



BREAD IN BETHLEHEM SERIES: Part 4
THE LOVE THAT LIFTS US
Kevin Presley

Welcome to the program today. It's good to be with you. Thanks for joining me for Let the Bible Speak. We have come to a turning point in the great drama known as the Book of Ruth. We're spending several weeks in this wonderful book of the Old Testament, not only because of the practical lessons it teaches and illustrates for us, but also because of the important theological truths it sets forth. Over the past three weeks, we have focused on the warnings and practical inspiration the story of Naomi and Ruth provides, but today, we will see another purpose behind this important book: the revelation of God's Son and a foregleam of the redemption He brought to earth when He came.

We have stayed in chapter one, today though, as we turn the page to chapter 2, God turns the page of Ruth's life to a whole new chapter as well. Let's read Ruth 2:1-3. The bible says: *"There was a relative of Naomi's husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz. So Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." Then she left, 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 family of Elimelech."*

This short scene was the beginning of a great love story; not only between two unlikely people, but a love story between God and His people. I'll explain in our lesson today. So far, we've learned about The Times That Try Us, as well as the Choices That Condemn Us, and the Decisions That Destine Us. Today, we see The Love That Lifts Us.

There was a commotion at the gates of Bethlehem as Naomi returned after ten long and hard years away in Moab. The people surely must have wondered what had happened to this family after they had left during the famine ten years before. A strong and able man along with his lovely and pleasant wife and their two sons walked out of the city gates one day to find relief from the famine that gripped the village but now, only Naomi returns, a childless widow, and the pain of regret and hardship written

across her once youthful and pretty face. With her was a young Gentile woman – an idolator from the enemy country of Moab named Ruth.

Somewhere along the road to Bethlehem, Ruth had made up her mind to leave her family and her home behind and find a new life with Naomi and among the Jews in Bethlehem. It would not be easy for her, but she was determined to discover the faith of her mother-in-law and her late husband and worship the God of Israel. As for Naomi, she was finally home and could begin to try to put the pieces of her shattered life back together. But everything seemed against her. She came back in bankruptcy and poverty. She had a broken heart, having buried her husband and two sons in a foreign land. She had no means of support as a woman without a husband or children to provide for her was in a desperate condition back in that day. And Naomi believed that God Himself was against her. Ruth 1:19 says, “Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them; and the women said, “Is this Naomi” (how different she must have looked after all this time). But she said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara (which means bitter), for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord has brought me home again empty...” Naomi may have thought that God was against her, but little did she understand just how much the Lord actually loved her and how He was about to lift her out of the shadows and give her a new start and a new life, along with her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth. In fact, God was about to use this Gentile woman as the channel of blessing, not only for Naomi, but for the whole world.

God can take unfortunate, and sometimes, even sinful, and foolish situations and turn them around and use them for His purposes and for His glory. And for all the heartache and sorrow Elimelech and Naomi may have invited into their lives over the past ten years, God now takes His pen and dips it in the well of His grace and writes the story of redemption on the dark background of Naomi’s broken life. A new day dawned when Ruth went out to find a field in which to gather barley. Naomi and Ruth have come to Bethlehem all because of the message that came to Naomi one day that God had “visited His people in giving them bread.” In other words, God had, at last, brought an end to the awful famine that had afflicted Bethlehem these many years. The rains had finally come; the crops had finally begun to grow; and for the first time in a decade, Bethlehem Judah would experience a plentiful harvest.

It was the time of the harvest when Ruth and Naomi returned, and the bible says that Ruth went out to glean in the fields. This means that she and Naomi were poor and at the mercy of the wealthy landowners of the town. Naomi may have come home, and Ruth may have begun a new chapter in her life, but that doesn’t mean that all was well and that everything was restored to the way things were when Elimelech and Naomi were a happy family before the famine. No, the famine and their departure to Moab had left Naomi, not only a childless widow, but it had left her bankrupt and destitute. That’s where sin and apostasy leave many souls today. Sin and trying to live without God exacts its price and leaves the one who left home looking for pleasure or gain empty and spiritually bankrupt. This is where Naomi is physically, and she’s depressed about her spiritual life as well. So, the only hope they have, is for Ruth, the younger and stronger of the two, to fall at the mercy of her neighbors and try to find a field in which to glean the leftover barley.

Now, God cares about the poor. He has always loved and been concerned about the poor, so much so, that He has always made provision in His law for them. Christians, today, are commanded to be empathetic and compassionate toward those who have less and to help those we have the opportunity to help. Jesus, in fact, said that every Christian will answer in the judgment for how we treated the hungry, naked, and imprisoned. Under the old covenant, He made provision for those who fell upon

hard times as well. Back in that day, a landowner who hire workers to go out and gather the stalks by hand. They would take a sickle and with a flint blade, grab a handful of stalks with their hand and cut them. They would take these handfuls and bundle them together in sheaves and then take them to the threshing floor to make grain. Now, Moses' law instructed the farmers not to harvest everything in their fields. They were to leave the corners, or the hard-to-reach places, for the poor. Leviticus 19:9-10 says "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the LORD your God."

That act of mercy saved many a life in that dispensation. The poor depended on it. Notice, the poor had to go glean. They had to go and work to gather the stalks, but it was incumbent upon those who HAD to make some provision for those who HAD NOT. We don't live under the Law of Moses today and most of us don't have fields to reap but this expresses a principle that I think we should keep in mind as we reap in our fields of life and industry, so to speak. We should always bear in the mind the poor and the less fortunate and make provision to help people as we can out of the abundance of the things God allows us to have. And I think we'll answer to God if we don't.

Well, Ruth sets out one day to find food. She goes out to glean in some neighbor's field. The bible uses an interesting phrase in Ruth 2:3, saying, "Then she left, 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 family of Elimelech." This statement makes it sound as though it was purely a coincidence that Naomi came to the field of Boaz. We'll talk a little more about that next week, the Lord willing, but it wasn't really coincidence. Oh, it was from a human perspective. No one, in other words, directed Ruth to Boaz's field. Nobody told her that it would be to her advantage to go there. She just happened to find herself there. That's from HER perspective. But God has a different perspective on the matter and her going there was providential. That's how providence occurs. We don't realize that something is providentially taking place. Providence takes place behind the scenes and is known to the mind of God. And in this case, God was weaving together another scene is the grand drama of the ages – His plan of salvation. Again, more about that next week. Today, though, let us see how her wandering in the field of Boaz changed her life and what that means to us spiritually today.

You see, not only did God have this provision of the fields for the poor, but He also had another law that protected families who fell on hard times and that is the law of the goel' or the kinsman-redeemer. Notice how the bible emphasizes that Boaz was 'of the family of Elimelech.' He was likely a nephew of Elimelech. And the bible portrays him as a very wealthy and prominent man in the village of Bethlehem. The word Go'el refers in some places to a defender or an avenger or, as in this case, a redeemer. God's laws concerning a kinsman-redeemer and the leverite marriage amounted to this: if a family went bankrupt and lost their land, a near-relative was to then step in and buy back the property (to redeem it). The law of the leverite marriage said that if a man died, a relative (first a brother) was to marry the widow of his dead relative and raise up children with her so that the family name and line would continue. God was here dealing with a human family at that time and so the law that governed them made such provisions for the family's survival and continuation.

Well, Ruth, dead Elimelech's daughter-in-law, happens into the field of Elimelech's nephew or cousin, Boaz, and finds barley to glean. Something wonderful then happens to her. Boaz takes special notice of her. He finds out who she is and how she had cared from Naomi after the death of Elimelech, and her faithfulness and goodness caused him to show incredible kindness to her. He instructed his workers to

not only leave her alone and allow her to continue gleaning but he tells them to let extra grain fall from their bundles on purpose and not to rebuke her for picking it up. He had her to sit and eat with he and his workers and he gave her a bag of leftovers to take home with her that night. In other words, she had a wonderful day. When she came home that night, Naomi was eager to learn where she had been and how the day had gone. Ruth excitedly told her about the good fortune she had had in this wealthy man's field. She showed her the abundant stalks she had been allowed to gather and the loaves of bread she had been sent home with and Naomi wants to know where all of this came from. She asks "Where have you gleaned today? And where did you work? Blessed be the one who took notice of you." So, she told her mother-in-law with who she had worked, and said, "The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz." Well, when she said 'Boaz', Naomi, I guess, did a double-take. She said, 'his name may not mean much to you but dear, we're related to him, and this couldn't be any better.'

You see, she understood the Law of Moses and the provision of the kinsman-redeemer and the Levirate marriage and she hatches a plan to put this wealthy bachelor of Bethlehem together with this little maid from Moab. She tells her (and I'm paraphrasing now), "sweetie, here's what you do. You go in there and take a good bath and get all cleaned up. Put on your prettiest dress, dab on some Chanel No, 5, and you slip down there this evening when he's finished working and here's what you do. When he eats his supper and lays down to sleep at the threshing floor to protect his harvest, you wait until he falls asleep, and you carefully uncover his feet (and don't let some lead your mind off into the gutter... the word 'feet' here means feet and nothing else), you lift up his garment and uncover his feet and you lay down at his feet and he'll tell you what to do. There was nothing sensual in any of this. It was all symbolic custom. It was her way of appealing to him to step in and fill the role of the kinsman-redeemer; to ask him to buy back their land and to take Ruth as his wife and care for her and raise up a family in the stead of Mahlon, her deceased husband with whom she had not been able to have any children. It's actually a beautiful picture from that ancient culture. But it's especially beautiful when you consider what it represents for us.

We'll show how it all unfolded next week, Lord willing, but to make the story short, Boaz found Naomi at his feet that night and lovingly agreed to do what she asked and to restore her family and to marry her. They have now fallen in love and on the morrow, Boaz will go to the town gates to set things in motion to make Ruth his beloved wife and to restore the lost and broken estate of Naomi and her family. There were at least three qualifications for one to be a kinsman-redeemer. One had to be worthy, wealthy, and willing. He had to be worthy: in other words, the goel or the redeemer had to be related to the one who's property he was redeeming. He had to be a near relative. He also had to be wealthy: he had to have the financial means to buy the property and, in this case, be able to marry the widow. And thirdly, he had to be WILLING to marry her and redeem the land. Boaz was a near-relative of Elimelech. He was a wealthy and prominent citizen of the town and certainly had the means to redeem the land. And he was very willing to reach deep not only into the storehouse of his wealth but also into the depths of his heart to save his family and take Ruth to be his bride.

Do you see a picture in this? Do you see what God in His law was foreshadowing? Do you see the not only the love story of Boaz and Ruth but also another and far greater love story here? Is this not what Jesus, our heavenly Boaz has done for His people? You see, that's one reason that God became flesh. It's why Jesus, the Son of God, one day laid his heavenly glory aside and came walking down the starry stairway of heaven into this dark and sinful world. It's why He, the eternal and glorious One who made the worlds, condescended to human form, and entered the very time and space that He created through the portal of a virgin's womb. He became one of us! The Hebrew writer so beautifully states in Hebrews 2:14, "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,"

Jesus is OUR Go'el. He is our Kinsman-Redeemer and more than one-thousand years before He came, the Holy Spirit painted His portrait for us in the story of Boaz and Ruth. Our Lord met the same qualifications that Boaz had to meet. He became a man and identified with the human family in His flesh. He was oh so wealthy. He, who owns the cattle on a thousand hills, and owns the wealth of all the worlds, came and poured out the most precious thing He had to redeem our poor and broken souls: His blood. And thank God, He was willing. No one constrained Him to come to the world and die upon the cross. His own love and His devotion to the Father is all that constrained Him to come and suffer. And today, in Christ, we have gained a million times over anything and everything we lost through sin. He wants to be YOUR Redeemer. He is lovingly willing to step in and pay the price to redeem your lost soul. So, you see, the story of Ruth, is, like the other great sagas of scripture, orchestrated by the all-wise and loving God who is working toward one great purpose: the redemption of His fallen people and the restoration of His perfect kingdom after the fall of sin. That's the Love That Lifts Us, just like it lifted Ruth and Naomi from their broken and impoverished state. Next week, the Lord willing, The Providence That Provides.

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