

Pure Church Sunday 6th September - FIELDS OF GOLD

A three-part 'conversation' about the Book of Ruth and it's link with Harvest

Welcome

HYMN: Guide me oh Thou Great Redeemer

Before we begin, let's pray.

Father open our hearts and ears today to understand the depth and height and the length and the width of Your great love for us. As we study the book of Ruth this morning, we ask that you speak to our hearts and open up to us the magnitude of your redeeming love.

Thank you that you continue to weave Your wonderful plan for our good and for Your ultimate glory in Jesus Name we pray.

Louise: Welcome, everyone. Today, the three of us wanted to try something a bit different. As it's now September, we want to look at the Book of Ruth and explore the theme of the harvest.

Sarah: This year has been tough for farmers. The exceptionally dry weather has meant the wheat lacks the weight and quantity they desperately need. It just shows that Harvest is never something we can take for granted. It relies entirely on elements completely beyond our human control. It will ultimately mean that we may face shortages.

Lorna: That bread smells so good! (Take a piece and hold it up) Simple, everyday, life-giving!

Louise: It's hard for us to imagine what a famine would look like. We've always had plenty. But this is how the book of Ruth starts isn't it?

Sarah: Exactly. It begins at the time of the Judges, before there were any kings. It was a time when everyone did what was right in their own eyes, not in God's eyes. This resulted in a famine. And in Bethlehem—where Naomi, her husband Elimelech and their two sons lived, things were very bad. They belonged to the distinguished and noble tribe of Judah though and they were well off owning property and land. In Hebrew Bethlehem or Bet Lechem literally means "House of Bread." The irony is sharp. The House of Bread is empty, so the family decide to leave with their assets and escape the hardship.

Famine had come because of constant border invasions by the Midianites and the Moabites who were descendants of Lot, Abraham's relative. It wasn't just a lack of rain that caused the famine, it was these people's intention to destroy the produce of the

land and oppress the people. But the people had also ignored God and that had serious consequences.

Lorna: That is a great point. So, the famine drives them away towards the people that helped cause the famine.

Sarah: Yes. Naomi's husband Elimelek chooses to pack up his family and leave Bethlehem, taking them across the border right into the enemy nation of Moab. On paper it looked like a smart survival strategy, but in reality it was a bad choice. The rest of Bethlehem stayed and survived, but Elimelek and Naomi's family left to protect their assets. They chose to preserve their inheritance in pagan Moab rather than trust God through the famine, and it cost them everything.

Elimelech's move to Moab wasn't a tragic necessity; it was a failure of faith. He used his wealth to escape the hardship his community was facing. By walking into the hands of the Moabites to save his estate without God's blessing, he actually invited the complete destruction of his family line.

Louise: So what brings Naomi back?

Sarah: Ten years after their move, word reaches her in Moab that the fields of Bethlehem are bursting with bumper crops again. Her life has changed dramatically during that time with the death of her husband and also of both her sons. She decides to return home to Bethlehem with her two Moabite daughters in law just as the barley harvest is beginning.

Lorna: Why the *barley* harvest specifically? Does the timing matter?

Sarah: It does. The barley harvest is the very first crop cut in the spring. It signifies new life, fresh beginnings, and hope emerging right after the dead of winter. For Naomi, who felt completely empty after the loss of her husband and two sons, arriving at the barley harvest is God's subtle way of saying, "Your season of emptiness is ending."

Louise: I've heard that the barley is a kind of first fruits?

Sarah: Yes, it is tied to the Feast of First Fruits which is highly significant. The first sheaf of barley cut from the field was brought to the priest and waved before God as a thanksgiving offering. This act acknowledged that the entire harvest belonged to Him and was a declaration of faith and guarantee that a full harvest would safely follow. First fruits is all about a spiritual chain reaction. Giving the best of your first so that the rest is blessed is a biblical concept. It doesn't just apply to the different types of harvest such as barley, wheat and fruit, but also to human offspring and to livestock. Jesus Himself was a kind of Firstfruits.

Even through her emptiness and bitterness, Naomi passed the baton of belief to Ruth, causing a tsunami of faith that affects us today.

Lorna: So the Moabite daughters in law accompany Naomi on the journey to Bethlehem...

Sarah: The two daughters in law, Orpah and Ruth set off with Naomi. Ancient Jewish tradition helps to fill in some gaps and tells us that these girls were in fact sisters of Eglon the King of Moab, so they were royal princesses. They'd grown up in a royal palace, surrounded by luxury, wealth, status and power. They would have worshipped pagan gods and were of course gentiles. No doubt their marriages would have improved Naomi and her husband's lives considerably.

Louise: Ahhh! That's interesting. So Naomi's sons married outside their Jewish faith.

Sarah: Yes, that's right. Even though her sons married wealthy nobility, I expect Naomi regretted leaving Israel and must have thought in hindsight that it would have been better if they had stayed in Bethlehem. Being gentiles, the girls were technically excluded from Israel's covenant with the One True God. By letting their sons marry Moabite women you could say that Elemelek and Naomi had compromised their faith. They cared more about blending into Moab and securing their own future than staying true to their religious identity.

By the time the sons had died, all the family wealth had gone, stripped away by divine judgement. Ruth and Orpah must have faced a massive crisis of identity and status.

Lorna: You can't blame Naomi for becoming bitter!

Louise: You're right. Grief of that magnitude is crushing. It's impossible to blame Naomi for breaking under the weight of losing her husband and two sons, as well as her home. She directed her anger and pain directly at God and said:

The Almighty has made my life very bitter..... The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.

Sarah: The amazing thing is that the Bible doesn't censor her anger. It allows her to voice her raw, unfiltered blame toward God, whom she still calls All Mighty and Lord. She still believes despite everything. It's the brutally honest cry of a shattered heart that is eager to put things right with God. Really Naomi is a picture of Israel; humbled, stripped of pride and entirely dependent on the unmerited grace of God to survive.

Lorna: She must have felt God had forsaken her....

Sarah: He answers her through the quiet unconditional love of Ruth who must have been inspired by Naomi's faith. As they make the arduous journey out of exile back to

Bethlehem, Naomi tells them both to go back to their royal estates where they could live in luxury and remarry. Orpah kisses her mother in law goodbye and returns to her old familiar lifestyle, her people and her false gods.

Ruth on the other hand **turns away** from her past and declares her unconditional love for Naomi, her people AND for the One True God she serves. “**Your people are my people and your God is my God**” she declares. Out of pure unconditional love, Ruth chooses to leave her old identity behind in exchange for the spiritual richness of joining the people of God. It was a voluntary sacrifice that should resonate with each one of us today.

You see, Ruth is a picture of us. Her story describes our exact spiritual transition from gentile outsiders to family members through a Redeemer. We don't merit that kind of acceptance. It's purely by God's grace.

Louise: What happened to Orpah then?

Sarah: Ah well that's extremely interesting because the Bible doesn't say what happened to Orpah. However the ancient Jewish writings tell us that Orpah returned to Moab, played the harlot and prostituted herself ending up in union with a Philistine Nephalim giant from Gath, bearing offspring rooted in the line of the ancient, fallen ones. From that union she birthed four huge warrior sons one of whom was called Goliath.

Louise: No way!

Sarah: Yahweh! The Bible tells us that the Nephalim are divine/human hybrids or fallen angels. Their union with human women produced a powerful, imposing lineage of corrupt, long-living warriors. But more of that later!

Lorna: Goodness me! So back to Ruth and Naomi in Bethlehem.

Sarah: On arrival in Bethlehem, Naomi encourages Ruth to get a job working in the fields gleaning the barley.

Louise: Excuse me, but can you explain what gleaning is?

Sarah: Gleaning was a safety net in God's law. Ancient Levitical law commanded farmers not to reap to the very edges of their fields or pick up dropped grain. They had to **leave it behind** for the poor, the widow, and the foreigner. Ruth fits all three categories. Even though she was of gentile royal blood, she agreed to work. Gleaning was a humiliating and dangerous task because reapers were generally notorious for taking advantage of these vulnerable people, but God sees to it that Ruth gleans in the field of a gentle and upright man called Boaz - he offers her protection and says to her

“The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge”.

Louise: So, Princess Ruth is working hard in the fields, and Boaz notices her. I expect she looks different and acts differently from the other workers. He tells his reapers to purposely drop extra barley for her. How does this elevate the harvest imagery?

Sarah: It transforms the harvest from mere survival into a picture of God's radical grace. Boaz becomes the provider. Ruth goes home to Naomi with about 18 kilograms or around 3 stone of grain! It was an astronomical amount for one day of gleaning. It just shows what a bumper crop it was that year.

Louise: Naomi must have immediately recognized the hand of God in that abundance and protection. But the climax of the story takes place on the threshing floor. Why does Naomi send Ruth there to seal the deal?

Sarah: The threshing floor is where the grain is separated from the chaff. It represents a place of sorting, revelation, and transition. It's also used multiple times in the Bible as a metaphor for meeting with God and a place of sacrifice. By going to the threshing floor, Ruth is showing her availability and commitment to Boaz and essentially asking him to be her kinsman-redeemer.

A kinsman-redeemer must have three qualifications.

1. They must be related by **BLOOD**
2. They must be **ABLE** to pay the price and
3. They must be **WILLING** to redeem, or purchase the land/property.

As we all know, Boaz was a picture of none other than our Lord Jesus who was both **willing and able** to redeem us and paid the price for us with His own precious **blood**.

Lorna: That's amazing.

Sarah: It is so amazing because the threshing floor is where the hard work of the harvest is finally realized and celebrated. Not only that but Naomi understood that it was the ideal place to fix up her daughter in law for a date night! Boaz was celebrating the bumper harvest with his workers, he'd had lots to eat and drink and fell asleep by a big pile of barley. Ruth, by laying at his feet, was expressing her desire for Boaz to redeem her and to buy the land that belonged to Naomi. She is a picture of us as we lay at the feet of Jesus asking Him to redeem us and cover us with His precious blood.

Louise: There is only One that can redeem us, but I thought there was another man who was eligible to marry Ruth?

Sarah: That's right, there was. Being an honorable man, Boaz deferred to a relative who was closer than he was to Naomi's family and also had a legal right to be kinsman-redeemer. He was also related by blood and able to pay the price, but he was not willing. That man was already married with a family. If he had married Ruth, any children they had together would automatically inherit the land and property compromising his current family and he didn't want that to happen, so he deferred to Boaz. It was all very legal and honorable.

Lorna: So, if we look at the whole arc, the harvest imagery goes from famine, to survival, to abundance, and finally to a wedding.

Sarah: The physical harvest in Bethlehem ultimately points to a spiritual harvest. God takes our empty, famished lives, brings us into His fields of grace, and yields a harvest of redemption that impacts generations. It's the ultimate act of amazing grace and love - to leave a legacy.

Remember this: The greatest harvest is not about what you gain in this life, but what you leave behind.

Louise: That's Beautiful. But I'm fascinated to know what happened afterwards. That can't be the end....

Sarah: You're right Lou, it doesn't end there.

Ancient Jewish teaching says that Boaz was an old man at this point. He would have been well aware that Ruth, as a former foreign princess, could have easily caught the eye of any young man in Israel - yet Ruth didn't look for money, romance or status. She chose Boaz out of loyalty to preserve the name and lineage of Naomi's deceased family. Because she humbled herself, God highly exalted her. In her marriage to Boaz she became the premier lady of Bethlehem and gave birth to a son called Obed.

Lorna: So they lived happily ever after?

Sarah: It's assumed that Boaz and Ruth live happily ever after, but our Bible doesn't mention Boaz again, in fact it tells us that the women of Bethlehem named Ruth's son which was highly unusual because the father always named the offspring. This indicates that Boaz probably died before he got to see his son, Obed, born. Obed means "one who serves". The neighbours named him so because his earthly mission was to serve his grieving grandmother and mother and wipe away their tears.

If Naomi is a picture of Israel and Boaz is a picture of Christ and Lord of the Harvest, then Ruth is a picture of the gentiles. She's mentioned in Matthew's genealogy of Christ, along with Rahab - two gentile women who chose to turn to the God of Israel and play their part in His Harvest.

Louise: Ahh! Wasn't Rahab the woman who hid the two Israelite spies in Jericho?

Sarah: Yes! Rahab was the mother of Boaz! His son Obed, had a son called Jesse who had a son called David, who became King David.

Louise: Pause.....Ohhhh. Now I see it! David and Goliath!

Sarah YES! David and Goliath were distant cousins. Orpah's offspring (*fallen ones*) and Ruth's offspring (*Christ*) meet head to head on the battlefield of faith. It isn't just a clash of nations, it's a bitter family reunion that will be replayed one final time when God's Kingdom finally comes.

The two men are visual representations of two entirely opposing kingdoms and mindsets. Goliath defied the Living God and the army of Israel. He represents the worldly kingdom of sin, pride and flesh. No doubt, being descended from the fallen ones, his great physical prowess, stature and strength meant even though he was considerably older than David, he had physical abilities that outweighed any man. He represents everything that stands against God - pride, self-sufficiency and defiance, not to mention a hybrid lineage that opposes God.

David represents the Kingdom of God - humility, dependence on God and His Spirit. He has no armour to protect him, no military stature, no worldly power or experience on the battlefield. He's just a young shepherd boy, but *David's physical bloodline is the literal human line chosen to bring the Savior into the world.*

He's anointed and spirit-filled and steps out to defend the name of the Lord God Almighty .

Ruth's radical pivot, her turn away from her past, is a picture of repentance. This side of the cross, when we repent, we **turn away** from the lifestyle we once led, commit fully to Christ and begin a new direction, with each step taken with Jesus by our side. We leave our past, uncommitted life behind in exchange for a life of devoted dependence upon our Saviour.

Louise: Yes, I guess it's easy to think we can earn our way into the Kingdom by doing good works, being a good person and coming to church, but in fact Jesus took 100% of our sin debt. If that's the case, then there's nothing left for us to pay.....

Lorna: So true!

Sarah: One last thing.

The golden fields where Ruth gleaned around Bethlehem were the same fields that David would shepherd his sheep approximately 80 years later and where Samuel the prophet discovered God's future king. These are also the very same fields described in

Luke's gospel where the angels appeared to the shepherds watching their flock by night. By marrying Ruth, Boaz secured the family estate which would form the stage for the birth of two Kings - an earthly king and a Heavenly King. Those same fields became the Migdal Eder (which means Tower of the Flock). Sheep raised in these specific fields were not ordinary livestock; they were uniquely destined for the Holy Temple in Jerusalem to be used as Passover sacrifices under the ministry of the High Priest. The shepherds of the Migdal Eder would wrap the lambs up in swaddling cloths to protect their pure white coats from getting dirty so they could be presented as spotless lambs before the High Priest at the time of sacrifice.

This means that when the angels announced the arrival of the Messiah to the shepherds over 1000 years after David's time, they were speaking to the men guarding the sacrificial lambs - revealing to them the birth of the ultimate "Lamb of God" in the very town where the story of redemption began.

Louise: Those golden fields of barely did not just fade into history, they declared that the Bread of Life, born in the House of Bread, the Firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, would feed the world - Jew and Gentile alike.

Sarah: When Ruth stood in that barley field, she was part of a living prophecy. Her purpose in life was to pass her faith on through to David's line which went right through to Christ the King who passed it on to His Disciples who passed it on to the New Testament Church. Now, that same baton of faith has been handed to us to pass on to the next group of believers. What a legacy!

Lorna: This bread (holding up the bread) represents hard work, harsh conditions, deep humility and a legacy of faith. It reminds us that we are not and never can be self-sufficient. To receive what we need, we must humble ourselves and depend entirely on God's grace.

Sarah, Louise and Louise: AMEN!

We will now sing **Come Ye thankful people come**

Let us pray: