

Ruth's Surprising Suitor

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[0 : 00] I'd like to read this morning from Ruth, we are on Ruth chapter 2, it's on page 223 or it's on the screens. If you've just joined us and haven't been following this series or don't know the story, I'm not going to detail but the first chapter is really about Naomi and her husband, Alimaleh, who leave a famine country of the Promised Land and that famine reflects a spiritual famine that's in the country.

And rather than stay and turn back to God, they leave and go to Moab where they think they'll get food, they go with their two sons, their two sons get married down there and then the two sons die and so Alimaleh also dies, so Naomi is left with nobody but Ruth and Orpa, her daughter's in law and she hears that there's a return to fruitfulness in the Promised Land which signifies that the people themselves have returned to God as well and so she makes her way back with Ruth who doesn't want to leave her, Orpa stays in Moab but Ruth goes back with her into the unknown in many ways and so we catch up with the story of them coming back, they heard that God was blessing their land with the harvest.

Can I read the last verse of chapter 1 and then through to verse 18 of chapter 2. So Naomi returned and Ruth the Moabite with her daughter in law with her who returned from the country of Moab, they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Alimaleh whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, let me go to the field and glean them on the ears of grain after him and whose sight I shall find favour.

And she said to her, Naomi 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 Alimaleh and behold Boaz came from Bethlehem and he said to the reapers, the Lord be with you and they answered, the Lord bless you.

[2 : 15] Then Boaz said 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 after the reapers. So she came and she has continued from early morning until now except for a short rest.

Then Boaz said to Ruth, now listen my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one but keep close to my young woman. Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping and go after them.

Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn. Then she fell in 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.

[3 : 24] And how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. The Lord will pay 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.

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.

This is the word of God. And we look forward to spending some time around this passage. So if there's one thing, Ruth is a really interesting book.

One of the main themes of Ruth is that returning to God trumps everything. I gave you take nothing else from this sermon today or from this message or from worship.

Remember that returning to God trumps everything. Whatever you've gone into this week thinking is important, thinking is significant and vital. I'm telling you today there's nothing more important in your life than returning to God if you need to.

[4 : 30] But in many ways as Christians that's the caricature, that's the direction, that's the way our life is moulded.

It's a constant facing of returning to God. So it's not just kind of for someone who might be drifting away from God, but it's for all of us that we have this focus where eyeballing God in our lives spiritually every day.

And what we see in the story of Ruth is the transforming power of grace for those who return to Him. Okay? So this is a great story.

It's a tremendous story that speaks volumes to us about how much grace actually changes us from the inside out. So we'll change the way you walk out of here and we'll change the way you deal with the events of this week that God will buy us.

Grace allow you to enjoy. And as we look at this book we need to remember as we've mentioned before that the truth that is in this book transcends the culture into which it's written.

[5 : 37] So you may read the book and say, well I don't know anything about this culture, I don't understand what's going on, I don't understand what's happening, it's miles away from 21st century experience in first world living, how can it be relevant?

We need to be wise enough to learn from the culture into which it's written to understand it was very different. But that God works in each of these cultures right through and to our own and that this is part of God's word.

And so the truth that God wants us to know transcends the culture into which it's written. In other words it's not all fashioned and it's not out of date just because we don't understand the relationships between men and women and between slaves and masters and everything that went on in these days.

The human beings don't really change and God's message to us and God's truth to us doesn't change. So this is very much about life and faith. I know it's from the Old Testament before Christ therefore they were a lot less privileged than you are today, you sitting here are very privileged because you can look back on all of the New Testament and all the knowledge of Christ and what he's done and that makes the responsibility of deeper.

Nonetheless there are great lessons for life and faith that we can take from Ruth for ourselves. So let's look at the story today. There's two things that I want to mention. The first is God in our lives and the second is faith in our lives.

[7 : 00] Very simple things God and faith. And look at how this story teaches us about these things in our lives. So in this story about God in our lives we can see, if we look at this story we can see it from two perspectives.

We can see it from the perspective of God. In other words we know that God's doing a lot of things in their lives of Ruth and Naomi and Boas and we know he's got a purpose and a plan.

We've seen that and we know that from Scripture that he has a purpose, he has a plan, he has a sovereign will, nothing happens randomly, nothing happens by chance.

That Ruth is part of the genealogy of Jesus so that what we have here is God protecting the forebears of Jesus so that Jesus can be born.

And we also have a reflection of God working in the lives of these people, revealing his redemption and his grace to them before the coming of Jesus. So God's got a clear purpose and a plan and yet we also get the story from Naomi and Ruth's point of view and Boas and it's not necessarily so clear to them.

[8 : 10] A lot of the time they're walking in the dark and they can't see God's purposes and don't know God's plan. Can I read a poem to you which you'll all know? Nah, I shouldn't say that, maybe you don't know it.

Maybe the young things here, the older generation here will probably know it because it gets wheeled out at lots of things. But it's called Life is a Weaving and it's kind of saying what I'm trying to say here.

My life is but a weaving between my God and me, I cannot choose the colours, he weaves steadily. Sometimes he weaves sorrow and I in foolish pride forget he sees the upper and I see the underside.

Not till the loom is silent and the shuttle cease to fly will God unroll the canvas and reveal the reason why. The dark threads are as needful in the weaver's skillful hand as the threads of gold and silver in the pattern that he is planning.

He knows he loves, he cares. Nothing this truth can dim, he gives the very best to those who leave the choice to him. So that picture isn't of a tapestry that looks beautiful and patterned and ordered on the top but if you turn that upside down it's a complete mess of threads just going everywhere.

[9 : 18] It doesn't seem to make any sense. And sometimes that's the picture that we have in scripture. God knows his perspective and then there's the reality of what's happening on the ground.

So can I look at that for a moment, God's perspective and also the perspective on the ground. God's perspective here comes through the narrative and through the narrator and through gentle hints in the text.

We don't start with the saying, okay this is what God's going to do, A, B, C, D, Z and then have the story but we get hints throughout the story that God is in control and we have two gentle hints in this story.

The first, and I'm stealing Corey's thunder here because I think Corey last week said he was going to make some great comments about the barley harvest. I'm first. It's my turn.

I'm going to make them and I'm going to steal his thunder. The end of verse of chapter 1 says they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest. Now that might just seem an incidental fact to us but it was significant to God and it's significant to the narrator and in some ways also obviously to Ruth and Naomi.

[10 : 23] But the paradox of that statement is that you remember Corey last week mentioned that Naomi left, we're told that Naomi left the Promised Land at a time of famine and that she said she left full.

Now that didn't mean she left full physically of food but it meant she left full of her own self-reliance and self-importance so she was going to sort out things herself. She left the Promised Land full and then at the end of the chapter we're told she said she comes back empty.

Don't call me blessed. Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara. Bitter. Because I've come back, God has emptied me. So she realises there's a spiritual that's happened.

She's gone away full of herself, she's come back empty in need of God. And yet in this story we're told that physically there was famine in the land at the beginning, not fullness, but when Naomi comes back empty there's harvest in the land, there's fullness, there's a barley harvest.

Now that's an interesting paradox there because it signifies that what God was doing in Naomi's life he'd done in the people of Israel's life because we mentioned in the first C.R.

[11 : 32] sermon that the physical famine reflected a spiritual famine and so the physical harvest also reflected that the people who had stayed returned to God, learned the lesson of the famine and knew God's blessing again.

You know we said that in the Old Testament the spiritual truths were much more kind of physical, much more tangible. Well this is one of them, they didn't have Christ on the cross, they didn't have a risen saviour to look back on so their faith was expressed by God for them in much more physical, tangible ways often.

So the harvest spoke of that he was blessing them again and it was tangible. Now this barley harvest was the first harvest.

It was March, April, March, April time. It was the first harvest. It was the harvest that was particularly celebrated by the poor because they made bread with it and so they would be fed, remember they came from Bethlehem, the house of bread and there was no bread and so there was bread, they were going to be bread provided for them again and it was harvested at the same time as the people celebrated the Feast of Passover which they were to celebrate to remember their freedom from slavery in Egypt.

Remember the Lord passed over their houses when they were covered in the blood and they escaped into the Promised Land and so it was a time of celebration, a time of hope and a time of newness and looking forward.

[13 : 02] So this barley harvest incidentally mentioned here is the narrator and God ultimately through the Spirit reminding us that what was happening was significant spiritually, something new happening, something celebratory, something where he would provide in ways that they hadn't known before.

So that's the first hint in the text of God's perspective. The second hint is this rather anomalous parenthesis at the beginning of verse 2, a verse that's stuck in there that's not really part of the story yet, Naomi and Ruth and then all of a sudden we have, Naomi had a relative of her husband, a worthy man of the clan of Olymola whose name was Boas and that's it.

And then it goes back to Ruth and Naomi's story. He's never been mentioned before but this gentle kind of hint of this text being put in here is a reminder that God's got a plan and it's going to involve Boas and he's significant even though Naomi and Ruth don't know him at this point and of course in verse 4 it goes on to say, and behold Boas came from Bethlehem and so he then is involved in the story but God knows and God involves us in that knowledge by saying who Boas is and why he's significant.

He goes on to become a redeeming, generous, extravagant character who reflects Jesus Christ. It's a type of Jesus Christ but we'll see that more in future weeks.

So that's God's perspective. He's got a purpose, he's got a plan, he's working out something here. But then if we look at the perspective on the ground we have Naomi and Ruth here. Now Naomi's come back and she's been emptied by God.

[14 : 46] She feels she's got nothing left that God has judged her for what she's done and yet pleasingly and happily and I like Naomi, she's good, she's given a hard time by the biblical scholars and commentators.

I like her. Naomi's come back here, she's far from perfect and we're going to see some more of her mischievous ways later on but she's drawn back to this repentant community.

She hears about what's happening, she knows God's blessing them with harvest, she knows she has to go back because God's dealing with her and she goes back. She's very like the prodigal, you know.

She's the prodigal daughter here, not the prodigal son. It's similar kind of story. She realises her only hope is getting something back from God as she returns to the promised land yet it must have been so hard for her.

Can you imagine? She had a fragile trust, she takes faltering steps back, she doesn't know how she's going to be accepted, she's going back with a moabite girl, how she will be accepted, who will give her money or who will provide when there was no welfare state, what would it be like for her?

[15 : 54] Would she be ostracised and rejected? She didn't know the plan, she didn't know what God was doing, she couldn't see his purposes ultimately for grace and love for her really at this stage.

So there's Naomi and then there's Ruth, Ruth's different. Naomi was a returner, a backslider coming back to faith slowly, gently. Ruth has a new faith, she's come to trust in God.

She is going to have to be part of a new community, she's going to have to be part of a new life, she's left her country behind, she's left her family behind and she doesn't know what lies ahead for her either.

She's young, she's lashed with this older lady, is it going to mean it's going to be difficult for her to get a husband? Is she going to be poverty stricken? Will she be rejected? But we see with her, she also doesn't know, but she just goes out on a base.

She's finding herself poverty stricken and so what she does is she realises that in Israel when the harvest is happening God has ordained that the harvesters didn't harvest at the side of the fields so that the poor could pick up the crops from the side.

[17 : 06] That was God's provision for the poor. He said to people with crops, don't harvest at the sides and let the poor come in and harvest there. She recognised she would be like a slave, she would have to go and harvest and work hard and just see what happened.

And the middle of verse 3 says an interesting thing, it says 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.

Now the actual translation is that she by coincidence came to this place. She didn't know it was Boaz's place, she didn't know what plans God had for her in Boaz, by coincidence, just by chance she came here.

You see from her perspective she was just going out to a field and it was just a random field she chose. It was chance, it was a fluke.

God knew but from her point of view it looked just like a fluke. I would go as far as to say that even fluke or even chance which I believe in is ordained by God which I also believe.

[18 : 14] But from our perspective what looks like chance, just a fluke feel that she happens to go in, she didn't know what lay ahead because of that, she just went out on a bed. And so she trusted and obeyed and didn't know what the future would hold.

So I'm going to stop at this point and ask some questions because when we look at scripture let's apply it and let's think what God's doing in our lives and what we're thinking. So I'm going to ask some questions that I ask and maybe you will ask as well.

What is God doing in my life? What is God doing in your life today? Maybe you're like Naomi today, maybe you feel that you've been emptied of all that you thought was filling you and that you've got a brokenness and just a feeling of emptiness spiritually that you feel God is not blessing you in your life.

And I'm saying if that's how you feel, that's a good place to be if you return to God like Naomi did and recognise that his hand is on you and that you must confess your sins and turn back to him. And if your life is such and if my life is such that we have no time for depending on God, if we've no time for praying to him, if we've no time for building and drawing and deepening that relationship with him, if we're wanting to take the benefits of salvation for that day of judgment but live however we want to live now in our own strength and our own reliance, then God I'm telling you will empty you because you're his child and he loves you and I'm telling you he'll empty you because he loves you and because he wants to bring you to your knees back to himself.

[19 : 54] We don't see the end of the story here with Naomi but he deals in great love and great patience and great graciousness with her but sometimes he will empty us of all the things we think are important and significant and self-reliant in order to make us realise that our dependence and our reliance must be on him.

And if you're in that empty place today, a place of darkness, fall on your knees and ask God to fill you again. There's no kind of period that he requires of obedience before he works.

Just fall on your knees today before him and ask in your life if what he is doing is intended to bring you back to himself, the emptiness.

And then we can possibly ask all the questions, what does it mean to live by faith? Some people think to live by faith means that we have such a relationship with God that we can just ask him for guidance and he writes it down on a bit of paper for us and everything's clear whether it's the job we take, the partner we have, the house we buy, the decisions we make, the way we spend our money and it's all absolutely clear cut to us.

I don't believe that's how God works and certainly in the story of Ruth it's not how he works. Ruth here obviously comes to that place where she has committed her life to Christ, she's gone to a new community and all sorts of things might be happening and she doesn't know the end of the story, she doesn't know how it's going to work out, she just simply seeks to obey, trust and obey.

[21 : 27] There's no other way to trust and obey. And very often that will be how we find it. We will move forward by faith.

We will pray, we will obey but we will not get a divine bolt of lightning right in on the wall telling us exactly what to do with our lives because not much faith needed in that.

The faith is needed when we take the steps of obedience wherever he will lead and as we look back we can see that. There's a great old Puritan called John Flavill and he says the providence of God are like Hebrew words, they can only be read properly backwards.

So those of us who are Hebrew scholars know that, of course I'm just explaining to you that you read Hebrew backwards. And that's very true of providence very often of God's guidance.

Sometimes we move forward in faith and it's only as we look back that we can see clearly exactly where he's guided us.

I'm sure that was true, it would have been true for Ruth and Naomi in their lives and much of what we do might seem just like faith, like chance, like coincidence but nothing happens that way.

[22 : 40] The people you meet, can I say, the people who are in church today, the people you will see during the week, none of it is by coincidence and you have to act in every situation with faith and obedience and we will see the outworking of that.

The third question briefly on this first point is, and this is slightly random but I think it's related, is to do with our church community, whether it's attractive or not.

Naomi was attracted back to the promised land, to the people of God and to the barley harvest. She knew that they had been spiritually exercised and active and that they'd repented and turned back to God.

And with all her questions, with all her fears, with all her doubts, she was willing to go back there because there was an attraction about that, people in whom God was working. Now, if we are living our lives as a Christian community, not just as random individuals but also as a people of God who are encouraging each other to return to God, to look to God, to be praying to God, not just to be going our own way and turn up once in a Sunday and that's all it for the rest of the week, but to be a community of people who are living out their faith in a vibrant and in a real way, if we're responsive to God, I believe that as a people then we will attract drifters and converts.

Naomi was a drifter, Ruth was a convert. That is who God will send to us because we are working and we are responsive to his word and responsive to his will.

[24 : 17] He will send us people who are far from the faith but who want to come back and also people new to the faith. Now, that's, can I just say by way of my parenthesis here, that's one of the interesting things that's happened in the church plants that we have, particularly the morning side which is slightly further on our cornerstone, is that the people that have come to cornerstone, they're our own core and then there's new people, but there's also new converts and, interestingly, returners, people who have been away from church for years, who have found it easier and more attractive to go back to that setting for maybe a multiplicity of reasons, but maybe partly because it's smaller, maybe partly because there's a sense of newness and freshness of God at work and yet they've attracted them.

And I think in a living church, if we're not attracting converts and drifters, then God is saying to us, get back to me.

Turn back to me as a people. Don't be proud, don't be self-reliant, don't be complacent. Turn back to me together. Returning to God, I'm saying, is the most important thing in the world.

Okay, that's the first thing which is God in our lives. The second thing I want to mention is faith in our lives, okay? And that comes very clearly through the story here of Ruth in the passage we read. Because if we have been touched by God, if we have returned to God, if he is beginning to fill us spiritually, having been emptied spiritually, then our lives will be transformed.

[25 : 54] We don't, we're not people who say, I became a Christian 20 years ago and I'm the same person now as I was then. You know, it's not that we become Christians and then we carry on the way we are.

We become, we've got new, new creations. We're babes in Christ and then we grow and we're transformed and we're changed. In other words, I'm saying faith, understanding grace, understanding what Jesus has done for us will transform our hearts.

I'm telling you, from the inside out, it will make us different people. And if it doesn't, we haven't understood grace and we haven't understood our need.

We're all different. We're not going to be robots, we'll be transformed in the unique way that God has created us, but to become like Christ. And what I'm saying is that if we are Christians, the faith that we have should make us beautiful people.

It should be making us, we should be becoming beautiful people because we're becoming like Jesus. That's what's true.

[26 : 57] And we should be changing. Because we say, I'm a Christian, I'm unchanging, I'm unflinching. And we mix up the unchanging nature of who God is with the inevitable need for change in our own lives to become like the unchanging one.

So you've got two characters here. Well, you've got more, but I'm going to look at Boaz briefly and Ruth. We'll deal with Naomi later on because God deals with her more so. This is more about Ruth than Boaz. He is someone who is a believer and we see it in his character, just oozes out of this chapter beautifully.

And some of it is implicit. It's not that clear. We know he's faithful because he stayed in the Promised Land, even during the famine. He didn't resort to going down to Moab and leaving, which God forbade them to do.

He stayed and presumably he examined his own heart and returned to the Lord and was part of a people who he may have remained righteous right through it. And he may have felt like these

people are just absolutely godless and they're just doing what's right in their own eyes and they're idolatry.

But he did, he stayed there and he was part of that renewal and revival which brought them a harvest again. And also interestingly, and this is kind of once removed, but he's slightly older by this time.

[28 : 21] But he later in the story, he's a fair bit older than Ruth and he comments on that later in the story. But he also didn't do what many of the guys of his day and power did, which was go anywhere like Samson or people like that and some of the other patriarchs and go down and choose wives from foreign nations, which they were also forbidden to do.

He was single, he was faithful to God in that and he was waiting on God for God to provide for him. He was obedient to God because like I mentioned about the harvest, he had commanded his harvesters not to harvest round the edges so that the poor would get their food.

He recognised that as being important and significant. He was gracious and respectful. He had a lovely interaction between himself and his workers. He said, the Lord be with you and they said, the Lord bless you.

You know, there was a good relationship. He wasn't a kind of oppressive, harsh dictator, but they respected him and he respected them and he spoke to the servant who was in charge and he asks about Ruth and then he goes and speaks to Ruth.

Now he deals with Ruth beautifully and I'm not for a moment suggesting that there wasn't a twinkle in his eye by this stage and that may have possibly coloured the way he treated her.

[29 : 40] But we can see that that's how he treated other poverty stricken people and she was the poorest of the poor. She was a mobitis. She wasn't even a Jewish poor. Mobitis. She could be on the complete outside.

Yet he speaks to her, he provides for her, he cares for her, he keeps her from danger, he is friendly to this woman and that for me is the greatest thing about him is his friendliness to the outsider.

Why is he so friendly to Ruth? Is it just mere attraction? Don't think so. Do you remember who his mother was?

His mother was Rahab, the prostitute who saved, helped save the Israelites at Jericho and became part of the people of God. He was an outsider. He came from a family of outsiders who came into the people of God and he knew what it was to be like to be an outsider and he took from his own family experiences and it reflected in his the way gracefully he treated Ruth in her situation.

I think Boaz is one of the most outstanding characters in the Bible because remember the day he lived in it, I've just been reading Genesis just now that there are a bunch of mentalists in Genesis, they do mental things and yet they are part of the people of God and yet Boaz is so upright and yet so manly and courageous and strong.

[31 : 04] Anyway enough about Boaz. Ruth, we also see that grace, truth transforms her in the way that she lives. She's unprivileged, underprivileged, however you might want to say it.

She's lost her husband, she's lost her home environment, her family area, she had put her trust in God as her saviour. There's a lovely verse 12 where Boaz speaks about her and says, the Lord, you will get a full reward be given to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

So this is her testimony, she had put her faith and trust in God, she had rested in him like a mother hen comes in for protection under the wings of its, the chicks come under the wings of the mother hen, so she had come under the protection of God for redemption and salvation and that was known.

That was a reputable fact in the community. People knew Boaz had heard about her, she was loyal to Naomi, she was respectful, she was hard working, you know, she didn't hardly stop for a break when she went to work in the fields, she didn't button, she didn't demand, she was just a gracious, gentle Christ-like, if I can say, character even before Christ's time.

And faith in God influenced her life and influenced her decisions and influenced what she did. And what I'm saying is that it simply can't be hidden. If we have a genuine faith, we can try our hardest to suppress it and not let other people though, but it'll just come out.

[32 : 41] It will come out because of the Christ-likeness of our character, because faith, genuine faith that understands who we are and what we've been redeemed from will come out.

And it will track because our lives will be transformed. Boaz's life was transformed and so should ours be. And that's what I want to finish just with some practical applications of faith in life transforming us, because that's what we should do, Ruth and Boaz, our life was transformed. So faith in your life, you should go from here, don't just wait and listen to the Sermon thing, I was a good Sermon and a poor Sermon and go out here, there's the same. Recognise that your faith in Jesus Christ requires you to go and live a certain type of life for Him.

A Christ-like, attractive, attractational life for Him. As I just want to say a few things, the first is the extravagance of God's grace, which we see in this story and it's pointing towards, remember I talked about God's having the bigger picture here and the story is pointing forward.

And Boaz is very much a type of Christ and we begin to see it in this chapter in the way he deals with Ruth, but it becomes much more evident the further on we go as he deals also with Naomi.

[33 : 56] But Boaz is very much introduced as a redeeming character here, a protecting character. I point forward to Jesus who is not the house of bread, Bethlehem, but the bread of life.

I am the bread of life, the one who provides the good news, the extravagance, the blessing in what we think sometimes are the random experience of our lives as we turn to God, He is using them and showing us how great He is.

Returning to God is the most important thing because we will experience the extravagance of His love. You think returning to God is going to bind you.

You think it's going to be dull. You think it's going to be miserly because somehow if it's good to be a Christian it must be a miserable experience if we're going to have a great time in heaven.

He doesn't work like that. He says if we trust Him even in the darkness that He pours out His extravagant love. Ephesians which we looked at makes that clear that He will do exceedingly above and beyond what we can ask or even imagine.

[35 : 04] Your imagination can be very dramatic and it can imagine great things. He says I will give you above and beyond what you can ask of Him. He's a generous God.

The cross is His visual gift as the harvest was a visual gift here. It's His visual gift of His love, commitment, cost, sacrifice, atonement, gift on our behalf that as we trust in Him who deserve nothing He will give us Himself.

He will give us eternal life. He will give us what we need in this life as we put our faith and trust in Him. Trust of God's love. And then secondly the priority and I've got this in inverted commas of reckless faith.

From our point of view, very often our faith seems like a reckless thing to do. Our very wise mentors tell us don't believe in God, don't walk the walk of faith, don't be ridiculous.

You take control, you make the decisions, you be number one priority in your life. But the gospel is a gospel of reckless faith. That is from our point of view.

[36 : 16] Naomi it seemed reckless to go back to the promised land. It could mean her death. Ruth she was giving up everything to go back and there wasn't much potential there for her let's be honest and yet she trusted and obeyed it may have seemed reckless.

And you may think today in your suffering, in your darkness, in the testing you're going through and the doubt that you're feeling in the circumstances of your life that it's reckless to trust in God.

I think I'll just go and make my own way. And he says no returning to me trumps everything. It's not reckless to go against what everyone else is thinking and saying because I am sovereign and I am Lord and I am creator and I am redeemer and I am judge.

It's not reckless. I love you. Stop blaming me. Stop accusing me. Stop grumbling against me and simply put your trust in me.

It's not reckless even though we think it might be. It is the way of hope and the way of grace.

Returning to God trumps everything. Go on your knees today when you get home if you are far from God and if you think that faith is a reckless waste of time and ask him to show you himself.

[37 : 33] And the last thing very briefly is the undeniable beauty of grace in our lives just as it was in the life of Ruth and in the life of Boas.

If we come to Christ, if we put our faith in Christ, if we seek to serve and obey him out of love and are constantly turning back to him, in other words repenting of things we've done wrong and sins that separate us from him, that will, I'm telling you, make you a beautiful person.

It's not what we are in ourselves. It's not what we can drum up with our own abilities. As we return to God and live the life of grace, it will be beautiful. Spurgeon has got a great quote on this and he

speaks about character.

The old preacher, Baptist preacher, he said, a good character is the best tombstone. Those who loved you and were helped by you will remember you.

Listen, so carve your name on hearts, not marble. Isn't that great? carve your name on hearts, not marble. In other words, it doesn't matter what the marble statement say about your life and how great it was, carve your influence on the hearts of people around about you by living out a life of Christian character in your everyday.

[38 : 49] You know Boas was right up here. He was a big significant important person. Ruth was right down there. It didn't make any difference the way he called before God. And Ruth and her way had great influence and so did Boas and his way.

We don't need to be leaders and politicians and significant business people by the world standards. Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, be Christlike and let faith transform your life so that it's reputable as Ruth's was.

You know, be good bosses, be good workers, be diligent, be honest, be humble, be selfless, serve God and be part of God's community of returning people.

Don't just wander off on your own and think, ah, well, the church is a waste of time. The church is just full of hypocrites. It's just an excuse. Deal with your own heart before God and come among God's people and be a returner among God's people and be part of this work of renewal.

Because then your faith will be spoken of and you wouldn't need to work at it. You wouldn't need to think, how can I witness to God today? Because you will be witnessing. You will serve Him by grace shining from your life and then you will tell when the opportunity arises.

[40 : 02] And you know the most important thing, and I said this at the first service as well, for me anyway, at least the most important thing, both as a church and as individuals, but as a church, it's knowing where we've come from.

Means that we will love the outsider. That to me is the real mark here in Boaz. He just loved the outsider and that as a church, let's be people and as individuals, let's be people who love the outsider because we were, we're outsiders.

We're outsiders in the world of secularism. We're also outsiders of God's grace until we come to Him by grace. And we know what it is to be on the outside.

So we should be a people. And when God is working in our church, I honestly believe the church should attract new converts and returners.

And we will attract returners because they will come here and they will not be judged. They will not say, oh, I haven't seen them for a long time. What are they doing back here?

[41 : 10] What do they want? Or even more significantly, we might notice the ones who, do you notice who's not here today? Are you aware of who might not have been among the community of God's people for weeks and weeks here?

Do you care? Do we care about those who are drifting or do we just want to keep the group that, you know, as insular looking in to one another that we get a good crack with?

What about those who are on the outside? Who's looking out for them? Who's praying for them? How are we attracting them back? Are we aware as a community of these people?

Naomi made a great impact when she came back and roofed it also. And she was attracted into that community. I hope that that is the kind of church we are, great challenge to us and individuals that we are also.

Amen. That's power heads. And pray. Lord God, we ask and pray that you would bless and guide us in our lives, that we would see that faith in this story from so long ago, so much power of God's word, reminds us that faith transforms our lives and changes our lives, changes our attitude to the Christian community, changes our attitude to one another, to new converts and to returners, to those who are struggling.

[42 : 32] Remind us Lord that faithfulness is about faithfulness when we don't know the future, when we feel famine touched or we feel emptied by God.

May our response be like Naomi to take that emptiness and return to God, even if it's only fragile, faltering steps. Forgive us for being proud and for being independent and for being careless of the spiritual needs of others or from any kind of hypocrisy or self-righteousness that so often will enter into our own hearts.

We pray for humility and for cleansing. And bless us Lord in all that we do and say and think in our worship and in our lives for Jesus' sake.