

Themes Of Ruth (Part Four): Kindness And Faith

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There is probably no way to gauge the kindness of a society, either in the present day or in historical terms. We do not know how kind the Babylonian people were, just like we do not really know how kind the Germans are or the the people down in Brazil or what have you, because kindness is one of those abstract concepts that could be difficult to define across cultures, and it is impossible to quantify. How do you quantify kindness? There is just really no way. To some these days, kindness is just a random act that you do when you help a person in a big or even a small way.

Society nowadays expects us now when we receive a random act of kindness, to pay it forward rather than pay it back. That is a little bit different from the way things were not too long ago. Once we got this idea of paying it forward, then that changed things. To others kindness is a way of life. That is just the way they are. You probably know people that are just naturally kind, who just do nice things for people. They are pleasant and good to everybody they seem to encounter throughout the day.

Before the leftists made a point of besmirching its reputation around the world, America was thought to be a very kind and generous nation. Our representatives were among the first that would land at a place where some natural or even manmade disaster happened around the globe. And we would donate millions of dollars, or now even billions of dollars, in both currency and relief supplies, and we send people there to be on the ground to help get those catastrophe-plagued areas back on their feet. We seem to do it routinely. We helped rebuild Europe and Japan after World War II. Germany and Japan were our enemies, and we were willing to give them a hand up if they were willing to take it. And they were.

Americans in general, I think, are very kind and generous people. Not long ago, no people gave more of their hard earned money and goods but to help others. And who knows? Maybe it is the same way now as it was in the past

in some areas. Many donate their own blood, bone marrow, or internal organs to a nameless, faceless recipient who needs those vital fluids or tissues.

I do not know if you have that around here, but you go past some of these churches and you find that American Christians give a lot of money to their churches. I know we have got several in South Charlotte that we watched grow over the years from smallish churches (they obviously had a fair amount of money), but now there are not only churches, there are church offices, there are schools, they have got sports complexes, and all of that came from donations from their members, and they have very wealthy members. It just seems like American Christians give so much, not just to their churches but to their favorite charities.

We give a lot of money and of course, we are walking down the street and we give money to bums and buskers and homeless people just because they have a hand out and we feel the need to fill it. Out of heartfelt concern, or maybe it is out of guilt or shame or whatever it happens to be, we routinely donate to food drives, coat drives, bike drives, toy drives, and other organized acts of kindness, and they really get going around Christmas time.

We give our winnings from contests and games to charity. We have TV shows where people do that. They will say, if we win, we are going to give ours to the Red Cross of Dayton, Ohio, or whatever it happens to be. And when they win all their money goes to the charity rather than to the people who actually won the game. We now donate to GoFundMe campaigns and similar types when people cannot pay their medical bills, when a family breadwinner dies, or even when we think a product that we like should get on its feet and be out there in the marketplace.

Now, I am not knocking any of this sort of thing. I am happy, even proud in a good way, that we live in a nation whose people feel compelled, for whatever reason that compels them, to give to their fellow man. It is a good thing. This generosity, which is so much at odds with carnal human nature, must derive from the heavy influence of Christianity in this nation in times past. Christianity was the going thing for a couple hundred years before other religions and atheism came in and has begun to be quite influential.

So for generations, the churches in this country have preached this aspect of Jesus' teachings, and they have done a very good job of preaching this the idea of charity and giving to the poor. It has instilled in Americans a kind and generous attitude. Not everybody has it, like I said. But a lot of people do. A lot of people still do. It seems like there are so many out there that are willing to give their right arms to help somebody in need. And that is great.

Not all of us are like this. We have our misers and we have our misanthropes. They are out there, too. I mean, that is just the way human nature is. But fortunately, those kind of people seem to be in a minority. But for how long is that going to be the case? As Christianity's influence on this nation declines, and it is in decline, and if we happen to go into an economic spiral of some sort (We never know when that is going to happen. It seems like our economy is on shifting sands all the time.), we are likely to see the growth of a dark underside to the American character. Kindness and generosity in times like that will fade, and in times of stress and want, as those times will be, those so-called softer virtues, like kindness, will be replaced by hardness of heart and selfishness.

If you will, please turn to II Timothy 3 to some very well known scriptures. Paul gives us a description of how people will be in the last days. So this time of stress and want, where people have hardness of heart and selfishness, is what Paul describes here.

II Timothy 3:1-5 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

In this paragraph, there is not a drop of the milk of human kindness to be found. There is nothing there that has any inkling or any little bit of real love, real concern, real generosity, real helpful spirit. None of that is there. This is the kind of attitude that we are drawing toward ever-closer as the return of Christ comes closer.

What we see in this list that Paul gives us is just the opposite of all that milk of human kindness—self love or narcissism, avarice, greed, being unloving (some people have that word actually meaning shameless), brutal, despisers of good, and other things. That is just the exact opposite of kindness and generosity. The apostle paints a picture of humanity stripped of every good virtue.

They are all focused on themselves and what happens when good is stripped out? Well, something is going to go in to replace it, and what replaces it is wickedness and vices that feed intrinsic selfishness. Human beings are human beings. They are made of flesh, they are carnal, and given a chance, human flesh is going to cry out for things to sate it, to please it, and that is what happens here. All the good is taken out and everything that comes back in or fills up the void is evil.

I get the picture in my head that he is describing the kind of people that you see in those futuristic dystopias in the movies like "Mad Max" or "The Book of Eli" or "Blade Runner," where everyone is out for himself and there is blood and violence and every vile thing is happening. And maybe there is one person, the hero of the story, who is trying to do something good, trying to go through all of that to make a little bit of difference.

If you have never seen "The Book of Eli" I would recommend it, not necessarily for all the violence and language and the other bad things that go on, but for the reason why Eli is doing what he is doing. It is interesting and you would probably get a lot out of it. But it is one of those futuristic dystopias where everybody is out for himself.

In short, the people that Paul describes in this prophecy in II Timothy 3 are the ones who have rejected God and rejected His way wholesale. Satan has deceived them to the point where they want nothing to do with God and His way. Nothing to do with those virtues that He wants to see in us, and the ultimate result is the breakdown of all community, all society. What we see is anarchy, bedlam, and chaos. It is just each man for himself and the strongest wins.

The Old Testament concept of kindness, which is where we are drawing the sermon, towards kindness, which is conveyed in the Hebrew word *hesed*, is

steeped in community, and if you take community away, you do not get much *hesed*. As a matter of fact, we should probably say that the Old Testament concept of kindness is steeped in covenant, because it is the covenant that creates the community—God's community—which we see in Israel, although they never lived up to it. But in certain times, certain places, it would spring out, and it would be good. There would be more of this *hesed* happening. And that is when people kept the covenant and they reaped the rewards of it, and good things happened because they obeyed God.

But in Old Testament thought, kindness is what the covenant produces in those who follow its purpose and its teaching. So you cannot produce *hesed*, this kind of kindness, outside of the covenant because it is the covenant that creates the environment and gives the instructions for how you actually show kindness to a fellow.

But that is really not quite right. That is not saying enough, because true kindness is more than performing what the covenant obliges us to do. It is more than just obeying the rules. It is more than just staying within the bounds or within the lines. There is something extra. As I used the term in one of my former sermons, there is a value-added aspect to kindness, something beyond, more than just following the letter-of-the-law terms of the Covenant. I want to give you what I think is a pretty good definition of the kindness that we see in the book of Ruth, and that is, "good and helpful actions that go above and beyond what God and His covenant require." So it is more than just keeping the rules and doing what God tells us to do. It is actually going them one step further.

I want to show you this from Luke, from the New Testament, from something Jesus taught. We will see an example of what I mean by this above and beyond approach or a value-added approach. You will see that this astounded His disciples.

Luke 17:1-4 Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."

So we have a situation where there is somebody who you know, one of your relations or somebody, an acquaintance of yours, and he is constantly doing something against *you*, he is sinning against *you*. It is very personal and particular. And then he is of such a mind that he says, "Oh, I shouldn't have done that." and he comes back and he says, "Please forgive me. I repent." Jesus says that if he does this seven times a day, well, you are supposed to forgive him.

Luke 17:5 And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."

They could not imagine doing this to someone who had sinned against them in particular, seven times a day. Being able to say, "Yes, I forgive you." So they asked for more faith to be able to do that because that just seemed impossible. Notice how Jesus answers their request.

Luke 17:6-10 So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat?' [You would not do that if you are the master. You would not tell your servant to eat with you.] But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all these things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'"

Notice what He says here. This is a New Testament application of this principle that I was explaining about kindness. Jesus showed the expectation under the New Covenant in verses 4 and 5. The expectation is that if someone sins against you and asks you to forgive him, saying, "I repent," you are to forgive him. And if he does this seven times a day, you are to forgive him. That is the requirement under the New Covenant. And as I

mentioned, the disciples' reaction was they were flabbergasted that this would be required of them and that is why they asked for their faith to be increased because they could not imagine themselves doing that. It was just not something that they thought they would have to do. They did not really understand how high the standard was, so Jesus gives the Parable of the Unprofitable Servants to illustrate how New Covenant godly character acts. The main thing we need to get out of this is that someone who is under the New Covenant must learn to go above and beyond the strict requirements in so many ways.

In this particular way that I am talking about today, he must go above and beyond the strict requirement to show lovingkindness to even the most aggravating sinner, the sinner that keeps sinning against us and endlessly asks our forgiveness. That is tough. That is hard to do. Some would say that is impossible to do because we are so carnal. We do not want to extend that much love towards somebody or that much kindness or that much forgiveness. But it is something that as New Covenant Christians we have to understand, it is what is asked of us. It is not just forgive your brother of his sins against you. It is do it as many times as he asks you. There is no limit. We must give forgiveness as long as he repents.

So it is this kind of character trait, specifically in terms of kindness, that we are going to consider in the book of Ruth. We are going to see it in Ruth, particularly. Boaz expresses it in chapter 4. But we are not going to study his *hesed* today. I did that in another sermon several years ago. I just want to go into Ruth's. As the disciples discerned in Luke 17, practicing true kindness requires considerable faith. That is why they asked for faith. In fact, to really be kind in the way that Ruth is kind in the book of Ruth, you have to *use faith*. You have to apply faith because what we find there in the book of Ruth is that we must do what is right and good and kind when everything around us and our carnal mind is screaming at us to do what is best for *us*. But we have to do what is right and good and kind.

Before we get into the book of Ruth, I want to show another example of *hesed*, what we call kindness or lovingkindness from the Old Testament. But I want to use David as an example. I hope by looking at David's example we can understand Ruth's acts of kindness or covenant loyalty or lovingkindness, however you want to put it, and the faith, the trust in God

that it requires. What I hope to show here is that the two of them—kindness and faith—go together. That we cannot show this *hesed*, or kindness, without faith because, and you will see as we go through this, that the kindness that we do using *hesed*, this kind of love is often required when it looks the worst for us. So we have to step out in faith to do this particular act of kindness.

Before we read it, I want to kind of set the tone here, set the historical and political situation. This is a little bit after David has come to the throne of Judah. It is after Saul has died. When he died, the Israelites followed his son Ishbosheth, and David then ruled over Judah. So there was two separate kingdoms. I just want to flip back to chapter 3, verse 1.

II Samuel 3:1 Now there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David, but David grew stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.

If you read these chapters, you will find all kinds of things happening. There is all kinds of dynastic infighting. There is murder, and there is a lot of bad things going on. To stop all the fighting, and because he really did not like Ishbosheth very much, Abner defects to David and he tells all of Israel to follow him and cleave to David. But Joab, David's nephew, who was really a terrible person, he has a problem with Abner because Abner had killed his brother Asahel. So Joab calls Abner over, finds a dark spot, and kills Abner—stabs him. Of course, this would cause war between Israel and Judah all by itself. And then after that, two Benjaminites decided that David would probably reward them greatly if they killed Ishbosheth, so they did that for him. David did not like that at all and he killed those two Benjaminites for killing Saul's son. So you have all kinds of things happening. It was a terrible, violent time in the history of Judah and Israel.

II Samuel 9:1-13 Now David said, "Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness [or *hesed*] for Jonathan's sake?" And there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba. So when they had called him to David, the king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" And he said, "At your service!" Then the king said, "Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, to whom I may show the kindness of God. [Notice, this is a particular kindness he mentions here. It is the kindness of God.]

And Ziba said to the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan who is lame in his feet." So the king said to him, "Where is he?" And Ziba said to the king, "Indeed he is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, in Lo Debar." Then King David sent and brought him out of the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, from Lo Debar. Now, when Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, had come to David, he fell on his face and prostrated himself. Then David said, "Mephibosheth?" And he answered, "Here is your servant!" So David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father's sake, and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather, and you shall eat bread at my table continually." Then he bowed himself, and said, "What is your servant, that you should look upon such a dead dog as I?" And the king called Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, "I have given to your master's son all that belonged to Saul and to all his house. You therefore, and your sons and your servants, shall work the land for him, and you shall bring in the harvest that your master's son may have food to eat. But Mephibosheth your master's son shall eat bread at my table always." Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. Then Ziba said to the king, "According to all that my Lord the king has commanded his servant, so will your servant do." "As for Mephibosheth," said the king, "he shall eat at my table like one of the king's sons." Mephibosheth had a young son whose name was Micha. And all who dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants of Mephibosheth. So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate continually at the king's table. And he was lame in both his feet.

What does this tell us about the kindness of God? Remember, we just saw all the infighting and the murder, and that is normal dynastic behavior. That happened all down through history when two families were fighting to take over a throne. And it has also been commonplace throughout history for the one who wins, the new king, to kill all the heirs of the dynasty that he is just overthrown. We have an example of that in the Bible when Athaliah, who was the the mother of of Ahaziah who was king of Judah during the time of Ahab's sons or grandsons. But anyway, she found out that her son Ahaziah

died and there were actually several others of her own family left and she went and killed everyone except Joash, who was hidden by the high priest and his wife. And of course, later, Joash came and overthrew Athaliah.

But that is the way dynasts like that think. That they have got to get rid of all the claimants to the throne so that they do not have to always be looking over their shoulder. Because if they leave somebody alive that has a claim to the throne, then somebody is going to take that person and use him as a figurehead for revolution or a coup d'etat. So in order to start their reigns properly and make sure that they do not have all that competition, kings often will kill all rivals to the throne.

But notice that David did not do that. In this case, David, by faith, extends *hesed*—God's kindness—to Mephibosheth, despite the fact that he and his son Micha as we saw could be potential thorns in his side. He had such respect for Jonathan and such respect for God, and he had such faith in God, that he was willing to do this. He was willing to extend kindness even to his enemy, knowing that it could mean a knife in the back later. But he did it anyway, and he trusted God to make sure that that did not happen.

If we would go to chapter 16, verses 1-4, which is in the section there about Absalom's rebellion, we find that Mephibosheth sides with Absalom at first, and later when David comes back to Jerusalem and David kind of accosts him about it, he repents. You will find that in chapter 19, verses 24-30. So it seems like even though David had extended this great kindness toward Mephibosheth, a man who had no way of walking around—lame in both of his feet—could not make a living on his own, but David supported him out of his own pocket and even allowed him to have the proceeds of Saul's lands without doing a stitch of work for it. He had Ziba and all his sons to do all the work.

Not only did he give him all these things, he gave him the money, the income to be able to stage a coup, should he so use the money. That is how far his kindness went. But David, trusting in God, did that because he had made a vow to Jonathan that he would take care of his sons, take care of his progeny. So he extended this kindness even though there were distinct disadvantages for doing it.

So this helps to illustrate *hesed* to us. It is not just doing someone a favor or lending them a helping hand. That is part of it. But *hesed* is doing these things despite a present or potential danger or disadvantage to oneself. It is extending a hand even if it costs you. Remember Psalm 15 where it talks about the man who is on Mount Zion or whatever, and it talks about who will say the truth to his own hurt? Well, this is the same sort of thing in terms of kindness, *hesed*. That he will do what is right and good and kind even if it is to his own hurt.

It is in this way that it is easy to see the similarities between *hesed* in the Old Testament and agape in the New. They are both that kind of outgoing concern for somebody no matter what the cost. They are both self-sacrificial acts of outgoing concern. Both *hesed* and agape are self-sacrificial acts done out of outgoing concern. There is no expectation of advantage to oneself or even payback. The only thing that one expects from doing *hesed* is satisfaction that you have pleased God, you have done what is right, and doing such a thing takes great trust, great faith in God. "Okay God. You said you were going to bless me if I do all these good things for you. I will do them no matter what comes upon me for doing it."

Let us go to Ephesians the fifth chapter to give you another example from the greater David, Jesus Christ. This is the same kind of love, same kind of kindness that Jesus showed in His life.

Ephesians 5:1-2 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love [agape], as Christ has also loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

The same kind of love that Jesus showed in giving Himself for us in sacrifice, in both His life and in His death, is what is expected of us. As he says here, "be imitators of God," we imitate God by walking in love, by walking in *hesed*, using the Old Testament term. One commentator that I read in studying for this sermon said that *hesed* is, "A special reciprocal behavior that exceeds the matter of course." He goes on to say it is, "An attitude that exceeds the customary requirements of ordered social life."

Finally, he said, "It is magnanimity and sacrificial willingness to be there for the other beyond obligation." This is what we see in Ruth. She did these things just like her great grandson David did with Mephibosheth later on.

Let us go back to the book of Ruth. I think we have finally seen enough so that we can see these things coming out in Ruth's behavior. Now let me set the scene. We probably all know this, but this is Naomi leaving Moab and going back to Bethlehem. The "she" here is Naomi.

Ruth 1:6-18 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had visited His people by giving them bread. Therefore she went out from the place where she was and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. [Here Naomi asks God to show *hesed* on them. This is the environment that Ruth had lived with in her marriage to Mahlon.] The Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. They said to her, "Surely we will return with you to your people." But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb that they may be your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go—for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, would you wait for them till they are grown? Will you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters, for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me!" Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. And she said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law. But Ruth said [this is where we come into her *hesed*]: "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me,

and more also, if anything but death parts you and me." When she [Naomi] saw that she [Ruth] was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her.

We have already gone over this a couple times in this series already. But it is worth looking at again in terms of *hesed* and faith, these two subjects that I have chosen today. Now, if we would go to chapter 3, verse 10, we would see that Boaz there calls this Ruth's first *hesed*—her first kindness. And he tells her there that in her kindness toward him in chapter three, she had exceeded her original *hesed*. Here Ruth is showing kindness toward Naomi.

Now, why is this *hesed*? Why did Boaz, in looking back at this situation that she had had here with her mother in law, call it *hesed*? Well, the reason is it checks all the boxes of what *hesed* is. I have three points here that it fulfills.

The first, is that it occurs within a covenantal relationship. Now the covenant is not the Old Covenant that we are talking about here. The covenant that we are talking about is the marriage covenant. And it occurs within the marriage covenant despite the fact that the marriage had been voided by death. Remember, Ruth had married Mahlon and Mahlon had died. We can go to the scriptures that say that once one of the spouses die that marriage is finished, it has run its course, and the person then who remains is allowed to marry again should he or she wish to do so. So the marriage was over.

But did you notice something as we were going through this passage? What was said in terms of identifying these people? By the wording that is used, we can see that neither Ruth nor Naomi acknowledged the passing of the marriage covenant that bound them together. They are, to each other, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. They did not necessarily need to be that way anymore because the marriage was over. We see Orpah, even though she called Naomi her mother-in-law, decides that that is it, and she goes back to her people. But Ruth is different. She is remaining with Naomi. Naomi consistently calls Ruth and Orpah my daughters and Ruth always talk to her as her mother. It does not show right here, but shows it throughout the book that she always considers Naomi her mother-in-law.

So to them, that relationship has not been breached by death. It is still ongoing. Ruth, we could say, never repudiates the relationship and later this

is taken even further when Boaz is considered, not only Naomi's relative, but Ruth's. Ruth had no connection by blood whatsoever to Boaz. She was a daughter-in-law, a Moabitess. But she considered Boaz a near relative because he was Naomi's near relative. She considered herself that much within the covenant, within the relationship, that what was Naomi's was also Ruth's, was her own. So by vowing here in what she says in verses 16 and 17, by vowing to enter Israel and to worship the true God, she then binds herself, not to Naomi through marriage alone, but through the Old Covenant. What is Naomi's is Ruth's. And so since Naomi was under the covenant, Ruth would come under the covenant as well. We would say that Naomi would be the pathway to Ruth's conversion. God used that.

The second point is that Ruth *hesed* was self-sacrificial. We have to think this through a bit because we have to put ourselves in Ruth's place. When Ruth decides to cast her lot with Naomi, with Naomi's people, and with Naomi's God, there is on the surface very little or even no advantage to her doing so. Now we know that there is great advantage in making oneself a part of God's people. But on the surface, in what Ruth did at the time, from somebody looking from the outside in, they could see nothing that would be an advantage to her. Here she was a young, perhaps good looking, woman of Moab, and she was running off to Judah, who everybody in Moab hated, with an old lady. Just kind of put it that way. Look at it in its worst ways or whatever, how you could put it in a bad way.

She is giving up everything that she has grown to love and respect. She gives up her family in Moab. She gives up her homeland. She gives up all the familiar customs and traditions that she has grown up with. She also gives up, probably, the possibility of an easier life among her own people. And perhaps because she cannot see this at this point, she gives up her ability to marry and bear children because what she is saying is that "I'm going to spend my time not looking for a husband, but for caring for this lady Naomi." That is going to be her job. But she did all of this to maintain her relationship with Naomi. She sacrificed everything for her.

The third point of Ruth's *hesed* here is that it is magnanimous on her part, and it goes above and beyond. If you ever read a commentary on the book of Ruth, when you come to verse 16, the commentators extol what she says here in great swelling words of goodness. They call her speech noble and

high-minded and generous of spirit. And it is. It is all that and more. It is not something she had to do. She could have done like Orpah, turned her back and left. She had that choice. But she decided to do what was noble and good instead. She had no covenant to tell her not to do this or no covenant that bound her to do otherwise. She was what we would call a free agent. She could do whatever she wanted. She could take the best deal, but she deliberately chose to aid Naomi for her mother-in-law's well being, not for her own.

What we find is that she did this out of love, out of her outgoing concern. In her words there in verses 16 and 17, she essentially vowed lifelong service to her mother-in-law. Now there are some mothers-in-law that that would be a life sentence. But from what we saw about Naomi in the first sermon of this series, she was just a beautiful, pleasant woman. So it was not all that bad for her to do this. But she still went above and beyond what was required for her and did the noble thing.

So we can say that, in a sense, Ruth sacrificed her entire identity and all her goals and aspirations to take care of her mother-in-law, Naomi. She showed far more love for Naomi than was either required or even normal for daughters to do. How many daughters are willing to give up everything they have to take care of their mothers? Sometimes daughters want to go away and have their own life, have their own husbands and children and just let Mom live her life out. Let us go to Ruth chapter 4, verse 15. This is the women speaking after Obed has been born. It says,

Ruth 4:15 "And may he [Obed] be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him."

So their estimation of Ruth as a daughter-in-law is more than seven sons. Her love for Naomi, you could say, was seven times that of a normal son or daughter. We could say her selfless love for Naomi was sevenfold greater than average. When you see numbers like seven in the Bible, you know that what is being said here in biblical terms is that Ruth's love was complete—perfect. It is as good as any human being can express it; that she showed perfect love towards her mother-in-law, perfect kindness.

Now we should also add here that we need we need to understand the times that Ruth did this just monumental act of loving kindness. This was during the time of the judges, when every man did what was right in his own eyes. We could probably add to that that every man did what was right in his own eyes and what was best for him! But Ruth was not that way. In a time of national faithlessness in Israel, Ruth displays uncommon faithfulness. What she did took exceptional faith. We could even, I think, give her a verse in Hebrews 11. Something like: "By faith Ruth left her family and her country, choosing to follow her impoverished mother-in-law to a land and a people she did not know," and she made the most of it. She cast her lot with God and His people and forsook everything else out of kindness, out of love.

If you will turn with me to Philippians 3. This is a New Testament equivalent of what Ruth did. This is from the apostle Paul's life. He says,

Philippians 3:7-11 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things lost for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I might gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

When we give our all to God and His way, we are expressing *hesed* for God. We are willing to be the Ruth in this relationship and say, "I could go back to my family and I could go back to my country and I could go back to all my traditions and customs and I could go back to everything that I hold dear. But no, I am going to give myself to following God to the Kingdom of God." We do this out of gratitude for what He has done for us and for the faith, and in faith, for what He has promised us. And in this way, when we give our all to God and follow Him no matter what, we fulfill and surpass our part in the New Covenant. We are doing more than what is just required. We are not just following the rules, we are giving our heart.

Back to the book of Ruth, chapter 2. Now, we could say that the *hesed* that Ruth shows here is actually part of what we saw in chapter 1. But what we saw in chapter 1 was the words, the vow, you could say, of Ruth to do these things for her mother-in-law. She had not actually *done* any of them yet, except make the first step toward Judah with her mother-in-law. In chapter 2, we see the realization that she was good. Her word was good. She said she was going to do that and she did it. All these things that we saw in chapter 1, verses 16 and 17, she backed up with action. So we see a little glimpse of her kindness, her ongoing daily kindness—lovingkindness—toward Naomi in chapter 2. This is how it worked out.

Ruth 2:1-3 There was a relative of Naomi's husband's, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz. So Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

Ruth 2:17-18 So she gleaned in the field until evening, and beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. Then she took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. So she brought out and gave to her what she had kept back after she had been satisfied. [meaning her afternoon meal]

Like I said, Ruth's *hesed* here toward Naomi is a realization of her promise to help and support Naomi in chapter 1. Here Ruth gets up early in the morning and she goes out to Boaz's field, and she works all day in the hot sun to bring Naomi food in the evening. All along the way, as part of this goal to take care of Naomi, she humbles herself before Boaz's foreman, and later she humbles herself before Boaz and she obeys their instructions without question while she gleans. She is willing, then, to do whatever she has to do to help Naomi. That is love. That is faith in action. That is putting your money where your mouth is. She said she would do it, and the next thing we see her doing exactly what she said.

She was willing to go out in the hot sun and bend over in the field all day, picking up loose grains and whatnot that had been dropped. Spend all day doing that with a break for lunch. And then go take what she had to her mother-in-law for her to do with as she would. Like I said, that is *hesed* if I have ever seen it.

Let us go back to the book of Philippians and we will pick up exactly where we left off there in chapter 3. This is the attitude we need to have now that we have made our covenant with God. We made our vow to do what we must do to be in the Kingdom of God.

Philippians 3:12-15 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature [If you are spiritually mature, have this mind, have the same desire like Paul had to press toward the goal.]; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

This is the New Testament attitude, like Ruth had in the Old Testament. Once we have made the commitment to God's way, we need to press toward the goal that God has set before us. What he means there is we have to put our all into it. We have to give it our whole mind and strength. That is what Ruth's example teaches us. Remember Romans 12:1-2, where Paul says it is our reasonable service. It is rational because we have been bought with a price. It is rational, it is reasonable to make of ourselves living sacrifices for God so that we can be transformed into the image of Christ. We have to have this "whatever it takes" mentality, whatever it takes to please God, to be there in His Kingdom. Or, as he says there in verse 11, "If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

Back to Ruth, this time in chapter 3, verses 7-10. This is what we went over in the last sermon. It was a major part of that sermon, so I will not spend very much time on it today, but I think it is worth noting again in terms of kindness and faith.

Ruth 3:7-10 And after Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was cheerful, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came softly, uncovered his feet, and lay down. Now it happened at midnight that the man was startled, and turned himself; and there, a woman was lying at his feet. And he said, "Who are you?" So she answered, "I am Ruth, your maidservant. Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a close relative." Then he said, "Blessed are you of the Lord, my daughter! For you have shown more kindness at the end than at the beginning, in that you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich."

I want you to see there this is the place where Boaz remarks that her *hesed* toward him was more kind than her kindness toward Naomi. How could this be? We already saw that she had done a great thing for her mother-in-law. But the difference is, the more, the added factor here, is that Ruth adds him, who was a near stranger to her. Remember, she had just met him in chapter 2, really even did not know who he was until Naomi said later that he is a kinsman. But, she adds him to the kindness that she has toward Naomi.

She had been willing to give up everything for Naomi, and here she shows herself just as willing to give her life to Boaz. He was an older man, obviously, by how he talks about the younger man, so he must have been a little bit older, not as desirable. Who knows? Maybe he had moles or whatever, and he was not the kind that most girls would want to be a husband. But she did, because she was adding him to the *hesed* she was showing to Naomi. It was getting larger and more encompassing.

And as we find out as we go through the rest of the book, that it was encompassing the whole purpose of God in bringing Obed into the world and after him, David and Christ. So her *hesed*, her lovingkindness, is reaching out to bring more people into it so that she, although she did not probably understand it, could do the will of God, the work of God by bringing

ultimately the Messiah into the world as well. But she was willing not just to fulfill her covenant obligations, which she had taken on voluntarily, but she was willing to take on this man who she really did not know. But it was part of what she needed to do.

Let us go back to Philippians 2 this time. We often go to chapter 2, verse 5. But notice Paul's approach here and notice what he is really talking about.

Philippians 2:1-4 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ [any encouragement], if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy [these are all very high-minded things that we are supposed to be doing as Christians], fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love [that is, agape], being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

We could say that he is describing Ruth here in the way that she acted toward her mother-in-law and then to Boaz. Paul's emphasis here is on humbling ourselves as we look out for others interests. That is why, from this point on, after verse 4, he goes into "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Then he describes how He humbled Himself to the point of death to be our Savior and open the way for us to have a relationship with God. And what do we find when we get down to verses 9, 10, and 11? That this is the attitude that God highly exalts in due time. That if we humble ourselves now, and we give of ourselves for the good of others like Jesus Christ did, that we will ultimately be exalted.

This is the kind of love, of *hesed*, outgoing concern for others that God will indeed reward greatly in the Kingdom of God. If we remove ourselves and our selfish desires and selfish emotions from the equation, we can then act in faith and express true agape or true *hesed* toward God and man. That is what Jesus Christ did. He made Himself in the form of a servant, one who does not have much control of anything, and He just did the will of God—in humility. And look what He accomplished because He showed *hesed* toward the whole world. That is the example we have to follow.

Let us conclude in Micah 6. Here are marching orders.

Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O man, what is good [This is what is good for you to do: what is good for the world, what is good for your community, what is good for your family, what is good for you as a person.]; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly [Do what is right, do what is, not just fair, but equitable toward all people.], to love mercy [*Hesed*. That is what underlies that word mercy. We are to love that feeling of goodness and kindness and action toward others.], and to walk humbly with your God? [To have that kind of humility that Jesus Christ showed, which Ruth showed too in her dealings with Naomi and Boaz.]

These marching orders define what is good in this world. To be just toward all, to express mercy—*hesed*—and to live with a humble heart as we journey toward God's Kingdom. If a young woman from Moab, with little prior training in God's way can do it, so can we.