

So here are these women standing at the crossroads, then out come the handkerchiefs again! Now, just suppose you were walking along that road on that day and you saw these three standing there. You would have thought nothing much was happening. And you would have been wrong! A decision made there was going to determine whether or not the Lord Jesus Christ would be born in Bethlehem. And if the right decision is not made, you might as well e-mail the Wise Men, telling them not to come because he is not going to be born there! That is how important it was.

Yet for Orpah it all becomes too much. She realises she is not prepared to go that far; the cost is too great. And that is the way it is with some people even today. They go to church. They enjoy the company of believers; they like to be among them. But when it comes down to it, they are not *possessors* of the Christian faith; they are only *professors*. They only mimic, at best.

Remember our Lord's parable about the sower, the seed and the soil? Remember what happened to the seed that fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil? The seed grew quickly and all looked well at first, but when the sun

came up, the plants withered away. Why? Because they could not get their "little feet" deep enough to develop a healthy root system! And plants without proper roots do not last (Mark 4:5-6;16-17). Similarly, there are those who hear the gospel message and they get very excited about it. Maybe they even come forward at an evangelistic rally and make a profession of faith. Yet for all that, we cannot assume a genuine conversion has taken place. It may be a passing phase, and that is all. The test is in the going on (Hebrews 6:1). Going on, step by step, and developing in Christlikeness is the proof of whether or not an initial response to the gospel message is real. And in Orpah we see the difference between going on and going back, as she kisses her mother-in-law goodbye (Ruth 1:14).

### **Real Faith**

Orpah's loyalty is not only to her people, but to the gods of the Moabites. Then as she turns back, she walks straight off the pages of the Bible, never to be heard of again. But as for Ruth, she clings to Naomi. That is the difference.

Ruth has real faith. It is a faith that could only come from God. "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith,*" we read in Ephesians 2, "*and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God*" (v8). Grace is from God; so is faith. And with that God-given faith she will cope with whatever she has to. What is more, she will not be put off, whatever Naomi might say.

"*Look,*" says Naomi (Ruth 1:15), "*your sister-in-law is*

*going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”*

In saying this, Naomi is knowingly or unknowingly testing the mettle of Ruth’s faith, seeing if she has the courage of her convictions. It is a test that goes deep and speaks to the heart. It is a “*choose this day whom you will serve*” test (Jos 24:15). Orpah has chosen. She is on her way back to idolatry, and the very silence of Scripture from now on tells of a life without God. What a tragedy!

Then Ruth makes her choice very clear. She says to Naomi (Ruth 1:16), “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.” By choosing to go with Naomi, she has chosen the God of Israel ... and she will never stand at the crossroads of life again. And, by the way, it is this declaration of intent and its putting into practice that Boaz will speak of later as the very crown of Ruth’s goodness (see 2:11-12).

The question is, why did Ruth say this? At the time, it had not made much sense, as she stood looking at the remains of her husband, Mahlon, and watching as his body was lowered into the ground. Oh, the pain and the seeming unfairness of it! Ruth could have turned to her mother-in-law and said, “Well, if this is what your God of love does, forget it! Why did he have to take my husband, why did he have to take yours and Orpah’s?” But she did not say that. Even though death had come like a thief and taken her husband, even though the end of his life had been like a full stop placed before the end of a sentence, she did not

get angry. Somehow she knew that the Lord is too loving to be cruel. He is too wise to make any mistakes. He is too powerful to have his plans interfered with.

Having said that, there will be someone reading this book who is going through a hard time. And they are having difficulty with “why” this has been allowed to happen. The question “why?” is automatic. It rolls straight off our lips in the painful circumstances of life. And sometimes it is not so much asking, as crying out in our despair. “Why?” It is a tough question. In fact, it is one that has often been on the lips of people like Joni Eareckson Tada. Having been paralysed since a diving accident at the age of 17, Joni has come to the conclusion that even if God did give all the answers, it probably would not help. “It would be like pouring million-gallon truths into our one-ounce brains! We could not take it all in,” she says (“Through the Roof News,” issue 10).

Granted, it might trouble us less if we always knew God’s purposes in our difficulties, but usually the jigsaw of our lives needs more pieces added to it. Then, may I say this. Although we do not always appreciate the significance of what is happening, we can be certain that God’s worthy purposes are being served. And one of the reasons for life becoming exceedingly difficult at times is that the Lord uses disappointments to wean us from the world. He removes this and withholds that because he sees our hearts are too set on them. In doing so, he reminds us to seek and find all our satisfaction in Christ alone. Then if we will

commit our way to him and have no unconfessed sin in our lives ... even if we have to say with Job (Job 13:15), *“Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him”* ... the jigsaw of our lives will start to come together.

For sure the Lord is sovereign and he can see what we cannot see. He can see the end from the very beginning. And here is an example of that. For as his plan for Ruth unfolds, she will find that Mahlon’s death was part of the overruling sovereignty of God. Ruth will understand this once some of the missing pieces are in place. In the meantime she shows a maturity that is beyond her years, aware of the simple fact that God is God. This, incidentally, is a lesson that Naomi, despite her many years as a believer, has yet to learn. How about you ... how about me?

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#### **Chapter 4 Into the place of blessing**

It has been rightly said that many men have experienced affliction, but none like Job. Again, many women have known tribulation, but none like Naomi. For she was a widow and she became poor. And having lost her sons as well as her husband (these tragedies made all the worse for happening in a foreign land) she was left almost comfortless. Surely her misery had been pressed down, shaken and was running over!

Now this has been a long and weary journey back to Judah, so Naomi and Ruth must make a sorry sight. *“Can this be Naomi?”* the women of Bethlehem exclaim. *“Don’t call*

*me Naomi,”* she tells them. *“Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.”* (Ruth 1:20) Naomi, may I explain, means pleasant; Mara means bitter. She had left this town with a husband and two sons, but has returned with only a Gentile girl. It is as though she has been given one stranger for three loved ones. As she continues, *“I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi?”*

It is a long way from full to empty, and she has certainly been through some unpleasant experiences in between. Nevertheless she should not have said that the Almighty had made her life bitter. That comment was way off target, just as when Adam said that the woman God had given him was responsible for the presence of sin (Gen 3:12). And just as Adam had thrown the blame for the Fall back into the lap of God, so Naomi accused him of bringing bad times into her life.

The truth of the matter was this: the Lord was not responsible for her hardship. He did not tell her husband to uproot and go to Moab! But I will tell you something. He will be responsible for the blessing that is soon to come, now that she is back where he wants her. And another thing. Naomi’s insistence that she be called Mara is going to be ignored! The God-inspired writer will carry on referring to her as Naomi. And with good reason: because the bitter experiences belong back in Moab, while – joy of joys – pleasant things are now in store for her.

Of course, we can imagine how tongues would wag. They always do. “Naomi’s back. Have you seen her? She’s looking terrible!” By the same token, there will be people who are more thoughtful, considerate and Christlike in their approach. “Good to see you,” they will say. “Welcome home.” And they will really mean it. Welcome home, Naomi. And welcome to a new life, Ruth.

### **Firstfruits**

Then what a good time it was for Ruth, the Gentile stranger, to arrive in Bethlehem. The barley harvest was just getting underway (so it was probably in the month of April) and it always began with what is known as the Feast of Firstfruits. That is when the first sheaf of barley was presented to God. And today when we in the church look back at this feast, we are reminded of something very special. We are reminded that the Lord Jesus Christ is “the firstfruits” in resurrection and that his death and resurrection have brought all believing Gentiles into the place of blessing. *“Therefore,”* as Paul writes, *“formerly you who are Gentiles by birth were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ ... no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household.”* (Ephesians 2:11-13,19 condensed.)

Here we see how Ruth’s arrival serves to contrast what we

once were with what God has done for us. That is to say, our former position as Gentiles in the flesh (in our old sinful condition) and now our privileged position as believers in the church, cleansed by the blood of Christ. *“Now Naomi had a relative on her husband’s side from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz.”* (Ruth 2:1) Naomi had a relative (a kinsman). His name was Boaz and he is going to be the hero of this story. He will be the one who will show us what a kinsman-redeemer is. Not only that, but how about this: in Boaz we have a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the first chapter of the book of Ruth, you will recall, there was nothing but backsliding, death and misery. And during that time there was no mention of Boaz. Similarly in our own lives, the chapters which have been written without mentioning the Lord Jesus also have nothing of much value in them. So it is with a sigh of relief that we are being introduced to this beautiful picture from the second chapter onwards. The Lord Jesus is our Kinsman-Redeemer. He was made like us, yet he *“knew no sin”* ... he *“did no sin”* (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22 KJV). Instead, he is the one who is holy, blameless, pure and set apart from sinners (Hebrews 7:26). He is the only person in the entire universe who could save us from the deathly power of sin. And whenever Jesus is introduced into the story of a human life, he becomes the centre of all that takes place.

### **An ever present help**

“*And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, ‘Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favour.’*” (Ruth 2:2) The fact that Ruth asked to glean showed that these women had become very poor. And in a world where so many have so little, we cannot help but remember how poor the Lord Jesus was. “*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head,*” he told the scribe who wanted to follow him (Matthew 8:20). It was no proud confession, but a sad fact.

Naomi and Ruth were in great need; they may have been in danger of starving. And though Ruth humbly and quietly accepted her poverty, she nevertheless tried to relieve it as best she could. So she went into the fields to pick up leftover grain, something that was allowed under Mosaic law as a safety net for the poor. In practice this meant that when the land was harvested, the corners of the field and the gleanings were to be left, and, should a sheaf be forgotten, the harvesters were not to go back and fetch it (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19).

Ruth was learning to live by faith. She was trusting God to care for her and Naomi, while seeing his Word begin to work in her life as she claimed her lawful privileges. And Ruth’s faith was rewarded because, “*as it turned out,*” she found herself working in a field belonging to ... Boaz! (Ruth 2:3). “*As it turned out.*” Just a simple coincidence? Well, that is how it would seem from a human point of

view. After all, it was not as if God had given her a map showing her how to get to the field of Boaz. It is not as if he lets any of us see what is round the corner of our lives. Yet we can be sure of one thing: God is watching out for us. He is “*our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble.*” (Psalm 46:1)

So although there would have been an element of uncertainty about which road Ruth should take and which field she should enter, it all came down to the providential care of Almighty God. And this just goes to show that the very God of the universe has an intimate concern for seemingly unimportant “everyday people” like Ruth, like you ... and even me! That is what really comes across in this true story.

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## Chapter 5 What a small world it is!

There is Ruth gleaning in the field and here comes Boaz (Ruth 2:4). He greets the harvesters with godly courtesy. “*The Lord be with you!*” he says to them. This is not a greeting you are likely to hear from the boss nowadays. “*The Lord bless you!*” they call back, which is not a response you are likely to hear from the workers today, either. Then Boaz notices Ruth. “Who is that young woman?” he asks the foreman. “It’s that girl from Moab. You know, the one who came back with Naomi,” the foreman explains. “She asked me this morning if she could pick up the grain dropped by the reapers, and she’s worked steadily ever since, apart from a short break in the shade.” (See v6-7.) In showing concern for her, Boaz goes over to Ruth and says, “*My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and*

*glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled."* (v8-9)

In return, as a gesture of obedience and courtesy, she bows down. Then she asks, *"Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me – a foreigner?"* (v10) Ruth had found grace – she had found generosity and kindness – as she looked into the eyes of one she did not even know. And she was asking the question that surely every true believer asks, aware that it is only by God's sovereign grace that we are saved.

So here is Ruth the Gentile and Boaz the Jew, and in Romans 10:12 Paul tells us that *"there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him."* We can imagine, therefore, that over the gospel door are the words of the next verse (v13; Joel 2:32): *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* And once across the threshold, above that same door, we will read (Ephesians 1:4), *"For he chose us in [Christ] before the creation of the world."* As Charles Spurgeon said of himself, "God certainly must have chosen me before I came into this world because he would never have done so afterwards!" And if Spurgeon (known as the Prince of Preachers) felt he must say that, so must other believers.

As the old hymnwriter put it,

*"Tis not that I did choose thee,  
for, Lord, that could not be.  
This heart would still refuse thee,  
but thou hast chosen me."*

On the cross at Calvary, Jesus Christ did everything necessary for our salvation. But just as Ruth did not yet know Boaz, neither did we know how to seek Christ. Therefore, it needed the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, bring us to the point of repentance and give us a saving knowledge of the grace of God. In other words, we may have chosen him ... yet he chose us first!

### **Shining through**

**G-r-a-c-e.** It stands for God's Riches At Christ's Expense. It is about getting what we do not deserve! And when we come humbly before God, it is also his grace – his unmerited favour – that gives us the desire and power to do his will, as we are seeing in the life of Ruth (James 4:6). Now Boaz says to her (Ruth 2:11-12), *"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."*

As a Moabitess, Ruth was prepared to be looked down upon. As a widow showing kindness to her mother-in-law, she was willing to accept poverty. In these humble circumstances she never dreamed anyone would take any notice of her. Yet here is God's grace shining through, and romance is in the air! At mealtime Boaz calls over to Ruth to come and eat with him and the others. She eats all she wants and still has some left over, which she will later take home for Naomi. Boaz then has a quiet word with his workers. He tells them to show Ruth every courtesy, even letting her gather among the sheaves. Moreover, they are to pull out some stalks from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up (v15-16).

Well, you can imagine, can't you! Ruth does not know he has told them to do this, and she is coming across all this grain that has been left lying about! Anyway, she gleans till evening, threshes the barley she has gathered and carries it back to town. "So much!" we can hear Naomi saying. "*Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!*" (v19) Naomi said the word "blessed"?

That is right. The woman who had told the women of Bethlehem that the Lord had made her life very bitter, now had a new word on her lips. With Boaz having come onto the scene, her bitterness was going to turn to blessedness. And as soon as Ruth mentioned his name, Naomi said it again! "*The Lord bless him!*" What a lesson this is for us! Everybody, at one time or another, feels bitter. But here is

the good news: we do not have to stay that way! Maybe, for instance, there is someone reading this book who is looking back on a wrecked life, a life that has been torn apart by difficult circumstances. Could that person be you? Have you been hurting for so long that it has made you bitter? Well, just as Boaz would be a blessing in the lives of Ruth and Naomi, so the Lord Jesus can be a blessing in yours. If you will ask him, he will lift your burden and heal your broken heart (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:16-21). Then you will no longer be bitter and life will get better!

But then you might say, "I've felt so empty for so long, I've forgotten what it's like to have a satisfying life." Well, the gnawing emptiness inside Naomi was going to be replaced with fullness, and you can experience that too. Jesus said (John 10:10), "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*" Now although Ruth does not yet know who Boaz is, Naomi does. "*(The Lord) has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead,*" she says excitedly. "*That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.*" (v20)

Ruth had certainly gone into the right field, because Boaz was related to Naomi's late husband, Elimelech. Their fathers were more than likely brothers, which would make Boaz a cousin to Ruth's deceased husband. What a small world it is! And it is all the smaller when God has anything to do with it!

**Freedom's price**

A kinsman-redeemer, what exactly is that? It is a description of someone who is able to set free another person or even buy back their property. However, that someone and that other person must be related. The redeemer has to be a kinsman, in other words. So suppose there is an Israelite who has some land, but he becomes poor. Maybe he's had several years of crop failure because of drought. As a result, he has to get rid of his land (he just cannot afford to keep it going), so he sells it to a neighbour. Then suppose the poor man has a rich relative – a cousin, for example – and this relative is sympathetic towards him. Now, that kind cousin can come along, buy back the property and restore it to the rightful owner. That is how God said it was to be, as recorded in Leviticus 25:25. Here we read that if anyone becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative should redeem it.

Then again if things get really bad, a man might even have to sell himself into slavery. Maybe he has already lost his property and his family are still going hungry. So he becomes a slave in order to feed them. Yet one day a well-off uncle gets to hear and says, "I don't want my nephew to be in slavery. I'm going to do something about it. I'm going to pay the price for his freedom." And that is just what he does – in the spirit of Leviticus 25:47-48. These verses tell us that should an Israelite become poor and sell himself, he may be redeemed by one of his relatives.

This matter of redemption, therefore, can refer either to the person or his property or both. It is simply a matter of

recovering the property of the rightful owner and of restoring the person to the place of freedom. And can you see how the kinsman-redeemer pictures the work of the Lord Jesus Christ? He is our Kinsman-Redeemer in the highest sense. He paid the price to set us free from slavery to sin. He paid the price with his precious blood, which was poured out on the cross. And surely this kindness that is beyond words should thrill our souls, we who know him as our personal Saviour. No wonder we sometimes sing,

*“Redeemed, redeemed, from sin and all its woe.  
redeemed, redeemed, eternal life to know,  
redeemed, redeemed, by Jesus' blood!  
Redeemed, redeemed! Oh, praise the Lord!”*

The price of our redemption is the shed blood of Jesus. No less a price would do. No less a price would have delivered us from the curse and the judgment which hung over us (Galatians 3:13).

Back in Old Testament times the sinner came to the altar bringing a lamb as a typical sacrifice for sin. But such a creature was not worth enough to settle the whole question of sin. Only in the Lord Jesus Christ do we see a sacrifice of sufficient worth. And when a sinner owns up to his sin and guilt, when he comes to God in faith and puts his trust in Jesus, then so infinite is the value of the cross and of the life that was given on it ... so infinite is the value of the blood that was shed there ... that the sinner is redeemed from judgment once and for all. No other sacrifice

required, no lesser one acceptable.

This is the simple truth. In Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:7), *“we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.”* This is a fundamental truth we need to hold on to and it is God’s plain and personal word to each of us. Simple, fundamental ... plain and personal. That is the message of the gospel.

Jesus came into the world twenty centuries ago. After being here for 33 years, he died upon a wooden cross, was buried ... and rose again. In telling us this, God’s only written word makes it clear that the first coming of Christ was so that we could be forgiven. As he told his disciples at the Last Supper, the cup he was sharing with them represented his blood of the covenant (Matthew 26:28), *“poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”* You see, in the covenants he made with man, God required blood (Noah, Genesis 8:20; Abraham, Genesis 15:10; Moses, Exodus 24:5-8). And it is only by the shedding of blood – the price Jesus paid on the cross – that we can be brought back into harmony with God.

Hundreds of years before Christ’s substitutionary death, the prophet Micah had asked (Micah 7:18), *“Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives ... ?”* And when we come to Christ, trusting him to save us, we can be sure that because he took our sins upon himself, we are separated from them (Psalm 103:12), *“as far as the east is from the*

*west”*. What is more, when we enter into a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, we have a glorious future to look forward to, because the moment we take our last breath on earth, it is going to be our first in heaven!

Which reminds me ... Dr Joseph Parker, an English preacher in days gone by, went through a period when he gave too much attention to the modern thinking of his day. Just as now, men reasoned and came up with their theories but put very little value on God’s inspired Word, the Bible. And Dr Parker found himself reading their books, going to their meetings and, because of this, losing his grip on the great doctrine of salvation. Then one day a very sad thing happened. It was the saddest thing he had ever had to bear. His dear wife became ill and within just a few hours she died.

As he wandered brokenhearted through the empty rooms of his home, he tried to find some comfort in the theories of men. But there was none. “And then,” as he later recalled, “in those hours of darkness, in those hours of my soul’s anguish, when filled with doubt and trembling in fear, I thought of the old gospel of redemption alone through the blood of Christ ... the gospel that I had preached in those earlier days ... and I put my foot down on that. And, my brothers, I found firm standing.’ Dr Parker continued, “I stand there today, and I shall die resting upon that blessed glorious truth of salvation alone through the precious blood of Christ.”

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## Chapter 6 Breaking the last thread

While we have been finding out what a kinsman-redeemer is, Ruth has continued to glean alongside the workers of Boaz, as they harvest both barley and wheat (a process which would take about six weeks). And every afternoon, if you were to look down the road, you would no doubt see Boaz and Ruth walking back to town together. Naomi has noticed too! That is why at the start of the third chapter she says to Ruth, *“My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for?”*

Here is the mother instinct coming out in Naomi towards her faithful daughter-in-law. But a home like that – such a place of “rest”, as the original Hebrew language puts it – could only be found in the quiet shelter of a godly home, a home where a man of strength would protect Ruth from the stormy winds of a harsh world. So, out of interest, what does the name Boaz mean? It means “one who has strength in him.” Strength not only in terms of being a mighty man of valour, of someone who may well have distinguished himself in battle, but also in terms of character. And seeing as Boaz is being revealed to us as an upright, compassionate and just man, he is going to be more than qualified! With that in mind, Naomi happens to know that Boaz will be winnowing barley on this particular evening. And she tells Ruth.

The winnowing process, by the way, was performed by throwing up the grain after it had been separated from its husk; throwing it up with a shovel against the wind so that

the chaff would be blown away. And the reason this was done in the evening was in order to catch the breezes which blew at the close of a hot day and which continued into the night. Then during harvest time it was not unusual for the owner of a crop to sleep at the place where it was being threshed in order to guard the grain. That is why Boaz is going to be out at the threshing floor. And Naomi is telling Ruth because she is acting, under the approving smile of God, as a matchmaker!

Ah, but as the Apollo 13 astronaut reported, *“Houston, we have a problem.”* We have been talking about the law of the kinsman-redeemer in the book of Leviticus, but that is not the only one. We find a second law in Deuteronomy 25. It has to do with marriage. And from verses 5 through 10 we understand that if a man died without a son, it was the next of kin’s duty to marry the widow and raise a son in the name of the deceased husband. This would ensure that the family line would carry on. What is the problem?

Boaz is close, but he is not the closest relative. So does this stop Naomi seeing him as Ruth’s future husband? No. She is doing the Lord’s bidding, remember, whether she is aware of it or not. And God is sovereign; he is in charge. Of course he is. And this means that if he wants Boaz to marry Ruth, that is the way it is going to be. *“Wash and perfume yourself,”* Naomi instructs her daughter-in-law (Ruth 3:3), *“and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor.”* It is as though this mother of Ruth’s dead husband is saying, “Put to one side your clothes of

mourning and put on something that will show your radiant beauty.” In doing this, Ruth will be breaking the last thread that tied her to an unhappy past. For her, *“old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (2 Corinthians 5:17 KJV).

### **More than love**

Now we come to a situation which, if we are not careful, we could misinterpret. In following Naomi’s advice, Ruth creeps into the threshing area, unseen in the darkness, and goes and lies at the feet of Boaz. Is this not a bit brazen, a bit immodest? Actually, it is nothing of the sort. Ruth is acting wholly within her legal rights, the obvious interest of Boaz having cleared the way for her to take the next step and ask for him to become her kinsman-redeemer. That is what she is getting ready to do. Her actions are appropriate in these circumstances and, of course, we are to bear in mind the high moral characters of these two people. And so it is that when Boaz wakes suddenly about midnight, he turns and realises there is a woman at his feet! *“Who are you?”* he asks. *“I am your servant Ruth,”* she answers (Ruth 3:9). *“Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.”*

Let me offer you a little recap here. In Boaz we have a picture of the Lord Jesus, our Kinsman-Redeemer. And here we come to the sheer brilliance of the gospel. For Jesus Christ entered the human family so that we might enter the heavenly family. At that very place called Bethlehem, as we look back two thousand years, the

Second Person of the Trinity was made flesh in order to become our next of kin and therefore have the right to redeem us. But God does not redeem us just because he loves us. More than that, he redeems us on the basis of his grace. Grace is love that is willing to pay a price. God was willing to obey his own law; he was willing to pay the price that the law demanded. The Bible says (Romans 6:23) that, *“the wages of sin is death”*. It says (Ezekiel 18:4), *“The soul who sins is the one who will die.”* And the Son of God fulfilled the requirements of the law by dying in our place. As Peter wrote, it is not with perishable things such as silver or gold that we are redeemed from our empty way of life, *“but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect”* (1 Peter 1:18-19).

We are talking about something priceless. And here is an illustration: On April 14, 1912, the mammoth liner Titanic struck an iceberg on her maiden voyage. As she was going down, a millionaire came to a man sitting in one of the lifeboats, which was about to be lowered, and offered him a great deal of money for his place in the boat. Well, what do you think the answer was? No thanks! Since the lifeboat was the only means of escape, that place in it was priceless. From a doomed and sinking world, the Lord Jesus is our only way of escape, and it is only his blood that will buy a seat in the lifeboat that will save us from the judgment that leads to hell. After all (Mark 8:36), *“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”* What good is it for a man to have everything except Christ? For if we choose to live apart from him in

this life, we will do so forever.

### **He who began a good work**

Returning to Ruth, how does Boaz respond to her? In a very gracious way, he recognises the sincerity of her request. He loves her and, for Ruth's part, she has remained true to him and not sought the affections of younger men. Jewish tradition, incidentally, reckons that Boaz would have been about eighty years of age at this time. Certainly he was no youngster! He then says to her, "Don't worry about a thing. I'll do all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know you are a woman of noble character. Yet I have to tell you," he adds, "that although I am a close relative there's someone who is more closely related to you. In the morning I'll have a word with him, and if he'll marry you, fine. Let him do his duty. But if he won't, I will." (Ruth 3:11-13, my paraphrase.)

*"A wife of noble character who can find?"* the proverb asks (Proverbs 31:10). Boaz has probably been asking that question for a number of years. But at last he has an answer. Though Ruth is very poor, this very wealthy man realises she's *"worth far more than rubies"*, as the proverb so rightly concludes.

Naomi did not make a mistake in sending Ruth to Boaz. He was a good man, that is for sure. And knowing that Ruth's demand is just, Boaz is treating her with the utmost respect, maintaining both his honour and hers. With this in mind, she lies at his feet till morning, resting now in the

promise of his word. Yet both are concerned that she is not seen by others, so that her actions will not be misunderstood. So she is up early before daybreak, and before she makes her way home, Boaz says to Ruth (v15), *"Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out."* When she does, he pours into it six measures of barley. That is quite a lot! Why does he do this?

Boaz is giving Ruth what we could call a "down payment" on all the wealth she is going to inherit. Oh, and at the same time he is revealing a sense of humour! Remember how Naomi, when she returned from Moab, complained that she had gone away full but come back empty? Well, now Boaz probably smiles as he says (v17), *"Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed"!*

What a blessing he was. And what a blessing the Lord Jesus is to us as we come under his care and protection. He, too, is gracious towards us and very much concerned for our well-being. *"How did it go, my daughter?"* Naomi asks when Ruth gets home. And when Ruth has told her everything, Naomi says (v18), *"Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today."*

Boaz is going to finish what he has started. The Lord Jesus always does that, too. In fact, to use Paul's words (Philippians 1:6), we can be *"confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* Having finished the work

of salvation, Christ is preparing an eternal home for everyone who will trust him as Lord and Saviour. *“And if I go and prepare a place for you,”* he said (John 14:3), *“I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”* Think of it! We know that the Lord Jesus is rich. But until we get to heaven, we will not realise just how rich. For there we will see streets paved with gold, walls built with jasper, gates crafted out of pearl. And so much more.

As for today, it is the day of faith. *“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”* (2 Corinthians 4:18) Today the Person of Christ is hidden from view, yet his presence through the Holy Spirit is in the heart of every true believer. And how good it is to know that one day Jesus will return in glory, majesty and triumph. Then think of this too ...

As a homeless stranger in the world that he made, Jesus became poor. He did this for sinners like you and me. On our behalf, he took the very nature of a servant, humbling himself and dying on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8). He gave all he had that we might become rich. Rich in salvation, forgiveness, joy ... and more. Much more! (See 2 Corinthians 8:9.) The cross, you see, is not just a symbol of death, it is also a symbol of life for those who will come in repentance and faith, life that is victorious and never-ending.

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## Chapter 7 No longer a stranger

As a matter of interest, Bethlehem is situated on a narrow ridge which projects in an eastward direction from the mountains. Steep terraced slopes then sweep down to the valleys below, and so we read of Boaz going up to the town gate (Ruth 4:1). He has been at the threshing floor all night and that is down near the valleys where they grow the cereal crops.

Why is he going up to the town gate? Sooner or later the closer relative is going to come in or go out through it. And since such a gateway in Eastern towns is the traditional place to conduct legal business, it is the place these two men will need to meet. The place where there will be witnesses to what is said and what will be agreed over the kinsman-redeemer issue. Sure enough, in due course, the other man comes by. *“Come over here, my friend, and sit down,”* says Boaz. He then invites ten of the elders of the town to join them (v2). All very easy to arrange, really. No preliminaries, no delay. Just a few words and the matter is ready to be dealt with.

Boaz now presents the facts to this nearer kinsman. And when we say “nearer kinsman”, we mean that he could have been a brother of Elimelech, which would have made him an uncle of Ruth’s first husband. “You know Naomi, who came back from Moab?” Boaz says to him. “Well, I happen to know she’s selling the piece of land which belonged to Elimelech. I felt I should speak to you about this, so that you can buy it if you wish. You have the first

right to purchase and, by the way, I'm next in line" (v3-4a, my paraphrase).

This man is getting the priority he deserves. So will he or will he not redeem the property? If he does not, he is not going to be too well thought of, since it is actually his duty. Nevertheless, Boaz is secretly hoping he will decline. And here comes the reply. *"I will redeem it"* (v4b). Well, how do you think Boaz feels when he hears this? All is not lost, though. There is still the question of Ruth, giving him the opportunity to add, "Ah, I forgot to tell you. The day you buy the land from Naomi, you also get Ruth into the bargain. She's the Moabite widow of Elimelech's son."

That puts a different complexion on things! And we can be sure that the man is most grateful to Boaz for having taken the trouble to point this out! The redemption of the land will also mean marriage. Marriage to a woman from Moab, whose people the Mosaic law has so far said a big "No" to (Deuteronomy 23:3).

The one who redeemed the property had also to redeem the person. But the nearer kinsman has no love for Ruth and, it seems, only a calculator for a heart. So doing a few quick sums, he adds up the advantages of owning the property on offer, then takes away the possible liability of marrying a woman from Moab. Result: a sudden lack of interest. *"You redeem it yourself,"* he says, *"I cannot do it."* The suspense is over. Then, in keeping with the colourful custom in those days, he confirms this decision by taking

off one of his sandals and handing it to Boaz. (The sandal was a symbol of his right to set foot on the land, a right he now handed over.)

He had had the right to redeem but not the resolve. He wanted the property but not Ruth. *"Because I might endanger my own estate,"* he is quoted as saying (v6). This man was, we may suspect, afraid of the curse of the law and that he might spoil his bloodline. Boaz, on the other hand, was not concerned about the threat to his own line. The reason? His father Salmon was one of the spies Joshua had sent into Jericho. There he had met and later married Rahab the harlot, who became the mother of Boaz. So in effect his bloodline was already spoiled. At least, that is what men thought. But this was not how God saw it. For Rahab had hidden the Israelite spies and had further risked her life when she sent the king of Jericho's men off on a wild goose chase! (Joshua 2:1-7) Why did she do this? She had come to fear God and she had turned to him in saving faith. As a reward, Joshua spared Rahab and her family (Joshua 6:25). *"By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace."* (Hebrews 11:31 KJV)

Boaz was not bothered about adding Moabite blood to his future lineage; there was already Canaanite blood in it anyway! But what about the law? It stated that Moabites were not allowed to enter the congregation of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation (Deuteronomy 23:3). Did that not present a problem? It would have, except here

comes that word “grace” again! And God’s sovereign grace is going to overrule in Ruth’s life.

### **Our Kinsman-Redeemer**

So in the story of Ruth – this heartening tale of faith and redemption – Boaz fulfils his promise in front of the elders and all the people (Ruth 4:9 onwards). He declares he has redeemed the parcel of land and Ruth is to be his wife. At one time she had been a stranger, far removed from the privileges enjoyed by God’s chosen people; but this mighty man of wealth paid the price and brought her into the nation, into his home and into his heart. Then what a blessing the people sought for this couple. We are told that they wanted Ruth to be like Rachel and Leah, the wives of Jacob through whom the tribes of Israel came (Genesis 35:23-26). The people also prayed that their house might be like that of Perez, an ancestor who had many children (Genesis 38:29). So what happened?

In due time the Lord blessed them with a son (Ruth 4:13). Naming him Obed, here was the grandson Naomi had longed for. In fact, she became nurse, grannie, sitter-in, taker-out for walks ... the lot. Ruth did not mind, though. After all, in Naomi’s hands she had been safe. Of course, no one knew what the future held for him, but the prayer of the womenfolk was that he would become famous throughout Israel (v14). And do you know something? Their prayer was answered in a most remarkable way, because Obed became the father of Jesse, who in turn became the father of David. Even more important, as we

can read at the start of Matthew’s gospel, this is the line through which our Kinsman-Redeemer came – the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who paid the far greater price and, in doing so, made a glorious home in heaven available to us.

### **Questions at your crossroads ...**

*“[God] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)*

The beautiful story of Ruth has not only given us a link between the days of the judges and the reign of King David, it has also given us a picture of what the Lord Jesus has done. When Adam – the first man – sinned, sin itself entered the entire human race. Yet in the great plan of salvation, Christ has paved the way so that we can receive God’s forgiveness. Think about that.

Two thousand years ago Jesus Christ stepped out of the splendour of heaven to become a man – our Kinsman, in fact. That he came all the way from there to a stable in the little town of Bethlehem, then went on to the suffering of Calvary, are the most significant events in history. *“For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.” (Romans 5:19)* To be made righteous is to be made right with God. Is that what you want?

Maybe, like Ruth of old, you find yourself standing at a

spiritual crossroads and you see the need to be made right with God. “Which way should I go?” you are asking. Choose God’s way ... the way of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Because sinners like you, my friend, were the reason he obediently gave his life on the cross. Sinners were the reason he suffered and died ... and rose again. So tell God that you are truly sorry for your sins and ask his forgiveness. Tell him you believe Jesus Christ shed his precious blood for your sins and that you now ask him to be your Lord and Saviour.

If you really mean it, God will forgive you and make you his. Then you will not be a stranger to him anymore.

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