

# Encountering the extravagant love of God's family

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, if you were here last week, you'll remember our introduction to the book of Ruth. We looked at chapter 2, didn't we? And we saw how Naomi and her husband, they left Bethlehem and they went to Moab with their two sons.

But unfortunately, all three men died. And eventually, ten years later, Naomi returns to Bethlehem with Ruth, her daughter-in-law. And that's where we pick up now on chapter 2, verse 1.

If you look at chapter 2, verse 1, it's on page 222, I think, on the Pew Bibles. Ruth, chapter 2, verse 1.

Now, Naomi had a relative of her husband, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favour.

And she said to her, Go, my daughter. So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.

[ 1 : 1 0 ] And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered, The Lord bless you. Then Boaz says to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, Whose young woman is this?

And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, She is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves of the reapers.

So she came and she has continued from early morning until now, apart from a short rest. Well, this is a family tree.

I'm making some un-scrolling noises for those listening in. This here is a family tree. But friends, the stability that this represents is really something of an age gone by.

You know, in this day and age, to map out a family tree for many of us, well, it's just too complex. In my own life, about 11 years ago, my wife left me and that ended in divorce.

[ 2 : 2 5 ] And so, in these times, the Christian moral capital in our society, well, it's fast running out. In the evening times, a Miss Mulholland speaking in the evening times, she said this about family breakup.

People want to be more independent and they're unwilling to compromise on what they want. And you might remember the end of Judges, the last verse of Judges that we looked at last week.

Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. And we turned to Ruth, and the question is, how can God help families?

And two widows arrive in Bethlehem, the end of chapter 1. All the women, they're gathering around, blethering. Naomi and Ruth approach.

They've been, remember, they've been away on a long trip overseas, pushing their trolley into the arrivals hall. All eyes are on them. But Naomi, well, she's particularly sensitive just now.

[ 3 : 3 0 ] I'm glad I didn't say to her, welcome home, Naomi. You know, I sometimes do that. I go and say the wrong thing and upset somebody. Welcome home, Naomi. Call me Mara, she said.

I went away full and I've come back empty. End of chapter 1. Empty? Are you really empty, Naomi? Has the Lord no hope for girls like you?

Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Says Jesus.

Have a look with me now at verse 1 of our passage. Chapter 1, verse 1. Now, Naomi had. Well, she had.

I thought you just said you were empty, Naomi. I thought you had nothing. And this is interesting. She had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech.

[ 4 : 32 ] Does that ring a bell? Whose name was Boaz. So she's not as empty as she thought, says the narrator. And that clan, Elimelech. Well, wasn't that her problem?

Heirs? Didn't we all think it was sort of a dead end for her? Verse 2. And Ruth, the Moabite, said to Naomi, Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, after him in whose sight I shall find favour.

She's fast off the mark, isn't she? She's like a colonist arriving in America or something. So she's away. And she said to her, Go, my daughter, Naomi said. Verse 3.

So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. Look down at verse 3 with me. And she happened, do you see? Says the writer with a wry smile.

She happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz. So things are coming together, aren't they? And friends, God's put your life together.

[ 5 : 35 ] Yes, he has. But you say, well, it doesn't feel that way, you know, with the problems I've just got at the moment. But think about this, friends.

If God can bring hope out of the ultimate chaos, that is, the creation crucifying the creator, if hope can come out the other side of that, if God can pull that one off, then your own situation, think about this, suddenly becomes forward-looking, doesn't it?

Every other problem in life, am I right, it's of a lesser scale than Christ crucified. And so, friends, God is somehow using your difficulties.

Joseph looked at his brothers, didn't he? Do you remember the end of Genesis? You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. Peter addresses the Jews in Acts chapter 2.

He says, this Jesus, and listen to this, this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men, God raised him up.

[ 6 : 52 ] And so do you see, friends, God has ultimate victory. He's victoriously moving world events forward according to his purposes.

You know, inching things along. And this Wednesday lunchtime, we need to grapple with that reality. Especially, friend, if you're suffering in these times.

Of course, it doesn't feel that way, does it? Call me Mara. But nevertheless, friends, your life, it's more than randomness.

Ruth happened to come to the field of Boaz, didn't she? Verse 3. Sinclair, in this nice commentary for four pounds, he describes how, in the Hebrew, in the original language, there's sort of more of a pun on this verse 3.

I think the narrator is sort of almost teasing us. He's letting us in on what the world can't see.

Remember, we're moving, in Ruth, from the chaos of judges to the regal splendour of the Davidic kingdom.

[ 8 : 03 ] And a young widow here, she happened upon Boaz's field. William Cowper wrote this in 1774. His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour.

The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. Yes, it's all mysteriously subsumed, isn't it, in God's providence.

And we're touching upon things here that we'll, well, we'll never fully understand, but that doesn't make it untrue, does it, if you think about it.

Our limited understanding, friends, it isn't going to make God quake in terror, is it, and change his ways for us. Job questioned God's ways, didn't he?

Do you remember? Job questioned, he's questioning God's ways, and God says this, I sort of sum it up, he says, where were you, Job, when I created the universe?

[ 9 : 03 ] Wayne Grudem says this, he says, God has a purpose in all that he does in the world, and he providentially governs and directs all things in order that they accomplish his purposes.

So, Ruth and Naomi, well, it was three funerals, wasn't it, in Moab, a lot of tears shed, a lot of miles covered, and they've been through the mill.

But now Ruth has found herself amidst the people of God in the field of the clan of Elimelech, and the stage is set.

Naomi, I've been thinking about this, Naomi, in chapter one, she was sort of a pragmatic traveller, but for the rest of the book, she's more like a football manager.

You know, she's sort of directing things from the touchline with wise theological insight here and there. Boaz, his land rover, pulls up.

[10:05] The door clunked shut. He walks towards his staff. Look with me at verse four. And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and he said to the reapers, the Lord be with you.

And they answered, the Lord bless you. Now, as regards employer-employee relations, it doesn't get better than that, does it? You know, I suspect that that wasn't the scene in your office this morning.

It's an emblem, isn't it, of the family of God. I don't know about you, but I'm not very good at things like that. Perhaps we've got something to learn as a church. So, Boaz notices Ruth.

She's been working hard all morning, and there's something about her, isn't there? Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, says Jesus. Boaz sees something in her.

And, Naomi, well, I suspect Naomi is looking out of a bedroom window at this point, over the scene of the field. Maybe she's standing on a chair, looking with her binoculars to see what's going on on the field.

[11:11] She's very interested. And Boaz speaks to Ruth, verse 8. Bethlehem meets Moab. And God, who's behind the scenes of these chapters, he's looking at Revelation chapter 7, and he's sort of ordering things on a field outside Bethlehem.

Ordering your life and mine. How do you react to that friend? How does Ruth react? Chapter 2, verse 2.

She started the day, didn't she, with an understanding of God's providence. Just look at that. Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favour.

So she went out to the field. And now, how does she react having come across God's providence? Have a look with me from verse 10. Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, Why have I found favour in your eyes that you should take notice of me since I am a foreigner? But Boaz answered her, All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to the people that you did not know before.

[12:28] The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge. Yeah, she's snuggled up, isn't she, under the wings of Israel.

Something Israel herself refused to do, didn't she, when her Messiah came, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. Verse 13, Then she said, I have found favour in your eyes, my Lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants.

I don't understand, she says, I am but I'm not. And then she has lunch, isn't she, with Boaz.

Blessing upon blessing. And she goes home in the evening, think about this, she goes home in the evening with a big sack full of grain and a doggy bag from lunchtime.

Isn't that a marvellous thing to think? Just picture that evening in your mind's eye. You know, as she walks, she's humming a song that could have been written for her. Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come.

Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home. And Ruth arrives home, she's almost bursting with good news, she's knocking on the door, Naomi lets her in, she's soon in the kitchen, words can't come out of her mouth quick enough.

[13:48] She lifts this big sack up, it's so heavy, she's on tiptoe, she drops it on the table and thud. And they both look in amazement. It's sort of another one of those silent moments.

Verse 18, Naomi saw, says the narrator. And it seems to me that Naomi's faltering faith, well it's back.

Remember, think about it, remember she'd lost her husband, she'd lost her two lads, she'd been in a foreign land, her life had been knocked sideways, and yes, her faith shaken.

But she came back to Bethlehem, didn't she? She came to church. And now, verse 18, she sees, doesn't she, what love looks like.

I wonder, friends, if you've given someone, if you've given someone the sight of love recently. You know, think about this, especially someone whose family has for some reason been falling apart of late.

[14:57] Back in the kitchen, and Naomi knows what she's looking at here. She looks, and it's a reversal, think about this, of why she went from Bethlehem, isn't it? And God's back on Naomi's

radar screen.

Verse 19, have a look with me at verse 19, and her mother-in-law said to her, where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who's took notice of you.

So she told her, mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, the man's name, this is like an orchestra working up to a crescendo, the man's name with whom I work today is, and a long pregnant pause, Boaz.

You can just imagine in the heavenly realms, they're looking down and they're waiting for that word to fall off Ruth's lips, Boaz. And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, may he be blessed by the Lord whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead.

Naomi also said to her, the man is a close relative of ours, and this is the center of the book really, one of our redeemers. You can read about redeemers in Deuteronomy chapter 25, verse 5 is particularly insightful, but just listen to this, the New Bible Dictionary says, Israel's family law made careful provision for members of a clan who fell on hard times, so protecting the continuance of the kin group.

[16:22] Boaz was one of those to whom Naomi was entitled to look for support. And so, God had built into the law a provision for family stability in the midst of this fallen world, if you're following me.

We look on and say to Naomi, yes, Naomi, you would have been empty in Moab, people would have been calling you Mara of Moab, but not in God's family, not in Bethlehem.

We started, didn't we, by thinking about a family tree, but we've stepped into God's revelation. And we see that life's not primarily about our family, but God's family.

Acts chapter 17, Paul's in Athens, and he addresses the Areopagus, and it's a lesson in family trees. You'll need your attention here. Just listen to this.

And he made from one man, says Paul, every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth.

And verse 29, he says, listen, being then God's offspring.

[17:38] So Paul's mission is drawing people, think about it, drawing people back to God, drawing Athenians back in to God's family, drawing us back into our original family, back into the family of our creator.

It's Glasgow. Ruth and Naomi turn up. And the text is asking us, it's invading, it's saying, that was Bethlehem, but what's going on in your neck of the woods?

Friends, the danger is we avoid costly Boaz-type love. Boaz could have just waved at Ruth, couldn't he? I hope it goes well with you, Ruth.

And then rushed off, a busy day. Jesus says, as you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me. Cutting words, aren't they, those?

So Boaz has a lot to teach us, doesn't he? And I hope we've sensed the interface of God's kingdom. It's bigger than meets the eye.

[18:47] Friends, our family tree, that is, our family, God's family, it offers a stability that the world simply hasn't got.

Paul said, out of one man, and we've watched Boaz in action, he's drawing Ruth back in to God's family, do you see? Crossing boundaries of nationality, class, gender, age, religion, do you see?

He's doing that, crossing boundaries. Friend, when did you last cross such a boundary for God? I think sometimes that when we see a nice wedding in the church and it's people from different nationalities coming together in marriage, it's a wonderful thing, isn't it?

It's something of this here. It's almost like Naomi's sack of grain on the kitchen table. You can see the power of God bringing people together. together. It's our missionaries, Scott and Notmurray.

Scott and Notmurray brought together through the gospel to do the work of the gospel. We see it, don't we, the power there. It's a foretaste of Revelation chapter 7.

[20:04] Have a look with me now, just at the end of chapter 2, just the last sentence. Right at the end of verse 23. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

The narrator is helping us to ask a question here. He's helping us to ask a question. And this is a question. Now, who might Ruth be dreaming that she lived with?

That's the question I think he's asking. And if you're as old as I am, you'll remember the Waltons.

Can you remember the Waltons? Night, Jim Bob. Night, night. John Boy, I don't know if you remember that.

Naomi and Ruth tucked up in bed. But Naomi, the matchmaker, you know, the bedside cabinet, she's got her binoculars on the top and she's tossing and turning at night and working out how to fit

it all together in her mind.

But in the morning, she's up. She's up bright and early with a plan. So come back. That's in chapter three. Shall we pray?

[ 21 : 07 ] By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another as I have loved you. Dear Heavenly Father, help us to love as we ought.

Help us to avoid a cheap, superficial Christianity. We want to love you, Father. We want to love others as you love them.

And Father, that won't fit in easily with our busy schedules. And so we pray for your spirit to align our lives aright, to see the priorities of relationships, and to radiate what it is to be in your family.

And so, Father, we pray that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of your spirit would be with us all now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen. So the bookstores open if you'd like to browse or buy anything. Thank you.