

An [Extra]Ordinary Love Story Ruth 2, 11/28/21

Anyone who speaks a native language other than English would tell you there are words in their language that are difficult to translate into English because there is so much cultural or historical nuance that goes into that word. Kind of like an inside joke, you almost have to be there to get it. Our missionaries the **Ngengas in Kenya- “aki woiyee”** When you are really connecting and empathizing with what someone else is saying. Our missionaries **Rio and Renata- “Jayus”** is a word in their language that conveys the awkward humor behind a joke delivered so badly that you can’t help but laugh. Our missionaries the **Hufftys- “Tartle”** is a Scottish word for the hesitation one feels when introducing people but having forgotten someone’s name. There is a powerful Hebrew word like this used in a key moment in our story of Ruth- *Chessed* (a word that we often translate love...but it’s much more than that). This word came up in a conversation I had this Fall in Jerusalem with a **Orthodox Jewish man named Noam**, we walked and talked together about God, our faith and families, he was trying to kindly persuade me as to why Judaism was superior to Christianity, and he spoke of the *Chessed* of God that the Jewish people have. I smiled and I told him I experience the *Chessed* of God through a relationship with Jesus Christ. At this he admonished me a bit and said, “First you being a Gentile don’t really understand *Chessed*. Second, you can’t possibly have experienced God’s *Chessed* because only Jews get God’s *chessed*.” While I disagreed with his second argument, he may have a point with the first. But I will do my best to help us experience the nuance of this powerful word. *Chessed* finds its source in God’s nature. It encompasses both **His strong affection accompanied by His loyal, gracious and active care.** Therefore it is not just a feeling of affection or concern for others, it is the selfless and determined action to do something about their situation. Israel’s society, through the Mosaic Laws were designed to embody the *chessed* of God to both the covenant people and the stranger. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks **“Covenant creates society-as-extended-family; it means seeing strangers as if they were our long-lost brothers or sisters. A community based on *chessed* is a place of grace, where everyone feels honored and everyone is at home.”**¹ *Chessed* was the primary way that God intended the world to come to know the true God of Israel. Sadly, Israel rarely lived this vision throughout its history, especially during the dark times of the Judges, which is the setting of our story, when everyone did what was right in their own eyes. **Title Slide** But onto this dark backdrop we see two bright, shining examples of God’s *chessed* in Ruth and Boaz, which will cause Naomi, who thought God had abandoned and forgotten about her to finally experience God’s *chessed*.

Before we find out how this happens, we have to remind ourselves of how Naomi came to such a desperate situation. In chapter one we meet Naomi, the female Job. Because of a famine in Israel, Elimelech and his wife Naomi and their two sons abandon Israel for the pagan territory of Moab, while there Naomi’s sons marry two Moab women, Orpah and Ruth. But in a tragic turn of events, Elimelech and her two sons “Weakly and Sickly” die, leaving Orpah, Ruth and Naomi and childless widows in a patriarchal society where a woman’s worth and identity comes largely from her husband and her children. In grief and shame, Naomi embarks on a journey back to her people in Israel with little hope of a future. While Orpah goes back home to Moab

¹ <https://rabbisacks.org/tenpaths/educators/chessed/>

with the hopes of a second chance for a life, Ruth gives up her past life, people, her gods and commits to Naomi, putting her hope in her God, his people in Israel in a powerful display of chessed. Even though Naomi gets a glimpse of this love intellectually, she can't see this from God's hand yet. She knows God is God, but she is doubting whether he is good. She is depressed, grieving and bitter, even changing her name to Mara, bitter. But the cake is only half-baked.

2 Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a man of standing from the clan of Elimelek, whose name was Boaz. ² And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter."

³ So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek.

Some important observations to note here. **Israel's chessed Laws**: One of the ways God embodied chessed was establishing gleaning laws, which Naomi must have told Ruth about. God told his people in Leviticus 23 when you reap your fields, you go through your fields once. You don't go through them again. You leave some of the fruit on the vine and some of the wheat in the stalk. You go through it once, and you leave. And you leave the corner of your fields unharvested as well. Now any farmer today would say are you crazy? All that work to get to harvest, you get every last piece! Why? God's chessed- it was so that the fatherless, the widow, the poor of the land, the stranger of the land could come work the field so that no one would go hungry but also so there was human dignity- this wasn't welfare, it was workfare.

God's Hand Behind the Scenes: The author also gives us some insider information to foreshadow what is about to happen that Boaz was a wealthy landowner who happened to be a relative of Elimelech, Ruth's father-in-law. But we have no indication that Ruth has any knowledge of whose field she is going into. She likely went to a field where there was much to glean because the landowner was following God's chessed laws and was generous. V.3 it says, "As it turned out" this is a Hebrew expression that means "As fate would have it." Of course the writer is drawing our eye to see God's hand behind the scenes directing the course of human history, even in the lives of seemingly ordinary people in a humble place like Bethlehem, he is writing an extraordinary love story.

And as God would have it v.4 *⁴ Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, "The Lord be with you!" ...do you see God all over this? "The Lord bless you!" they answered. ⁵ Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, "Who does that young woman belong to?" ⁶ The overseer replied, "She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi.*

⁷ She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter."

Something about Ruth caught Boaz' eye. "Who is this?" "God is not just at work in turning water to wine but turning the head of Boaz toward Ruth." Her reputation precedes her. People

are talking about what she did for Naomi and her work ethic. Clearly this is a woman of remarkable, risk taking, loyal character. Boaz says, “So that’s the Ruth everyone is talking about.” He’s impressed. We begin to see that Boaz is a man who values the things God values and embodies the chessed of God.

⁸ So Boaz said to Ruth, “My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. ⁹ Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.”

¹⁰ At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?” ¹¹ Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before.

¹² May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” ¹³ “May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord,” she said. “You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servants.”

¹⁴ At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.” When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. ¹⁵ As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, “Let her gather among the sheaves and don’t reprimand her.

¹⁶ Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don’t rebuke her.” ¹⁷ So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. ¹⁸ She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered.

I want you to notice 4 ways that Boaz embodies the Chessed of God

His Hospitality- Invites her stay in his field, and to his lunch table, share in his food and water.

His Generosity- He sends her out with a doggy bag and with an ephah of barley- which was about 30 lbs of food, enough for many weeks of meals at his cost.

His Protection- 2x Boaz makes sure no one messes with Ruth, he makes sure she will be treated with all purity and respect, physically and emotionally.

His Encouragement -Words matter. When someone of stature, when someone you respect and value like a parent, teacher, boss, a spouse says something really thoughtful or builds you up, those words stay with you, they put wind in your sails and mark you. This is what Boaz does in Ruth’s life. He restores her dignity and honor through his kind words. “My daughter” he already sees this young woman as family, which must have made Ruth as a stranger, and maybe feeling on edge, at ease and to feel incredibly loved. He commends her for what she has done for Naomi and bestows a blessing on her, acknowledging her faith in God, in whom she has taken refuge.

Ruth heads back home carrying 30lbs of grain. Now I imagine that Naomi may not have yet gotten out of bed. You ever been in so much grief or depression, you just can't get yourself out of bed? But when she sees Ruth carrying this abundance of grain, it sent a bolt of lightning into her soul.

¹⁹ Her mother-in-law asked her, "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!" Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. "The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz," she said.

²⁰ "The Lord bless him!" Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. "God has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead."

Finally, Naomi began to feel the warm sunshine of the chessed of God embodied in Ruth and Boaz. She started to believe that God is not only God but he is also good. She's starting to smell the cake baking in the oven. God's not done with her.

But she sees an extra wrinkle of God's chessed in the story that Ruth doesn't. That Boaz isn't just a Boaz, he's The Boaz. *V.20 She added, "That man is our close relative; he is one of our guardian-redeemers."* Now I'm going to leave us on a cliff-hanger here, next week we will talk about the significance of this phrase "Guardian-Redeemer." Let's talk about you and me.

While it would be easy to see Boaz as a knight in shining armor here, and certainly he uses his power to bless Ruth and Naomi in a time of great need and vulnerability. It might also be easy to see Ruth as the hero who boldly takes action, works hard and risks her safety to provide for Naomi. But *God is the hero. Her story and his story is part of God's History.* He is working behind the scenes to direct and embody his chessed- his affection and loyal, gracious and caring action through his servants who are aligned with God's character. Boaz sees it clearly when Ruth is tempted to see Boaz as the hero, he deflects and says verse 12 *"May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."*

Have you come under the wing of the Lord for your refuge? Or are you trying to find refuge under other wings? The wings of financial security, of a human relationship, of comfort, of the approval of others, popularity. These are false wings, false a refuge that cannot hold up to the storm. If we are looking for unconditional love, approval, security, identity, purpose, hope- it is only found under the strong, steady wings of the Lord. Those who seek Him, who ask for and desire him. It is open and available to all who want it.

And ultimately, this refuge is found only in Jesus Christ who perfectly embodies the chessed of God. Remember my friend Noam, I felt sad for him when he told me that I couldn't experience the chessed of God, because Noam could only experience a shadow of it. He could only understand the conditional love of God, a God who would love him through his good works and commitment to Judaism. But we experience the chessed of God through an unconditional relationship with Jesus Christ. *Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his love for us in that while we*

were still sinners, Christ died for us. There is no greater demonstration of affection and compassionate action than what Jesus has done for us. And his wings are wide open- **Matthew 11:28** *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* Have you experienced the unconditional love of God? Have you come under the wing of Jesus Christ for refuge?

How are we as the body of Christ, embodying the chessed of God? Boaz is a great portrait of chessed and he points to the chessed of Christ.

Hospitality- Jesus invites all to his table. No one is too far gone...We must embody that hospitality individually and as a church- Story of Tim Santabarbara w/ Miss Winnie. What about you? Who is lost, lonely, left out that you can befriend and welcome? Who doesn't have someone to spend Christmas with? **Generosity**- 2 Corinthians 8- Christ was rich and became poor giving his life, so that we might become eternally rich. How are we embodying the generosity of Christ- giving our time, talents, treasures? Love-in-action fund- over 100 people or families per year, over 100k. What about you personally? **Protection**- John 10 Jesus says he is the good shepherd who watches over, protects and ultimately gives his life for his sheep. How are we embodying the protection of Jesus? Who are most vulnerable- Children, Poor, Unborn, shut-ins, sick, Homeless, Refugees, Victims of abuse- Childrens Ministry, Urban Promise, Sunday Breakfast Mission, ESL, Foster Well, A Door of Hope, Stephen Ministry. Don't wait for someone to ask you. **Encouragement**- As Peter said to Jesus, where else would we go, who else speaks words of life. Jesus restores our dignity and worth with his words of love. How are we embodying encouragement? I received hand-written note- thoughtful, so encouraging, strengthened me. Who needs encouragement around you today? Parent, child, neighbor, someone in small group, spouse?

When Jesus said, They will know you are my disciples by your love. He was talking about Chessed- agape...This is what we should be known for. And by quietly embodying chessed in ordinary ways, trust that God is doing something extraordinary through you.