Ruth 2: 17-23; Psalm 30; “Naomi’s Heart is Changed”

I. Naomi’s Hope is Restored II. The Source of this Hope

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, have you ever struggled with depression- or had a sleepless night due to anxiety? How differing things can look in the morning! Most of us have at some point in our lives experienced this- and it is liberating to see that the Bible paints people in living color. At the conclusion of chapter 2, we reach the halfway point in our study of Ruth. And as I said last week our story is not only about Ruth, but it is a story about the goodness and grace given to Ruth and by extension Naomi. Our beloved Naomi has been left in the pit of despair. She has started to repent and return- but still she has no hope or joy. But God is at work- and He can bring hope to the hopeless; turning weeping to dancing! The kindness that has been shown to Ruth has opened Naomi’s eyes as well. We remember that Naomi has a bitter heart after all the pain and death that she has experienced in her life- Naomi cannot see how something good would come from this difficult situation. We have also been introduced to a temporary solution to a long-term problem. We have Ruth going into the field and gleaning- here she finds temporary rest and provision. She gains food for the day, and almost a bushel to take home. But that is only a temporary fix- there is a deeper need that needs to be addressed. Both Naomi and Ruth need children so that the name of their dead husbands will not perish from the land. In our story today, the LORD provides the hope of a lasting dwelling place for His people.

**I. Naomi’s Hope is Restored**

As we return to our passage, we see in verse 19 that Naomi is overcome with the generosity of Boaz. “Where did you glean? Blessed is the man who took notice of you!” Once again, this blessing is connected to the blessings of the covenant- and it would be a blessing that was reserved for those who were faithful to the Law of the LORD. The Law that enables gleaning and the law the provided for the childless widows are laws that God has ordained! These women are finding refuge and shelter of God’s almighty wing! Naomi is noticing that there may still be hope in Israel- there are still those who obey God’s Word and there are those who take notice of a poor widow and a foreigner. The God of the Fathers has not removed all the godly from the land, and since there are some godly hear- they are blessed by their hand. There is a remnant of believers in the land! As in the days of Elijah, God has reserved for Himself those who have not bowed the knee to idols. If everyone was still doing what was right in their own eyes, there would be no bread. The land would still be under the curse of the famine and the fields would not produce grain. But there is still one man in Israel who remembers the LORD and His provision for His people. For the sake of His name, God has not destroyed this nation- and hope rises like the sun.

 This blessing then is seen more clearly in verse 20- Boaz is blessed in the name of the LORD! No longer does Naomi say that the hand of the LORD is against her- no longer does she call herself bitter- she is beginning to see that through Boaz, she is being blessed, that Ruth is being blessed, and that the name of Elimelech is being blessed as well. She then speaks of the kindness that has been shown. But the kindness in verse 20 that is shown *does not have* a specific noun of reference. Whose kindness if Naomi speaking of? Is it the kindness of Boaz- or the kindness of the LORD that she is speaking of? The Hebrew leaves both possibilities open! Is Naomi finally seeing that the LORD has blessed her and Ruth? The kindness of v. 20 is also our word for faithfulness! “Hesed” in Hebrew means goodness, faithfulness and mercy. This is an undeserved blessing! In chapter 1:8, Naomi told both Ruth and Orpah that they should go home- that the LORD would show kindness to these two widows in the land of Moab. But we know that Moab brings hunger and death. Finally, Naomi is seeing that the kindness and benevolence of the LORD is connected directly to being in the land of the LORD and with the people of God! Yes- Naomi- the Kindness of the LORD has been shown to you here- in Israel! With God’s people and under the covenantal shelter! Naomi’s heart is growing warm again, and she is beginning to show the love and concern that all mothers should show- there is a warmth that is growing between these two women! As a faithful mother, Naomi in verse 22 tells Ruth to stay where there is blessings and protection. Instead of sending here daughter to death in Moab- Naomi tells Ruth to stay in the Land of Israel! That she would seek rest in 3:1. So we are starting to see glimpses of hope returning to Naomi. Back in 1:18- Naomi stopped talking to Ruth. But notice how things have changed! Once her thoughts were elsewhere- Naomi had a heavy burden that she insisted on carrying alone. A bitter spirit clouded her vision- she had no joy and no hope. She could not see the possibility of future blessings. As an aside, this can happen to us all. It is easy to focus on the trial or source of pain to the point that we cannot see the blessings. Like Naomi, we have no reasonable hope and expectation of future blessings. Notice that she complains about God back in ch. 1. The LORD has dealt harshly with me- the Almighty has brought calamity upon me. But now- in 2:20- she will speak of being blessed by the LORD and his kindness! Those who are under the weight of heavy burdens have to learn how to respond- yes we should bring our complaints to God- to ask God “why” is a proper thing- as long as it comes from a heart of faith and submission! We must refuse to allow our circumstances to dictate our emotions. When we live at the mercy of our feelings, we presume that the frowning providence of God cannot be turned to His smiling face again! As our catechism says, because we believe that God in His providence is ruling over all, we can be patient when times are against us- and for the future we can have a good confidence that God’s good will is being done! Even Job refused to curse God- rather he accepted all things from His hand!

So back in verses 21 and 22 Naomi notices that these provisions given by Boaz are of a more lasting character. Not only is Ruth given a field to glean for one or two days, but until the end of the harvest. And in fact- Ruth stays in these fields until the end of both the barley and the wheat harvest! In other words, Ruth is given permission to go out and stay with the servant girls from the beginning to the end of the harvest season. During these few weeks, Boaz has promised to provide for Ruth and therefore provide for Naomi as well. The kindness shown by this mighty man is truly great. It was good for Ruth to stay close to Boaz so that she would not be abused in another field. It is good that God’s people provide for the needs of each other- lend supporting hands- and encourage each other. Imagine the shock! Ruth comes home carrying a 50 lb bag of grain! So the gleaning laws of the OT met the temporary needs- but there is a deeper and longer lasting need that needs to be addressed. It is a need of both Ruth and Naomi- the need for a full family, lasting provisions, rest and protection that only a husband or father could give. The kindness pointed towards and seen in verse 20 also awakens Naomi to the possibility of other blessings that she may have forgotten- blessings that are only seen in Israel under the gracious covenant of the LORD. These blessings are seen particularly in the Law of the Redeemer and the Law of the Levirate.

**II. The Source of this Hope**

In our second point, we focus in on the source of hope. What gospel promises can these two widows hold onto? What good news should give them hope for the future? What has changed so that Naomi can clearly see God’s blessings again? Well, the first thing is the application of these Laws of Mercy! The first law that is referenced in our story of Ruth was the gleaning law- which provided for the short term problem of no food for Ruth and Naomi as we saw last week. But in our story, Naomi mentions in verse 20 that Boaz is a close relative- a kinsman redeemer. Now the law of the kinsman redeemer is listed in Leviticus 25. This is a reference to the “Goel” or the redeemer. Now the “Goel” or the redeemer was a close relative of a man that died. It is usually a reference to a brother or an uncle. This living relative had specific duties that they were supposed to carry out on behalf of their relative. The first task was that they were to avenge their blood if someone killed their brother. The second task was that they were to provide restitution if their brother stole something and could not pay it back. The third duty that a redeemer was to purchase or buy back their relative out of bondage and slavery. And the forth task was that the redeemer was to purchase the property that their relative sold so that the land remained in the family and was not sold to a foreigner. All four of these duties were connected with the fact that God owned this nation- and since God had specific ownership of all the land and since the people also belonged to Him- He alone had the right to give and to take away. Justice would be served and the needy provided for. It is this last aspect that our story concerns today- where the redeemer was supposed to purchase back the property of their brother who had sold it- so that the land would remain in the family. When Naomi calls Boaz a redeemer, Naomi was looking for Boaz to buy back the land that her dead husband, Elimelech, had sold when their family moved to Moab. Elimelech’s sons could have brought the land back, but they were dead as well. The process of buying back the land was very expensive for the redeeming brother, but it was their duty. But for Boaz who was not a brother or son to perform this duty was going above and beyond what was proscribed by the Law. Only a brother must perform this task- the Law does not demand that extended family carry out this duty. Yet we must also remember that Naomi has now recognized that the LORD- not Boaz- is the true source of these blessings. For Ruth to find the correct field- and for Boaz to show this kindness could only be the work of the LORD. So it is the LORD who is providing a redeemer- the LORD is providing someone who will save the land from being lost and save the family from losing its inheritance. As Exodus 6 points out, it was the LORD who brought Israel out of Egypt into the land of Canaan- it is the LORD who delivers from bondage and slavery.

 The second OT law that is going to be referenced in the remainder of this book is the law of the Levirate. Now the word “Levirate” is simply Latin for brother in law- so it is the law that relates to the duty of a brother in law. This law mentioned in Deuteronomy 25 says that if a man dies childless, his brother is to take the dead man’s widow and raise a family for his dead brother. The brother-in-law marries the widow- and hopefully they have a son to carry on the name of the dead man. Again, Boaz is under no obligation since he is not a brother, but he is free to take on this role. Each tribe was important and needed to be accounted for- if one whole family was sonless- the name of that tribe and its inheritance would be in jeopardy. A well known example of this law is found with Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38- where the oldest son of Judah died- so Judah gave to the widow Tamer the next oldest son so that a family would be raised for the dead son. In our story, there is no brother to take the place of the dead men- so Boaz enters the scene to fill in the void and provide for the long term needs of both Ruth and Naomi. As Philippians 4 says, my God will supply for your every need.

 But the having of children during the OT was more important than simply having a name continue- if the people of God did not have sons or they didn’t have the seed of the womb born- then the promises of God are void and null. It was God who promised in Genesis that the great redeemer would be born of a woman. A man who would crush the head of the serpent- so we need to see a son being born in our story or there is no hope for Ruth, no hope for Israel- and no hope for redemption for the church today either. No seed- no salvation! Lest we miss the point- we are in Bethlehem- in the line of Judah! As verse 23 in our story points out- Ruth is still living in the house of her mother in law- a situation that needs to be addressed and will be resolved by God’s goodness. In our story we see good taking place, but we still see the need for more grace to be given. What will happen after the harvest is over- will Ruth and Naomi still be provided for? Will permanent shelter and provision be provided by God? Will a redeemer be given- will the seed of a woman be born in Israel to the people of God? These are all questions that need answers- problems that will be solved when the redeemer of Israel is born! There is joy, redemption and provision in the house of the LORD because God has provided for the needs of His people through the work of our Redeemer- Jesus Christ! God’s love is steadfast and His mercy new each morning! Sorrows may last for a night, but joy comes in the morning! Wait upon the LORD- you never know how He might bless you in the future! As we see in the life of Naomi- from pleasant to bitter and back to blessed! Sin leaves us bankrupt and alone. But the LORD provides a promise of a lasting dwelling place- a home in the promised land with the promised seed for all eternity! And this home is being built for us by our redeemer- Jesus Christ! So our chapter ends with Ruth and Naimi living together. Although Ruth is cared for, the need for a husband is still pressing. And it is that need that the next chapter takes up.