

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR WEEK OF MAY 8-14

Series Title: SECOND HELPINGS

Message Title: MORE BLESSINGS

INTRODUCTION

This week we are concluding our series entitled “Second Helpings”. We have all experienced a delicious dish or a decadent dessert that made us want more and when the offer is presented to us for seconds we say, “Yes please!” Why? Because it was good! We desire more of something because it is so good. This week Pastor Mark will share with us what we need more of...the good stuff.

Before Your Small Group Meeting:

- Watch Pastor Mark’s Message
- Read Ruth 1 and 2

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is one thing that challenged you from Pastor Mark’s message this week?
2. Read Ruth 1:6-18. Why does Naomi discourage Orpah and Ruth from returning with her to her homeland of Judah? Why does Ruth decide to stay with Naomi and Orpah does not? Ruth responds in faith even in the midst of hardships. Have you ever given up comfort for a chance to know God deeper? What discourages you from clinging to Jesus?
3. Read Ruth 2:1-12. How is Boaz’s relationship with God reflected in his protection of Ruth? How are your motivations toward other people a reflection of your beliefs about God?
4. How often do you pray for blessing for people you meet? How does your view of God effect your answer to the previous question?

RESPOND IN PRAYER

Spend time in prayer reflecting on how God has blessed you and how you can provide a blessing for others.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Commentary on Ruth 1-2

1:1-7 The opening words refer to the historical period described in the book of Judges (roughly 1250–1050 BC), which ends, 'In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit' (Jdg. 21:25). The book of Ruth ends with the words, 'Jesse the father of David', and it was David who fulfilled Israel's felt need of a king. Bethlehem in Judah, as opposed to Bethlehem in Zebulun (Jos. 19:15), is called Ephrath in Gn. 35:19; the name survived in Ephrathites (2). Bethlehem means 'house of bread' and the name reflects the fertility of its fields and orchards. But even in Bethlehem famine struck the community and caused one family to migrate for a while to Moab. From Bethlehem it is possible to see the hills of Moab on the horizon to the east, across the Dead Sea. Though near geographically it was not friendly territory. The Moabites were descended from Lot (Gn. 19:27) and so were distant relations of Israel, but they had been hostile when the Israelites had approached from Egypt after the exodus (Nu. 21:29). Early in the period of the judges Eglon King of Moab had invaded and dominated the Israelites for eighteen years (Jdg. 3:14).

Elimelech decided to move to Moab. For his wife, Naomi, the eventual outcome of the move was tragic. First, she lost her husband, and later her two sons. Their residence in Moab, meant to be temporary, lasted ten years and at the end of it Naomi was bereft both of a means of livelihood and of hope for the future.

The turning point came when she heard that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them. She prepared to return, a recurring verb in the chapter. In Hebrew the same verb is used for 'repent', and in returning home Naomi was demonstrating a change of mind, a 'repentance'. Her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, set out with Naomi, feeling duty-bound as close relatives to accompany her. The familiar pattern of behaviour of the old patriarchs was being repeated. Abraham and Isaac had both left in times of famine, only to return later when food was available again.

1:8-18 The storyteller has set the scene, but from this point on the characters speak for themselves. Naomi, taking nothing for granted, urged her two daughters-in-law to return to their parental homes in Moab. They may have been in their late teens or early twenties, and Naomi took a motherly interest in seeking what was best for them. They had both been loving wives, and Naomi appreciated their affection for her, hence her prayer, May the LORD show kindness to you. Her hope was that his providential care would lead each of them to a second marriage. The kindness of the Lord bound Israel in a special relationship to God (see the note at the end of the chapter), but Naomi did not hesitate to pray that it should be extended to these two girls from Moab. She could have had in mind the Lord's promise to Abraham that all the peoples of the earth should be blessed through him (Gn. 12:3). Love, security and a home are among the blessings the Lord provides. Naomi's advice, Return home, my daughters, was sound common sense (11–13), though it was to her own disadvantage. The Lord's hand has gone out against me sums up her reading of events.

Naomi saw the famine, the consequent migration to Moab and the death, first of her husband and then of her sons, as signs of divine displeasure with her personally. That is why it was so bitter an experience. If she had thought blind fate ordered her life, she would have accepted her situation with passive resignation. As it was, by accusing God she declared her faith that he was ultimately the one who overruled events and since he was also the God who intended to bless, Naomi found hope even in the depths of despair.

Orpah left and is heard of no more, but Ruth clung to Naomi. The verb is the same as that used of marriage in Gn. 2:24, 'Therefore shall a man ... cleave unto his wife' (RV). Ruth, in total commitment, put

care for Naomi before her own interests. Love 'is not self-seeking' (1 Cor. 13:4). The reader is caught up in the drama, wanting to find out how things turned out for Ruth, who took the risk of accompanying her mother-in-law.

Naomi did not accept Ruth's decision without a protest. It was natural that parents and religious upbringing should exert a powerful attraction, but Naomi's protest called forth the most sublime response. Ruth's mind was made up, Where you go I will go. Naomi's well-being was her first concern, though that involved emigration from her homeland, leaving her parents who were still living (2:11), and settling among strangers. From this point on Naomi's people would be her people, though Ruth had no certainty that she would find acceptance. Most significant of all Ruth declared Naomi's God to be her God. Her resolve was total, extending even to death, and confirmed on oath in the name of her new-found Lord. Ruth's declaration forms the climax of this chapter. The author no doubt hoped that readers would follow her example.

1:19-22 The arrival of Naomi caused a stir of interest and excitement in Bethlehem, especially among the women. Their question suggests that they hardly recognized her because she was so changed, but also that they were overjoyed to see her again. Naomi quickly cut short any celebration by revealing the depth of her despair. Overcome by memories of past happiness in Bethlehem she could not bear to be called Naomi (which means 'pleasant' or 'lovely'). Far more appropriate in her view was Mara (meaning 'bitter'), and she blamed the Almighty (Shaddai) for her bitter experiences. He it was who had promised a great destiny to Abraham (Gn. 17:1). He ruled over the cosmic order (Jb. 34:12-13) and so it followed that he must have been responsible for the tragedy that had overtaken her. I went away full, happily married and blessed with two sons, but the Lord has brought me back empty, bereft of my source of happiness. The Lord who gave, and whose characteristic it is to give, had inexplicably taken away her loved ones. Moreover, she interpreted his action as a sign of his displeasure, for the LORD has afflicted me means 'has testified against me' (NIV mg.), as if in a court of law.

Some stylistic devices in the last three verses call for comment. The deliberate pattern in the use of the divine names, the Almighty ... the LORD ... the LORD ... the Almighty, lays great stress on the sovereign rule of God over human affairs, and yet he is the LORD who had revealed his loving purposes to Abraham. Because he is in control there is an implied hope, a hint of a better future. The narrator rounds off the first episode with a summary that looks both backwards and forwards. Naomi returned looks back by repeating a key verb in the chapter, whereas mention of her daughter-in-law indicates that Ruth will take centre stage in the next scene. The final words of the chapter, as the barley harvest was beginning, not only anticipate the next episode, but also match the time note in 1:1, so completing a kind of bracket round the first chapter of the narrative.

Note. 8 There is more to the word kindness than the reader might suspect. It translates the Hebrew word hesed, here and in 2:20 and 3:10. Supremely it is the characteristic of God himself in his dealings with those who are his people. Sometimes (e.g. Ex. 15:13) it is translated 'unfailing love' and the word conveys the Lord's faithfulness to his covenant promises (Dt. 7:9). People who have experienced the Lord's hesed are intended to reflect the same loving care in their relationships with others. Ruth the Moabitess is said to have done so (3:10), because of her selfless loyalty to Naomi and because, by declaring Naomi's God to be her God, she entered into the sphere of his blessing. By the same route, other non-Israelites were able to know for themselves the Lord's hesed, for he is 'rich in love ... he has compassion on all he has made' (Ps. 145:8-9). Supremely that steadfast love was revealed in Christ and is a secure basis for Christians' trust in the God of Naomi and Ruth today.

2:1-3 At this point the narrator skilfully introduces the fact that a relative of Elimelech was still living in Bethlehem. Naomi knew of him but determined not to ask him for support, though he was a man of standing who could have helped her. The immediate need was food. It was humiliating to be reduced to such poverty, but because it was harvest time there was a means of self-help. God's law stipulated that farmers were not to harvest the corners of their fields, but leave grain for the poor to collect (Lv. 19:9; 23:22). Special blessing would follow from this generous action (Dt. 24:19). Ruth decided to take advantage of this provision, but

guessed that not all farmers would welcome people foraging on their land, especially a foreigner. She wanted to go where she would find favour. Though she knew nothing about any near relatives of her father-in-law, she 'happened' to choose to glean in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. The repetition of these words which occur in v 1 underlines their importance. Her choice of field was no accident; God had been her unseen guide as subsequent events were to prove.

2:4-17 The landlord arrived and greeted his workforce with words which we associate more with church than with our place of work. The LORD be with you!, words familiar to many Christians, are used only here in this exact form. The usual greeting was 'Peace' (šālôm). Boaz and his farm workers acknowledged their dependence on the Lord for a good harvest. He wanted to know who the newcomer was and the foreman gave the Moabitess a good testimonial. She had three recommendations that had won her respect. She had come with Naomi, she had asked permission to pick up what the reapers left, and she had worked on steadily though gleaning was discouragingly unrewarding.

Boaz turned approvingly to Ruth, urging her to remain in his fields, and promising her special protection. He included her among his servant girls, gave orders that the young men were to respect her, and gave her permission to get a drink from the water jars. Unusually, these are said to be filled by the men. This farm seems to have been run on distinctive lines. Instead of being regarded with suspicion Ruth was accepted. She took nothing for granted but by bowing low indicated how grateful she was. Why should the farmer be so kind to her? The answer was that her reputation had gone ahead of her. The people of Bethlehem recognized goodness in action and approved of Ruth's courage in accompanying Naomi. With May the Lord repay you Boaz was expressing more than a pious wish. Aware of Ruth's self-sacrifice Boaz wanted her to be richly rewarded so that her faith would be strengthened by seeing all her needs met. Such was the promise to those who took God at his word (Dt. 5:10). God's people loved to liken God's protecting care to that of a bird spreading its wings over its chicks (cf. Pss. 17:8; 36:7). Jesus' use of the same metaphor has reinforced its message (Mt. 23:37). Ruth's reply amply expressed her gratitude, but she kept her distance by calling Boaz my lord ('sir') and referring to herself as his servant, so indicating her lowly status.

At mealtime Boaz singled her out again, inviting her to share the food provided for the reapers. He even served her with roasted grain, some of which Ruth saved to take back for Naomi. As she got up to start work again, Boaz gave orders that she should be allowed to collect grain from the sheaves (the norm was for the sheaves to be protected from gleaners). The reapers were told deliberately to drop grain for her to pick up. The result was that Ruth finished the day with far more to show for her work than she had dared hope to glean. One estimate is that it was the equivalent of at least half a month's wages.

2:18-23 Ruth's huge load of barley enabled Naomi to see at a glance that all had gone well. Someone must have been extra generous, hence her excited questions and her invocation of blessing on Ruth's benefactor. For the third time in two verses Naomi is referred to as Ruth's mother-in-law, as though to suggest that the relationship had special importance. Ruth's disclosure of the name Boaz revealed that there was indeed a family connection, and family relationships, 'daughter', 'mother-in-law', continue to be mentioned in subsequent conversations between Naomi and Ruth. Naomi's prayer became more specific now. She instantly foresaw possible developments. He has not stopped showing his kindness could refer to Boaz, but Naomi is thinking of the Lord's providence in guiding Ruth to the field of Boaz. This was evidence of the Lord's covenant love (ḥesed) to the dead Elimelech and his son through their widows. Though related by marriage and not by blood, they were fully included in the family. But there was more. Boaz was not only a close relative but also one of our kinsman-redeemers (see note below).

Israel's family law made careful provision for members of a clan who fell on hard times, so protecting the continuance of the kin group. Boaz was one of those to whom Naomi was entitled to look for support but there were several ways in which protection could be given and Naomi did not specify what she had in mind. Ruth added to their elation by disclosing that Boaz had invited her to accompany his workers until harvesting was finished in a couple of months' time. They need have no worry about the immediate future and during the harvest season Ruth would become part of the community in Bethlehem.

There have been several significant emphases in this chapter. The good character of Ruth was pointed out by the foreman (7) and enlarged upon by Boaz (11) who included her among his workers and saw she had plenty of food to take home with her. Ruth felt she belonged on this farm and gratefully accepted all that was so kindly offered. Both the giving and the receiving were aspects of a developing relationship, a growing in understanding of God's ways. Naomi, by calling Ruth her daughter, pointed to a closeness between them. Ruth stayed close to the servant girls (23). The verb used here and in vs 8 and 21 ('stay with') is the same as that used of the marriage bond in Gn. 2:24 (translated 'cleave' in the AV, RV and RSV). It occurs in 1:14 concerning Ruth's commitment to Naomi. The author is pointing to the secret of 'togetherness', of loyalty that results in cohesion in a family and in society. It should especially characterize the people of God.

Note. 20 Kinsman-redeemer. Strong family ties in Israel meant that the verb 'redeem' was in common use; it belonged to the realm of family law. Each member of a family or clan had an obligation to defend and provide for any other who was destitute or a victim of injustice. The redeemer of property was to buy back land a relative had sold in time of need (Lv. 25:25), thus keeping it within the family. If someone sold himself into slavery, his nearest relative was to buy his freedom (Lv. 25:47–55). A redeemer also had the duty of avenging a murder (Nu. 35:19; Dt. 19:6). The book of Ruth extends his duties to providing an heir for a male relative who has died childless. Usually this duty fell to a brother (Dt. 25:5–10), but in the case of Ruth who had no brothers-in-law, a more distant relative was expected to marry her, as Naomi revealed (ch. 3).

When the OT asserted that Yahweh was Israel's redeemer, the events of the exodus were to the fore: 'I will redeem you with an outstretched arm' (Ex. 6:6); 'In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed' (Ex. 15:13). Yahweh declared himself to be Israel's divine Kinsman, ready to deliver and help them (Is. 41:14). The special contribution of the book of Ruth is the insight that the near kinsman alone possessed the right to redeem, and yet was under no obligation to do so. The willingness of Boaz to undertake a costly duty foreshadowed that of the greater Redeemer, who was to descend from him.¹

¹ Baldwin, J. G. (1994). [Ruth](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., pp. 289–292). Inter-Varsity Press.