

Ruth's Progress Report

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Date: 07 August 2016

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[0 : 0 0] I would like to turn back this morning to the story of Ruth and from God's word seek to hear what God is saying to us through this story. We have seen a lot so far but I suppose basically we are reminded that this is not just a love story, although it is a love story.

It is a story that points forward to Jesus Christ because it speaks of a redeemer. Boaz becomes a redeemer for Ruth and Naomi but that is pointing forward and telling about Jesus who is ultimately a redeemer. It is also important because it reminds us that Jesus was always part of God's plan. It is an afterthought and right from the beginning he had a line, he had a genealogy, he had a people from whom he would come and in the genealogy that we have seen in Matthew's Gospel, Ruth is one of the four bears of Jesus. We are seeing here in some ways that Jesus' line is being protected and being prepared for his coming. That is very important. I am not going to deal with these mega themes today. I am going to focus on a much tighter theme from this passage which is about temptation. In this story it might not be immediately evident from the few verses we read but if we had read the whole chapter maybe I should have done that. There are elements of temptation that come throughout this passage which are very interesting and challenging for us. We know that where love is and where there is a love story, also temptation is never that far away and it becomes a reality. This love story is no different and indeed where people are and where God is, where God is involved in any story, there is always the temptation to ignore God or to reject him or to go our own way apart from him. So temptation is always going to be significant in a human story with a divine input and related to faith. This is also a story about the faith of Boaz, Ruth and the faltering but growing faith of Naomi.

Within that there is always the reality of temptation to be unfaithful, not trust and not to follow God. We often today, particularly in the society in which we live, trivialise temptation and we make it like, oh I am tempted to have another bar of chocolate. As if that is the kind of pinnacle of temptation. We talk about it in a trivial kind of way, I was tempted to this or tempted to that without really thinking through the significance and the importance and the seriousness of it biblically. We read that in the passage in James, the temptation to rebel against God and the temptation not to trust and relate to God. So in that context, I think temptation to rebel against God is often about control, who is sovereign over our lives, who do we follow, who do we trust, which is very much what the story is about and also about pleasure. What pleasure do we allow? What pleasure is legitimate and good for us and fulsome and what is sinful pleasure that will encourage us in our selfishness and maybe destroy our faith and separate us from the God who loves us and who cares. So temptation, I am sure it relates to a lot of other things but it does relate to control of our lives. I hope that makes it relevant for us by way of faith and also pleasure.

I think our sensitivity to temptation in our lives reflects our sensitivity to God and to other people. The less sensitive we are to God and others, the less we will be concerned about temptation. We will shrug our shoulders. What the heck? Does it really matter? But I think the more we understand the nature and character and the grace of God and also our responsibility to other people as Christians, then temptation will be an issue that we deal with and battle with and fight against. Can I look at the two characters here, Naomi and Boas, in this story and see the different way that they respond to temptation? Naomi, if you know this story and Billy would have told this very well, Naomi is desperate not to be alone and she is desperate to maintain the family line and she can see that the way to maintain that family line and all that it represents is through Ruth and through Ruth getting hitched with Boas, Ruth getting matched up with Boas and that for her is absolutely the hope that she has and she wants to see that happening and she is desperate to see that happening so she does not trust God that God has a plan within this so she wants to manipulate the situation so that it will happen by her way and so she says at the beginning of chapter 3 which we did not

read, read she says, look, doll yourself up, look good, put on your best perfume and go down to the threshing floor where Boas will be and he will have eaten and he will have drunk and he will be so attracted to you that he cannot possibly not sleep with you and just marry you and so he is desperate for this so she is pushing these two people together, she is a matchmaker, you know matchmaker, people say there are people in the church who are matchmakers because we have such a dangerous thing to do, to matchmake, to try and bring people together who maybe are not compatible or whose time it is not just to come together, anyway, she is tempted to control the situation and not let God, not wait upon God to reveal himself through it, she does not trust him in this area, she wants to make the decision, she wants to be in control of what is happening, it is probably a bit like the very beginning of the story when there is famine in the land and she wants to feed her family, she does not trust that God will do it so she leaves and goes to Moab with her husband to a place where God said for his people not to go, she wants to take control, now that is often the picture in the Old Testament and if we are honest with ourselves it is probably often the picture of our own lives, we want control, we actually we say we trust Jesus, we love him and he is our saviour but we do not really when it comes to obeying and following him, if there is choices to be made we will often maintain control of our lives, Naomi was driven by poverty, she was driven by fear, she was driven possibly by a misunderstanding of God, she still was learning of his grace and his goodness and so she was kind of insensitive to him and therefore insensitive to the people she was involving in her manufactured situation i.e. Ruth and that was placing Ruth in a very awkward and difficult position and indeed Boaz but she was willing to risk their integrity in order to make sure that what she wanted to happen would happen out of the situation.

Now interestingly as she was tempted to do this and did it rather than wait upon God there is an interesting outcome, it is that though she gave in to temptation at this case to do what she wanted to do rather than wait upon God, it was neutralised by the integrity and by the faith of Ruth and Boaz who did not sleep together but who maintained their dignity and their integrity spiritually and morally and God honours that and God teaches Naomi through that he gently rebukes her through the powerful witness and lives of Ruth and Boaz to such an extent that she learns more about the grace and the goodness and the forgiveness and the patience and the long suffering of God in her experience so that they maintain their integrity Boaz promises he will deal with the situation and do the honourable thing.

[9 : 22] He provides for her, he maintains her dignity and he provides for Naomi. He says in these beautiful words in verse 17 that Billy wouldn't have looked at last week take these six measures of barley and give them to your mother-in-law don't let your mother-in-law or don't go back empty handed to your mother-in-law Boaz through it what he does speaks God's grace into her life and says look I know your situation I know you came back empty you know if we go back to chapter 1 and verse 21 remember these important words why call me Naomi when the Lord has testified against me I went away full the Lord has brought me back empty see that's her experience and yet Boaz is reminding her same Luke don't it's the same word don't don't go back empty to Naomi rather go back with all this provision and promise her that I'm going to act and so God is revealing it that he is in control of this situation he will do he will look after her he will provide for her through Ruth but it will be in his timing and so God speaks through Boaz even though Naomi had kind of given in to temptation and also we know that Naomi we believe learns through that she's a believer it's great and I've said this before I love

Naomi commentators give her a hard time but she's learning and she's growing and here she is at the end of this small section that we read she has advice to give to Naomi remember her advice at the beginning of the chapter remember where she was in control and she says now listen to me Ruth she's go go down to Boaz you go and she makes us command and then at the end of the chapter having learned of what is going on she says wait my daughter don't go but wait she's learning it's the first time I think that she said that that she's understood that God cares and loves and will provide but she has to wait on him his stop trying to control things he says don't use don't shortcut my ways by disobedience wait and just understand my grace and I think that is a really significant word that she says there it's almost like we finally Naomi has learned a great lesson that God is sovereign and he loves her and that she doesn't need to force his hand she doesn't need to second guess him or try and get there before him she doesn't need to suffer from which we all suffer from spiritual OCD that we always need to be in control that we always need to know exactly what's happening and we make the decisions and what we usually why often do is I make the

decision and I pray about it I oh yeah that's God's will but it's really me this I'm not really waiting in the Lord I've not really sought his advice I'm simply doing why I'm in control but I attribute it to God because that's what good pious people should do but we need to be those who wait upon that's a really difficult thing and it's a challenging thing to do in our lives waiting on the Lord not jumping ahead into temptation and bringing other people with us into positions that might challenge their integrity and their morality and their obedience simply to get what we want so we see in our life of faith that same challenge don't we who holds the reins of our lives when it comes to decisions when it comes to choices when it comes to crossroads in our lives when it comes to trusting in its promises because that's often you know God had made promises to his people and to Naomi but she just didn't trust them so when it comes to God's promises in our lives are we willing to wait to see them fulfilled or are we just tapping our spiritual hands desperate for God to act and he simply isn't are we dictated by him by his character and by his word and by his our relationship to him or are we dictated by circumstances so that we are all blown by the circumstances we find ourselves in at crossroads do we obey which sometimes will mean waiting on God to reveal his purposes or do we go and in so doing disobey him because we are in wanting to remain control is our life about our glory or is it about his glory for us I think faith very often for us is I love Jesus as long as I get what I want as long as he gives me what I want or as long as he makes no demands of me I love Jesus but he's not to make demands of my life he's not to be Lord he is not to be obeyed I think when obedience isn't an issue for us or maybe I put this a different way when temptation isn't an issue for us it's probably because obedience isn't an issue for us it's usually making Jesus Christ our

Lord that brings temptation because it involves that challenge about which way we're going to go and who we're going to serve and who is first in our lives so I think the importance we give to his lordship and to his obedience not legalistic obedience but loving because he cares and loves and that's what the story is all about it's all about his loving care and protection and promises for his people it's when we recognize that he's not an ogre that we need to follow but he's a loving savior that wants us to follow him because it's life within us there's sin which tempts us to say no get lost I want control there we see that working out in the life of Naomi yet praise God we also see his patience and his grace with her that she learned even though she gave into temptation that his way wait is better then secondly we see Boaz and we see his example here I'm probably going to repeat a little bit from story from last week here but so he got to bed he's the leader of you know he's an important person he's a kinsman redeemer he's got all these men that work under him and during the harvest they all just sleep on the threshing floor and he had a good meal and probably had a bit of a skin to drink as well just to make him merry enough to sleep and you know the passage tells us he goes to bed happy he goes to bed content you know glowing and you can imagine he may even been dreaming about Ruth because I think he probably fancied her by this stage he certainly she was good looking and she was young and he had spoken to her quite a bit so maybe he was dreaming about her but can you imagine the shock when he wakes up to find her at his feet and can you imagine what went through his mind what an opportunity she's here she wants me we'll be married soon because I'm going to work out that we're going to be married let's just sleep together this is my dream girl and she's at my feet surely this is of God surely this opportunity that is presented itself must be from God this is the way he works things out but he knows God and he knows what God's will for and the temptation just to sleep with her must have been real for him was it a green light million voices going off in his head but no he recognized God's promises he recognized God's order and God's pattern and God's way of doing things and that he had to redeem her formally and legally and properly and that to deal with the whole situation which you'll see in the last chapter and so he waited because pleasing God to him in that situation was hugely significant and doing the right thing he knew God he was full of integrity and he was upright and he showed restraint in that situation knowing and believing that there was a better way and that there would be a more fulfilling time for them together as man and wife and it was all within his character within his knowledge of God and

God's grace and he knew what the story was he knew what was happening and he knew that Naomi was part of that he provides for her with this tremendous provision of food and he go back and tell Naomi look it's okay I'll sort it in the morning and I'll provide for you you'll not be left alone and you'll be okay things will be fine Naomi please recognize I can see God working in this situation see maintains his integrity he trusts God to work out now I'm not saying for a moment that that was easy must have been a huge temptation just to to go ahead there in that situation but he it was

tough and yet he remained there until the morning and in doing so he protects Ruth and her integrity because remember she was a prostitute they would have shrugged her shoulders she's a prostitute anyway and she would have possibly been in great danger for her life at that point he acts in other words very differently from Naomi who doesn't really go out to protect Ruth in this situation but as Boas does and he wants her to stay safe he wants her to stay at his feet for the night because that's probably the safest place for to be in that culture at that time and then he wants her to leave early to avoid misrepresentation and scandal both of him and of her and he provides by way of pledge the gift of the the barley for Naomi was not just a gift it was a pledge saying I will act I will I do understand I will provide and I will care for you through taking Ruth to be my wife and in that culture and in that situation so we see his spiritual influence here as a person who is trusted in God has a positive effect on Naomi and a positive effect on Ruth and in in one Kings 721 it talks about the pillars in this in the temple being built and and one of them is called [21 : 20] Boas and I think that is God's way of saying Luke was important because of what he did he is foundational in the way he reflects faith and because his name is in him is strength and so there is spiritual strength in him and that's significant and important he's an overcomer he doesn't just give in to temptation isn't it so easy for us to give in to temptation and don't doesn't he point forward to our great redeemer Jesus Christ who was tempted far more than we would ever understand or contemplate or be able to cope with for 40 days in the desert but who overcame that temptation because he was a representative our savior our substitute and our Lord and that huge tough integrity is integral to him being our savior as he went from that to the darkness of Calvary and to the grave of hell in our place and so we see that our strength therefore to overcome temptation isn't in ourselves isn't whipping ourselves into a frenzy of faith and saying well I've got enough faith all over come temptation it's not about us it's about him who becomes our pillar and our strength that we go to that we cling to that we hold on to that we depend on and when we're tempted we don't say well I just I'm so weak I'm just gonna give in this once and

I'll move on and God will forgive me yeah I'm sure he will but we have the ability in Christ as believers to overcome because he has strengthened us and empowered us by his Holy Spirit to be a spiritual influence for good to be a pillar to be strong so I conclude therefore by asking a couple of questions that temptation forces us to ask in our lives in our lives as Christians if we are Christians if we have put our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ if he's our Lord if we follow him we invite him to take control as it were in a that we will follow him and obey him in our own strength or in the strength he gives us and in the grace that he empowers us with we ask in my life today and tomorrow is it going to be my way or God's way when we're tempted and this particular temptation when we're tempted to go against God to disobey him to not follow his promises is it my way or God's it's a great focus isn't it is it about me or is it about recognising the uniqueness of me in Christ and following Christ to make me the most individual and fulfilled person

I can be is it my control and my pleasure or is it God's way for us and that might one I mean there's a million different ways that each of us will be tempted in different ways but in this story maybe it's to do with sexual purity as it was for Boas is it going to be what the world says and what the world believes and and what is perfectly normal for today or do we recognise God's model and God's pattern and God's way because it's it's not simply a biological act that we engage in but it's a reflection of us two becoming one of privacy but of beauty and of an outworking of a love and commitment to one another in that great sexual act are we shaped by him in that or are we shaped by just the thinking of today which may be in that or it may be in a million other different ways because the reality is we are going to be swimming against the tide if we are Christians and if we take God as word and if we recognise him for who he is do we know what it do we practice or have we ever experienced waiting on the Lord as Naomi finally comes to recognise rather than always trying to work out God's will for him before he is revealed that she says wait and have we ever been in that place where we wait on him in prayer in relationship as we talk as we look for him to reveal himself to us through his promises and through his word it's a great spiritual and exercise for us to do my we are God's way or and and who is who is my savior who is Jesus that I believe in is he is he the kind of Santa

Claus figure or is he the insurance policy man that will keep us from hell at the end of the day that we will call on on our last day or is he the savior who is worthy of our worship and of our acceptance every day do we do we develop him develop our knowledge of him are we learning of him as Naomi has been learning to move from bitterness oh God's bitter he's made me bitter he's a harsh and

oppressive God where God slowly unpacks himself and says God is fool he's making me fool he's he's providing for me it's a beautiful love story not just between Ruth and Boas but between Naomi and God and what kind of savior do we have what kind of redeemer do we have is he a good and gracious and blessed redeemer or is he kind of a harsh oppressive God that drags us into heaven by our fingernails do we ignore his teaching and his leading and his touch and his forgiveness and his blessedness in our lives do we know his promises do we know how great they are amazing verse first Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 9 and with that we're nearly done but as is written what no eye has seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man imagined what

God has prepared for those who love him it's beyond our imagination his promises for us not just in the world to come but in the fullness of life here yes definitely in the world to come but also in our lives here what kind he has the most we could ever imagine is a grain of sand compared with what he has promised for us in terms of fullness and life and goodness and grace are we going to learn in our lives to wait in obedience on him I guess that's sometimes what waiting on Lord means it just means living in obedience it means sometimes therefore we'll not get what we want and we'll not get what we think we need and our prayers will be answered differently from what we expect it just means that just the globe Boas was simply he knew what he was doing because he knew his God and it wasn't anything flasher dramatic but he that was the course of his life it wasn't that dramatic but he knew God and God blessed him because he had a clear vision of who his Savior was and he therefore was learning to wait and pray in obedience and lastly where is where is our strength in life you know we need to be founded in the rock that is Jesus Christ we sung about that the great rock who is our Savior but also can I say I think we need to be founded in one another Naomi's giving into temptation was neutralized by the faith of those around her Ruth and the Boas is not great that's community that's community so when we fall if we have good people around us and by that I mean people who are looking to the Lord Jesus

[29 : 58] Christ who are love us enough to gently sometimes rebuke us and who we love enough to take that rebuke then isn't that a great thing that we find our strength in one another we're not just islands we're not just lone Rangers fighting for Jesus and everyone else are rubbish it's not like that we don't judge other Christians and we don't say we're better than other we're looking for the help and support and friendship and partnership and strength from others so that even when we do give into temptation they kind of neutralize it by embracing us into their fellowship and friendship and love and that I think is a part of this story that we need Jesus Christ every day every moment every power lies but we also need one another as Christians we are to be a redemptive community I've spoken about that before from Ruth we are a forgiving redemptive long-suffering patient gentle understanding community of one another we don't wag our tongues at one another we don't look at them that disaster they are they're hopeless they're worthless that's not what we're to be we are to be a people who strengthen one another by the grace of God and over therefore overcome temptation and even when we don't we know the blessing of forgiveness and the overarching plan of

God working through even our failure may that be true of us today and may we know come to know this Jesus Christ much much better in our lives know him spend time with him love him develop that grace and warm heartedness that he will give us by grace and through his Holy Spirit Amen let's pray Father God we pray that you would teach us from your word that we would understand the the depth of the deep rootedness of our self-centredness and pride and sin and that that is often damaging to ourselves as we give into temptation and also potentially damaging to others putting them in positions other Christians in positions of danger and trouble and so Lord help us to rely on one another as we rely on Jesus

Christ and as we seek his Holy Spirit and may we do so because we are adopted into your family and we belong and we are loved more than we can ever imagine by you just help us to see that more clearly we pray and help us to overcome temptation in our lives for Jesus sake Amen.