

Study Notes for Ruth Chapter 2



Ruth by Francesco Hayez (1791-1882)

Ruth’s statement to Naomi in verse 2 of this chapter is particularly interesting. She says to her mother-in-law, “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor” (that’s the NIV translation). This last word invokes once again the major theme of this book, that of “*hesed*.” As I’ve mentioned before, this is one of those major concepts in the Old Testament, appearing around 250 times, which conveys a wealth of meaning. It almost always describes a righteous relationship (either between man and man, or between man and God), and in this instance we might attach a charitable significance to it like, “goodness” or “kindness.”

Ruth’s statement also reveals her tremendous faith in God’s goodness. She understands Yahweh’s statutes for the poor (which we shall go into in just a moment), and puts great store in their provision. It seems to me that this has huge importance for our own Christian perspective of this story for at least two reasons.

It is a widely held theological principal that sin was manifest through the Law. This is to say that prior to the existence of prescriptive covenants, furnished either by authority or God-given instinct, sin “didn’t count.” Paul states this most effectively in Romans 5:13. Now some things are morally or ethically legislated for us through codified standards, while other things we know to be right or wrong simply by the way we and our world are “hard-wired” (see Rom 1:20). C.S. Lewis goes even further. In the first 20 pages of *Mere Christianity*, he makes the case that a kind of “Law of Natural Morality” is evident in all peoples. Valor, honesty, fidelity and other characteristics are treated as positive the world over, regardless of the culture.¹

But, Houston we have a problem! Ever since that first fateful bite of the fruit from a certain tree, fallen man has been incapable of adhering to the Law. Our own 39 Articles attest to this (see article 9, *Book of Common Prayer, 1979*, p. 869). Paul laments this

¹ See Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), pp. 8-20.

fact, even in those who are “right with God.” His wrestling match with himself is most clearly depicted in Romans 7:14-25.

But, Ruth exhibits one of the miracles of grace. In an inexplicable way, when we are loved unconditionally, our natural tendency is to respond to that love by actually **wanting** to be virtuous, moral, and ethical people in the eyes of the one who loves us so completely. So we actually want to respect God’s law. Perhaps a mundane example will help demonstrate the point.

I am a slob. I walk out of the bedroom in the morning without making the bed and never look back. I love to cook but hate to clean up the kitchen. Rather than hanging my clothes back in the closet, I tend to pile layer-upon layer of shirts, trousers, pajamas, etc. on those pegs that we have attached to the back of the bathroom door.

But every once in a while I will actually slip-up and make the bed, load the dishwasher, or put my clothes back in the closet (this last event usually transpires when the bathroom door will no longer close because of the stratified layers of garments that I have loaded it down with). When I do these small chores, my wife will come to me, give me a hug and tell me how much these small gestures mean to her. And she’s not trying to manipulate me either. She knows that I really do work at reminding myself about these things, and her appreciation is genuine. I then realize how much she loves me, and I actually **want** to do even more to make her happy.

That’s the unique thing about grace. It produces the very thing that we, in our fallen state, are incapable of doing. And the “DNA markers” of this kind of “works of the Spirit” are the “Fruits of the Holy Spirit” (see Gal. 5:22). You will not see sustained evidence of these traits in any situation where someone feels “obliged” or “coerced” into obeying the Law. No way.

The other striking thing about the account of Ruth’s actions is that she is a foreigner. Yet she exhibits the characteristics of the virtuous Jew. In fact, in 2:7, the foreman says, “She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.” And later, we see that she persisted and “gleaned in the field until evening” (2:17). And she persisted in this work, all the while maintaining a humble and reserved demeanor (see 2:10 and 2:13).

In our modern world we tend to label things and people and judge them accordingly. But Ruth has learned the value in Matt. 12:33. She knows that a just God and His faithful servants will judge a tree by its fruits. And those fruits are both material and spiritual.

Finally, I asked you to read carefully Ruth 2:1-9, and compare this with the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarepath in 1 Kings 17:6-16. I also asked you to reflect on the

comparison between the story in Ruth and the preparations for Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem in Luke 19:28-38.

There are, of course, differences in these stories. In the passage from Ruth we have ordinary people executing quite ordinary actions. In the passage recounting Elijah and the miracle of the oil and flour we find a man of God executing extraordinary actions. And in the account of preparing the colt for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday, we have the Disciples of Jesus executing historic actions.

But in all three stories, we see that when Godly people faithfully do God’s will, whether it is something extraordinary or something absolutely routine and mundane, God will bless those activities with unimaginable results.

Who was Albert McMakin? The name is not anyone you are likely to recognize, just a man who farmed vegetables near Charlotte in the years after the Great Depression. But one night in the mid 1930s McMakin, a strong Christian, convinced a young friend of his to drive to a church service with him. The friend was a wayward teenager that McMakin thought had potential as a man of God.

And MaMakin was right, too. You see, the name of his wayward young friend was Billy Graham.

Never underestimate the importance of what you are doing for God. And never forget the imprint that He can have in your own life through what seem to be the most insignificant of activities. The Kingdom is built one brick at a time!