

**Telephone Harvest 2021 Ruth 2:1-12 Tim Collins**

**A Harvest Love Story**

Can there really be a better harvest story in the bible than the one we find in the book of Ruth?

This is such a simple, yet vivid, story of harvest – it provides us with a glimpse of agricultural practices in ancient times; it presents us with a picture of the labourers in the field – those tasked with reaping, those gathering in the sheaves of wheat; we are told of the practice of caring for those on the margins of society through the offering the gleanings.

And this picture, this snapshot of a harvest being gathered 3000 years ago, is mirrored in so many places around the world, even today.

But it's more than that.

This story, in a subtle way, reminds us of our communal responsibility to care for what we have been given. We are told that Boaz owns only part of the field, but the reapers and gatherers are a collective, they are working the whole field, not just a small portion of it ; and so we get a sense of a community working together for the common good; we get the understanding of the appropriate use of the land – a sharing, of a coming together; of regard for others.

But it's more than that

This story is a wonderful love story – with Ruth and Boaz; the embodiment of all those fairy stories we've told our children and grandchildren – a story of rags to riches; where boy meets girl; of social barriers overcome; where love conquers all; and all live happily ever after!

It's the end of one journey, and the start of a bigger one;

But it's more than that

This story is a parable – providing a mirror for us to think about our own lives, our own approach to the environment; our own interactions with one another. To think of our responsibilities to one another, to the land.

But, of course, it's more than all these.

Because these verses sit inside the whole book of Ruth; a book, that this is an amazing, incredible, wonderful book. In just a few short chapters – you can read the whole thing over a cup of coffee – in this short book we get a distillation of the whole bible: in particular, the great motifs that flow through and underpin everything from Genesis to Revelation are here laid before us

Those of justice,

of mercy,

of obedience,

of hope

of trust in God

All are played out in this short book.

And there's more.

Through its chapters, we get a beautiful example of what it means to be a Christian:

in responding to the word of God,

of obedience to God,

in being aware of - and responding to the needs of - others,

of caring for creation

Through its chapters we are given, too, a foreshadowing of the Sermon on the Mount:

blessed are you who mourn for you will be comforted – as Naomi is by Ruth

blessed are the hungry for you will be satisfied – as Ruth is free to feed on the gleanings

blessed are the poor for yours is the kingdom of God – despite the deep personal and financial loss that Naomi and Ruth suffer, in the end they find a home, again.

Through its chapters we get the gospel going out beyond the Children of Israel – Ruth is a Moabite, a gentile, an outcast – but through obedience, through acceptance, through love, she is brought into the family of the Children of God. And she will play a critical role as an ancestor of Jesus.

Indeed, as we explore the book of Ruth more and more, we become aware that these few chapters provide pointers and allusions – give us signs – as to what is to come:

the overarching story of Israel's relationship with God,  
the hope of a messiah,  
the fulfilment of the promises of God.

Now, as you read the book, you work out that most of the story focuses on a small village in Judah, a small village that will play a massive part in the life of Christ – Bethlehem

And from Matthew's genealogy at the beginning of his gospel, we realise that two of the main characters of this story - Ruth and Boaz - are forebearers of Joseph. This book, that weaves together the stories of Naomi and Ruth and Boaz, sets us on a journey that will eventually lead us back to Bethlehem, back to the birth of Jesus:

from Boaz to Jesse,  
from Jesse to David

and embracing the next 28 generations, from David to

Joseph: Joseph the husband of Mary,

Mary the mother of Jesus.

Each of those generations another step on the path to redemption and salvation. In this story of Ruth, we get the beginnings of an understanding of how that path will be trodden.

But, it's more than that. For there is a hugely important symbol that is flagged up for us. A symbol that relates to our service this morning: and points to the future.

Who remembers the meaning of the word Bethlehem?

Bethlehem. This village that will nurture Jesus in his infancy, its translation is 'the house of bread'! And at some distant time in the future, Jesus will declare to all who hear – I am the bread of life!

This short book of Ruth is an amazing, incredible story – and at its heart, as we have heard, is a harvest! A harvest that is abundant; a harvest that enables the poor, the marginalised, the outcasts to be fed, to be sustained. To live

At its heart, a harvest that demonstrates God's love, God's abundant giving

A harvest that keeps on giving. The more we explore - the more we ponder these things - the more we begin to understand; and in that understanding, the better we can see and feel God's hand in all that happens around us; the more we appreciate the wonder and beauty and love of creation.

And so, these few verses we have heard this morning – this wonderful story of Naomi and Ruth and Boaz - paint not only a picture of a harvest over 3000 years ago, but they also point forward to the harvest that awaits us in the future – the abundance that is forever God's wonderful, amazing, incredible grace and love. **Amen**