

INTRODUCTION

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVrQqWIs6ZE>

Why does this kind of thing resonate with us? If you hold to a secular view of human beings, that we're simply physical beings, randomly evolved from other life forms, how does that explain why seeing goodness and kindness stirs us regardless of what culture we're from? It's because humans are made in the image of God. He is good and kind. And we reflect Him, not in that we're always good ourselves, but that we long for it.

That goodness of God has been shining through in book of Ruth. We've been talking about how God is our redeemer. In Naomi, we saw that He redeems us from brokenness. In Ruth, we saw that His redeeming frees us to be courageous. In Boaz, we saw that His redeeming moves us to holy living

We'll sum up our study of the book of Ruth by looking at the reason we have hope for this redemption. And it's summed up in this Hebrew word: *hesed*. It's an important Hebrew word to know because it captures God's attitude toward His people. It's used about 250 times in the OT. It's exact meaning is hard to define. The most common one scholars give is: loving-kindness. It's love, but it's more than sentimental. It's a love that's acted on (i.e. kindness).

And this word is a major theme in Ruth. It comes up 3 times in 4 chapters. So rather than try to define it, I want to illustrate it through Ruth and Boaz. Actually, they are the ones showing *hesed* in this book, but both are meant to be a reflection of God's *hesed* toward us.

I. HESED OF RUTH: LOYAL

And he said, "May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich." (Ruth 3:10)

This describes Ruth's kindness to Naomi – first in coming with her and second in marrying within the family.

A. Ruth's clinging

Recall the decision Ruth made. She had a choice – Moab or Bethlehem. If we're making a logical decision, Moab was the clear choice. It was her home, those were her people, she had a chance of remarriage there. Bethlehem meant poverty and being alone. Why did she choose Bethlehem?

One reason is in 1:16: "your God my God." She had come to believe in the Lord and she wanted to go where she would be closer to God.

But she also did this for the sake of Naomi. Naomi was a needy person. She didn't own anything. She was too old to work. She needed someone to care for her. But she had no sons, no husband, she wasn't going to get married again. And she was bitter. She

was what we would call toxic. All of that was going to fall on Ruth. But it says in 1:14 that “Ruth clung to her.”

B. Loyal love

That’s *hesed* love. It’s a loyal love. It’s not off and on. It doesn’t waver when things go bad. Look at what Ruth says in 1:17: “May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.”

That phrase is terminology people in the OT used when making covenants. Covenants are like contracts, except more serious. Traditionally, what they did in those times to finalize a covenant agreement was they would kill an animal. It was their way of saying: “let this happen to me if I break the covenant.”

Ruth is not saying: “I’ll go with you for a little bit. We’ll see how it goes.” This is: “I’ll stay with you, even though I’ll be in poverty. Even though I’ll be alone. And if I don’t, may God take my life.”

It’s rare to find that kind of loyal love. It’s the kind of love wedding vows speak of. Verse 16 used to be quoted at weddings. It’s where we get “til death do us part.” And if you think about wedding vows, they’re not that romantic. For better or for worse, in health and in sickness, in joy and in sorrow. It’s anticipating many difficulties. And it’s pledging love that will remain in the face of those difficulties. It’s not romantic love. It’s a hard, at times painful, love. This is the *hesed* love of God. It will endure. It is loyal.

C. *Hesed* in other parts of the OT

Here are a couple of other verses in the OT that illuminate this for us. Lamentations 3:22-23: “The steadfast love [*hesed*] of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” His *hesed* never ceases. Never comes to an end. This verse has sustained me in my 20 years of following Jesus. No matter how bad the day before was, I know that His *hesed* will be there in the morning.

Psalm 23:6: “Surely goodness and mercy [*hesed*] shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” It will follow you! It will cling to you like Ruth clung to Naomi. And if you think about why Ruth clung to Naomi, it wasn’t because she needed Naomi. We already saw that Ruth found her refuge in God and was secure in that. She clung to Naomi because Naomi needed her.

As much as we try to cling to God, know this: God clings to us. Not because He needs us, but because He knows how much we need Him.

II. HESED OF BOAZ: ABUNDANT AND UNDESERVED

A. Boaz and Ruth

Boaz is the other picture of *hesed*. Think about this marriage between Boaz and Ruth. This is one of those couples where you wonder how this girl ended up with a guy like that. It's straight out of Crazy Rich Asians or Pride and Prejudice. She's poor. He's rich. She brings nothing to the table. He's the one who has to sacrifice everything. He gains nothing. She gains an inheritance. She bears a child. She has a future.

B. Christ and the church

This is Christ and the church. We're Ruth! We're in need. We're foreigners to Him. We're on the outside looking in. And we have nothing to give. We have nothing that we could offer to God that would make Him inclined to help us.

And God is God. He doesn't need anything. What does He gain from His relationship with us? He isn't lonely. He has perfect fellowship within the triune God. Yet He pays to have us. Just as Boaz had to purchase the land to get Ruth, God purchased us. Not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19)

And now, like Ruth, we went from being poor to having the inheritance of Christ. We went from being barren to fruitful.

I love this detail in 3:15: "he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her." This is about 15 gallons of barley. Who needs that much barley? How she even going to carry that back? And all this was after he knew she loved him. He's not one of those guys who stop after they get the girl. God, when He purchased us, His goodness was only beginning. He will give and give and give increasingly for all of eternity.

C. Abundant love

We often have this impression of God that He's stingy. And it's because we're shallow in how we understand love. We're concerned with our current joy. He's concerned with our eternal joy. We have no idea how much grace we are receiving daily to that end.

That's another side of His *hesed*. It's abundant. Psalm 103:8-17: "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love [*hesed*]. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love [*hesed*] toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love [*hesed*] of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children."

How do we know this is true? There are times when it's hard to believe. Hold on to that kid's song: "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." This isn't a joke. This is how we know!

Sometimes we feel it, sometimes we don't. But the word of God tells us that feeling God's love isn't what makes it true. It's true because he says it. We need to stop interpreting God's love through our circumstances, evaluating his love based on how well things are going for us. Instead, we need to interpret our circumstances through God's love.

The truth of the inerrant word of God is that God not only loves me, but has abundant love for me. Every minute, I am living under the shower of His grace. I live from that. From that, I know then that hardships are still His grace to me. I know that He'll receive me no matter how far I've fallen. Because His *hesed* is the reality, more than my feelings.

Live your life based on what you know, more than what you feel. Because we know his *hesed* is abundant. And we will see that to be true, sooner or later.

D. Undeserved love

What makes it all the more amazing: His *hesed* is also undeserved. It's given to those who have nothing to offer. Jonathan Edwards said: "We contribute nothing to our salvation except the sin that made it necessary." Those who think they can earn from God are the ones who actually don't receive it. It's those who do what Ruth did: ask Him to cover them under His wings.

III. Hased in Christ

A. Saving love of God is only possible by the cross

The last thing we have to do is to anchor all of this. This loyal and abundant and undeserved *hesed* is only possible by the cross. We can't separate it from the cross. For some people: God's love is this kind of generic love. It's like human love to them. And their testimony goes something like this: "I was going through rough time in my life. I went to a retreat and heard that God loves me no matter what, so I decided to trust Him and become Christian." There is truth to that experience, but to be honest, if that's all one understands about God, they might not be Christian. Because Jesus is nowhere in the picture.

We don't enjoy God's love just because. The cross tells us we actually do not deserve love. We deserve wrath. We have His *hesed* because Jesus stepped in front of that wrath on the cross and now we receive what Jesus alone deserves.

B. Loving God more than loving God's love

There's a fine line between worshipping God and worshipping His love. For many, God is just a means of love. He can be replaced and sometimes He is. Someone comes along who gives unconditional love, they don't need God as much anymore.

That happens to people all over the place. We're on shaky ground if we sing about God's love, without worshipping Him for how that love is secured for us: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

C. The true Redeemer

That's both humbling and hopeful. It's humbling because it's His righteousness, not mine. I have done nothing to earn it. But it's also hopeful for that same reason: it's His righteousness, not mine. God's love is dependent on who Jesus is. And that will never change.

That's what book of Ruth points us to: "So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel!" (4:13-14)

They're calling this child her redeemer but that's weird because everyone already knows Boaz is the redeemer. It's a prophetic statement. These women are saying that this child, and ultimately the future child of this child is the real Redeemer. He will be the one who secures God's *hesed* love for His people.

IV. APPLICATION

A. *Hesed* as action

Where do we go from here? It's important to note that this word *hesed*, out of the ~250 times this word is used, a significant number of those times it's not shown by God. Rather, it's shown by His people.

That's what Ruth and Boaz do: they extend *hesed* to others, because they've received it from God. That's Christian life in a nutshell.

But also it's made clear that they act on their *hesed*. It's *loving-kindness*. It's an active word. You don't *feel hesed*...you *DO hesed*. That's the point of the world. So then our response has to be action!

B. Need for application

It's really important that we apply the word of God I feel really passionate about this. When word of God speaks to you, we only grown when we make concrete plans to live it out. Bible doesn't talk about faith as some abstract principles you try to remember. Faith is lived out!

So we must apply the word here in Ruth. The lesson for us is that when we have received God's *hesed* we must give *hesed* to others as well. Specifically, we can apply in the ways it was shown in Ruth.

C. Suggestions

1. Let your love be loyal – extend it to those who are difficult to love. It might mean forgiving someone you're in conflict with. It might be to think about a way you can serve your family/spouse. Or think about someone you're tempted to ignore because you have nothing to gain from them (e.g. a new person; someone you've lost touch with).

Loyalty can also look like renewing our commitment to the church. It might mean following through on our intention to serve. Or to attend life group this week, and not just be there, but to share openly.

We all understand this message, it's a matter of: will we obey by *doing hesed*. Of course, it's not going to be comfortable. *Hesed* is messy. That's the way of the cross.

2. The other way *hesed* is displayed in Ruth: abundance. So let your love be generous.

I was really blessed by one of the life groups this past week going out of their way to buy a member a birthday cake. Christians have to be generous. Nothing reflects God more, because He is an abundant God.

So think of a way you can be generous this week. Maybe take someone out for a meal. Maybe offer a meal to homeless person, or bring donuts for your office.

Don't just let word of God be in one ear out the other... find a way to obey.

CONCLUSION

Do you know what happens when we love this way? You get to know Jesus. You start to understand: "this is how he loves me." And we gain him. The Book of Ruth is about this chain of *hesed*. Ruth to Naomi. Boaz to Ruth. And where all that leads: birth of Jesus.

That's how we all got here. *Hesed* of God shown through series of people. Maybe parents, teachers, or fellow believers, led us to Jesus. And that's how God will bring redemption to the world.

Let's not forget, we already have it. But there are many people still who don't. We must continue this chain of *hesed* started at the cross. Freely we've received, let's freely give. May it lead many to Jesus.