

The background of the cover is a sunset over the ocean. The sun is a bright yellow-orange circle on the horizon, with its light reflecting on the dark water. The sky transitions from a deep orange near the horizon to a dark, almost black, at the top. A large, white, simple cross is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the cover, partially overlapping the text.

*There is
a Redeemer*

**THE GOD OF
HAPPY ENDINGS**

***A devotional study
on the book of Ruth***

Dr. Arul Anketell

**THERE IS
A REDEEMER**

**THE GOD OF HAPPY
ENDINGS**

Foreword written by

BROTHER ANDREW (GOD'S SMUGGLER)

President - Open Doors International

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ARUL ANKETELL

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book firstly to Our Father the God of All Grace, the God of Happy Endings, the Redeemer of Lost Man and Restorer of Hopeless Situations.

Also to you my beloved family, Ranji, Priscilla, Niran & Ruth, for your sacrifice and patience.

Also to Francis & Erasmia Grim and all my dear colleagues and friends in Healthcare Christian Fellowship, Sri Lanka, South Asia, South East Asia and International.

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“First of all I want to thank my Heavenly Father for His acceptance of a prodigal son like me into His family. Also I thank my dear Lord Jesus, our Redeemer for His grace and mercy and long suffering with a wayward child like me. And I thank you Blessed Holy Spirit for revealing the glorious truths of the Book of Ruth to me and helping me as I wrote.”

And now here’s a salute and a big thank you to all who helped in getting this book to the printers.

Suri Williams, my beloved cousin who first challenged me to consider putting down on paper what I had shared from the book of Ruth. Later Dr.Mrs.Inpam Selvadurai, a colleague and friend also urged me and encouraged me to put this teaching in print and she even generously helped towards the expenses. Thank you to both of you.

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And finally dear Reader, thank you for taking the time to obtain and read this book. May you be blessed.

“To God be the glory for the things He hath done”

Arul Anketell

FOREWORD

THERE IS A REDEEMER

It must have been some forty years ago now when I was ministering somewhere behind the Iron Curtain. I am still in touch with my interpreter and if I could only remember where that meeting was held, I could go back there and continue preaching at the very point where I left off; not even needing an interpreter because I have since learned the language; and not needing a visa either because the Iron Curtain has ceased to exist.

You know where I stopped preaching? (Incidentally, I had to stop, because of my notorious habit of preaching on and on with a total disregard for time). Such was my privilege for many years in lands where people had no watches, but they had time. Today people have watches, but no time....

Watches? Recently in one of my meetings in a big church, two men had a telephone call during my sermon. Clearly, I was not coming through and I told the congregation that only the preacher should have a telephone with him during the service so God could give him a personal call to tell him what to preach. No, that's not a joke.

The unforgettable Bible study for me that particular evening was on Ruth, that splendidly polished gem in the Bible. As a matter of fact, if Ruth were the only bit of Scripture you had, it would be quite enough. It is a mini-Bible; and my good friend and beloved brother Arul has done well to write so touchingly and challengingly about it.

But back to the meeting in that communist country. After a whole evening, I had come to chapter 1:6 “*Then she started ...to return ...*” Friend, if you read this book in the same attitude as Arul has written it, then, wherever you have gone off the perfect way God had, and still has, for your life and ministry, then, “if you will start ... to return” He will bring you back again. God could even use this book to call complete ministries and churches “to return”.

As for Arul’s own country - war-torn Sri Lanka - it gives me great hope for such a seemingly hopeless situation in that devastated but beautiful land to know that there are such men of God on that island.

The hope is that many will find the Redeemer and head straight for the “Happy Ending.”

The price has been paid. All you have to do is to pay for this book and absorb its fascinating message.

Arul, I’m mighty proud of you. Press on!

Your brother, because of Jesus our Redeemer.

Brother Andrew

(God’s Smuggler)

President - Open Doors International

Introduction

*There is a Redeemer
Jesus God's own Son
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy One.*

Chorus

*Thank you Oh my Father
For giving us your Son
And leaving your Spirit 'til
The work on earth is done.*

*Jesus My Redeemer
Name above all names
Precious Lamb of God Messiah
O for sinners slain*

Repeat Chorus

*When I stand in glory
I will see His face
And there I'll serve my King forever
In that Holy place.*

Melody Green

Many years ago, a missionary in Bangladesh challenged me to study the Book of Ruth. He told me that it was a jewel and urged me to seek God, saying that He would reveal its precious truths to me.

A few months later, I picked up a book written by Roy Hession entitled “Our Nearest Kinsman”. I was deeply touched by this devotional booklet on the Book of Ruth. So began a blessed acquaintance with this precious nugget of the Old Testament. Ruth became one of my favourite characters in the Bible. The truths of the book, the God of Ruth, and the God of Redemption became more real to me. In fact, in 1991, when God surprised us with a third child, we had no hesitation in calling her Ruth.

The Book of Ruth is an epic on the great subject of REDEMPTION, through which we see our wonderful God in many different ways: -

The God of **Hope**

The God of **Redemption**

The God who **Notices**

The God of **Happy Endings**

The God of **History**

The God of **Grace and Mercy**.

And much more!

This book is based on two gracious laws that God (Yahweh or Jehovah) gave to Moses. These laws foreshadowed the kindness and grace of Jehovah God.

Leviticus 25:23-25 (Lands)

Leviticus 25:47-48 (Slaves)

If a man had to sell his family lands because of poverty, the next of kin always had a right to redeem them and to restore them to the original owner. This right also extended to the redemption of persons.

For example, if an Israelite man had sold himself as a slave, the next of kin could redeem him and allow him to go free.

Jubilee - Leviticus 25:8-17

Every fifty years, in the year of Jubilee, the lands were restored to the original owner and slaves were set free. However, fifty years is a long time to wait and some may have never lived to see the next Jubilee. Hence, God introduced this gracious law of the right of redemption, which offered the hope of restoration and release without needing to wait for the year of Jubilee.

Deuteronomy 25:5-10

Under the Law of Moses, if a man dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside of the family. It was the duty of the husband's brother to marry her and their first-born son should carry the name of the dead brother. This prevented the family name from being blotted out and the family lands from being lost. This was significant because the inheritance given by Joshua was considered very precious (as is the inheritance given to us by Jehovah Jesus in the New Testament). As prescribed in Deuteronomy, this duty appears to apply only to the brother of the dead man but as we see in the Book of Ruth, it appears that this had come to be regarded as the duty of the nearest kinsman, whether or not he was a brother. It is probable that if there was not a brother to take on this duty then it extended to the nearest kinsman.

The Book of Ruth then, is based on these two kindly laws of Jehovah given to Moses. It is the Bible's most complete instance of how these laws are worked out in practice. This next of kin was given a special name in Hebrew. He was called a "Goel". In the Book of Ruth this is translated as kinsman redeemer. Goel can also be translated as the next of kin or the nearest kinsman. Elsewhere in the Old Testament it is normally translated as Redeemer and is usually spoken of in reference to God. In nearly every case in the

Old Testament where the word Redeemer appears, the original word is *Goel*, with all its beautiful and compassionate associations.

There are two great activities of God:

1. Creation
2. Redemption

Creation was good but Satan marred it. However God did not despair. Like the good Potter;

"...He made it again into another vessel which seemed good to the Potter to make it." (Jeremiah 18: 4 KJV)

To create, God had to SPEAK !

To redeem, God had to BLEED!

God our LORD was more than willing to do it, though at great cost. Redemption then, is the Supreme Activity of God's grace. Grace is a concession not claimable as a right. Or, as someone put it

God's

Riches

At

Christ's

Expense

We usually think of Redemption as simply forgiveness of sins. Yes, thank God it does mean that!

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's Grace..."
(Ephesians 1:7)

Redemption is much more than this. It is that activity of God that not only forgives a man's sins, but also restores and over-rules all

the loss occasioned by that sin. Or, as we affirm in the liturgical prayer “all other benefits of His passion”. Everything we have lost through Adam’s sin and our own sin is restored. Some examples are:

- a) Our relationship with God.
- b) Our relationship with others.
- c) The blessedness of living under God’s rule.
- d) The blessedness of doing His will.
- e) The blessedness of being a co-worker with Him.

We had lost these because of sin but Jesus restores them to us. The mess that we have made of our lives our Redeemer, the Master Craftsmen, the Divine Embroiderer, the Divine Potter, the Great Physician can mend, restore and heal. This is shown to us in Ephesians 1, where we are told of the blessings that we receive in Christ:

- ◆ Forgiveness of sins.
- ◆ Adoption as sons.
- ◆ Chosen for the praise of glory.
- ◆ Knowledge of His will.
- ◆ Included and accepted in Christ.
- ◆ Sealed with the Blessed Holy Spirit.
- ◆ Guarantee of an eternal inheritance as God’s very own possession.

What a glorious list of blessings! Oh! This great and marvellous God of Redemption and God of Hope. All this was purchased with the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and thus, the **Cross is the central theme of this Book and indeed of the whole Bible.**

- ◆ Beloved reader, what condition are you in?
- ◆ Have you strayed from God?

- ◆ Have you lost your way?
- ◆ Have you lost hope?
- ◆ Have you spoiled God's plan for your life through some bad choice?
- ◆ Do you feel you are a failure?
- ◆ Do you feel you are too far-gone for redemption?
- ◆ Are you longing for another chance?

Take hope dear friend! God is a God of Redemption. The Book of Ruth starts with failure, death and tears. It ends with a wedding celebration, a newborn baby and tears of joy. It begins with three marriages, which end in sorrow. It ends with a fruitful marriage and points to the glorious marriage supper of the Lamb. Truly God is a **God of Happy Endings** to those who will come to Him and entrust their lives to Him. So be of good cheer. Please read through carefully. Not only can Jesus Christ redeem you as a lost sinner, but HE can also restore your hopeless situation. With God failure is never final. There are a number of English words with the prefix **Re**:

Redemption

Revival

Restoration

Renewal

Regeneration

The Latin prefix **Re** stands for again. In other words, God doing again something beautiful after we have spoiled it. He is an expert at this and excels in the glorious recoveries He has performed in millions of lives. Jesus Christ is the Sinners' God.

The Book of Ruth is also a Romance. Indeed the whole Bible is a Romance: Our Heavenly Bridegroom, and our Lord, wooing His Bride. And the Book of Ruth gives us a little glimpse of that Divine Romance.

- * Are you longing to know Jesus as your Heavenly Bridegroom?
- * Are you longing for a new beginning?

Please read on and may God bless you richly. You too can experience the truth that God is a God of Happy Endings.

When I wrote the first draft of this book, I shed many tears. The glorious truth of redemption and God's hope for the hopeless and helpless deeply touched my heart. The Lord assured me that at least a bottle of tears would ascend to heaven as people read this book.

Dear reader, whatever your situation is, may I urge you to allow Jesus, our Redeemer, to take over in your life. Come to Him. Come to His feet. Weep before Him in repentance and gratitude. He has a glorious plan for you. He is a God of happy endings, a Redeemer of lost sinners and a Restorer of hopeless situations.

PART I

RUTH - CHAPTER 1 (The Word of God)

In the days when the Judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

When she heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.'

Then she kissed them and they wept aloud and said to her, 'We will go back with you to your people.'

But Naomi said, 'Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could

become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me - even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons - would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD'S hand has gone out against me!'

At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her.

'Look,' said Naomi, 'your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.'

But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.' When Naomi realised that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, 'Can this be Naomi?'

'Don't call me Naomi,' she told them. 'Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.'

So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

1

THE DAYS WHEN THE JUDGES RULED

The narrative begins with the phrase, “In the days when the Judges ruled.” The story is set in the context of this period of Israel’s history. As we read through the Old Testament book of Judges, located just before the book of Ruth, we see that it was a time of spiritual, moral and general decline in the nation. There were short periods of renewal, which offered a glimmer of hope, but these times of restoration were short-lived and spasmodic. A certain series of events seemed to be repeating themselves in a vicious cycle.

The people of Israel sinned against God and worshiped the gods of the nations around them. This turning away from the covenant God, Yahweh, the God of the Bible, ultimately led to a period of evil. Murder, war, rape, pillage, idol worship and immorality were the order of the day. God was displeased with them and sent them various kinds of disciplinary judgements. God’s purpose in this was that they would turn back to Him. Most often these judgements were oppression and subjugation by other nations.

- ◆ Then in their distress they cried out to the LORD, Yahweh, asking Him and pleading with Him to deliver them.
- ◆ In answer to their cry He sent them deliverers, Judges, who led them back to victory, freedom and the worship of the one true God. Examples of such deliverers are Ehud (A left handed man - an encouragement to left-handers!) Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Deborah and Samson.

- ◆ But once again they forgot the Lord and went back to their old ways of backsliding, idolatry and sin.
- ◆ So God again sent disciplinary judgments.
- ◆ Again they cried to the LORD - and so the cycle was repeated.

However as the years went by, the Israelites sank deeper and deeper into decline. Until in the latter part of the Book of Judges, there's a dark period of unrest, violence, social disintegration, immorality, homosexuality, idolatry and finally anarchy. We see a similar situation in our world today.

In the opening verses of the Book of Judges we are given an insight into the root cause of this decline. Nine times in this Chapter we see a similar situation recurring. When God repeats something nine times in one chapter, He wants us to realise how important it is. In Judges 1:19 we read, "*The LORD was with the men of Judah. They took possession of the hill country, **but were unable to drive the people from the plains, because they had iron chariots.***"

God told them specifically to totally destroy the nations and take charge of the Promised Land but they were apathetic to God's command. It was difficult to conquer this people so they made a temporary, compromising arrangement with them. Israel thought that God would understand but partial obedience can be dangerous as King Saul discovered when he disobeyed Samuel's specific instructions in the war with the Amalekites. His partial obedience had disastrous consequences (1 Samuel 15).

The other tribes made the same mistake as Judah. As we follow the first chapter of Judges, we see that the tribe of Benjamin, the house of Joseph, Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali and Dan, all failed to follow God's specific orders to conquer the land surrounding them. Please read this chapter and may this truth sink deeply into your minds and hearts.

Judges Chapter One

1:19 Judah

1:21 but the children of Benjamin **did not drive out** the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem...

1:25b **but they let the man** and all his family go.

1:27 however Manasseh **did not drive out** the inhabitants of Beth Shan and its villages.

1:28b ... **but did not completely drive them out.**

1:29 **Nor did Ephraim drive out** the Canaanites...

1:30 **neither did Zebulum drive out** the Canaanites living in Kitron.

1:31 **Nor did Asher drive out** the inhabitants of Acco.

1:33 **Nor did Naphtali drive out** the inhabitants of Beth Shamesh and Beth Anath.

1:34 And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountains **for they would not allow them to come down to the valley.**

How clearly and repeatedly God is speaking to us, showing us the danger of apathy to His principles.

There were various reasons for this failure. Some even seemed legitimate: the iron chariots of the enemy; determination to continue to live in the land and resistance to give up their ground. However, the main reason was the carelessness and apathy on the part of God's people. Today, this will also prevent us from gaining the total victory. There are entrenched kingdoms in the world, where every advance by the church is resisted. Sadly, we too, tend to be apathetic and to make the same mistakes.

As a result of this the Lord spoke words of judgement to Israel. The second chapter of Judges begins:

“The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, ‘I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers.’ I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars. Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this? Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.’ ”

What an indictment! In fact, Judges 2:11-19 is a summary of what happened to Israel and describes the cycle mentioned above. Then follows an account of deep depravity - atrocious acts of butchery and slaughter that eventually lead to the mass murder of the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 19 and 20). One wonders why such a vile account is in the Bible. It is there for a purpose. Many lessons can be learned. One is that when we turn from God, however good our past heritage is, we can decline to a point of total anarchy and heathenism. This is happening in many parts of the world today. So from **apathy** to **apostasy** and finally, in the last verse of the Book of Judges, **anarchy** *“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.”* (Chapter 21:25). What a sad commentary on Yahweh’s covenant people.

I have described this period for two reasons. **Firstly**, it describes what is happening in our world today. Brother Andrew, Founder of Open Doors International once enunciated a principle, which gripped my heart. He said, “Whenever you see in the Bible a situation similar to the one we are in, then we can apply the principle of that story to our present situation.” This is because God’s ways are everlasting. The situation in the world today is similar to the time of the Judges; a steep decline in ethical and moral values.

As Christians, we too, have been apathetic to the principle of separation. In fact, I’ve heard Brother Andrew say that apathy is the number one sin of the Christian church today. This has resulted in many idols creeping into our lives. Many ‘other gods’ are being

worshipped, such as the gods of success, money, fame, sex, popularity, technology, leisure, pleasure, health at any price, appearance and many others. This correlates with the period of apathy and apostasy in the book of Judges. Now we are going one step further into anarchy. People do what they think is right in their own eyes. There are no absolutes anymore. We have no King. (*Judges 21:25*)

So we see an increase in such things as abortion, euthanasia, exploitation of the poor, sexual abuse of children, homosexuality, terrorism and so on. We can identify our situation today with the situation at the time of the Judges. It is interesting that the Greek word for deception is a root from which we get the word apathy. Apathy is partly due to deception. When we know the truth, we begin to get energised and full of zeal to lead a life separated unto God.

Secondly, it is in the context of such a decline in Israel that the story of Ruth unfolds. Hence we do not need to lose heart. Listen to these words:

“In the days when the Judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab.”
(Ruth 1:1)

In the days of the Judges - there was a certain man. He was an ordinary man. God is concerned about the community as well as the individual. Even in such times as these, God is working out His great redemptive purpose through ordinary men and women like you and me.

There is no reason for despair. In these dark times God moves in a marvellous and providential way to carry forward His eternal purpose. His light shines brighter when the darkness is deeper. God is at His best when man is at his worst. Hallelujah! There is no panic in heaven, only plans. The Divine Trinity never meets in emergency session. Even when Adam was eating the forbidden fruit, the plan of

redemption was being formulated. In fact, it had already been formulated. Oh, let's bow down and worship Him and praise Him, our Creator, Redeemer and King!

This then is a glorious time to be alive. The God of the Bible, the God of Hope, is doing mighty things. The darkest hour can be the finest hour. Do you want to be a part of it? You can! The choice is yours. Let's move on now and watch this Israelite family in Bethlehem at 'such a time as this.'

2

A HAPPY ISRAELITE FAMILY

In the opening verses of Ruth we are introduced to an Israelite family. The father's name was Elimelech and his wife's name, Naomi. They had two sons who were called Mahlon and Kilion. They lived in the town of Bethlehem in the land of Judah. They were Ephrathites. Names are of great significance in the Hebrew language, especially in the Bible, and this family is no exception.

Elimelech means **my God is my King**. Naomi means **pleasant, sweetness, lovely or delightful**. There seems to be some difference of opinion regarding the names of Mahlon and Kilion. However, I have selected the meaning Roy Hession picked out in his book, "The Nearest Kinsman", published by Christian Literature Crusade. Mahlon means **a song** and Kilion means **completeness or fulfilment**. Bethlehem means **house of bread**. Bethlehem was known for its abundant barley harvests. Ephratha means **fruitful** and Judah means **the land of praise**. If we put these names together we get a beautiful picture of what a happy family ought to be. It shows us what life in Christ is meant to be.

When God is King in our lives, we are married to pleasantness and delight. There is a song in our hearts and a sense of fulfilment in our lives. We live in a fruitful house of bread in a land of praise!

Hallelujah! This is our inheritance in Christ. It does not mean that our circumstances will be easy or that we will have plenty of food to eat every day but there will always be a song in our hearts

and a deep joy and satisfaction. Even in adverse circumstances we will be filled with praise to the Lord. We will experience the joy of feeding daily on His word, the heavenly manna, and bearing fruit. This is God's intention for all of us when we allow Him to rule as King in our lives. Yet very often we live far below this God-given inheritance. It was sadly so with Elimelech. Let us look at each of these names in more detail.

“Elimelech” - My God Is My King.

This, dear friend, is where it all begins. Jesus must be Lord and King over every area of our lives. Joshua's life is a good example of this (Joshua 5:13-15). The great general Joshua was facing one of the greatest tests of his leadership. The city of Jericho with its impregnable walls stood between God's people and the Promised Land. Joshua was alone, probably contemplating the different strategies for taking the city. Suddenly, he comes face to face with a Man with a drawn sword who later identifies Himself as the Captain of the Lord's army. This was Jesus in a pre-Messianic appearance. Joshua falls down at His feet and is later told to remove his sandals. Face down and shoes off, in humility and submission, he receives from His King the strategy to defeat Jericho.

Another example is found in 2 Samuel 5:1-10. The elders came to David and asked Him to rule over them and be king over all of Israel. David, knowing that God was with Him, takes the initiative, conquers Jerusalem and makes it his stronghold. From Jerusalem David's kingdom eventually extended all over the land. As we look closely at world events today, we sense a similar picture of God's sovereign move in preparation for the Second Coming of Christ. Is God your King? This is a vital question we need to ask ourselves.

Naomi - Pleasantness, Sweetness, Lovely or Delightful

When God is my King there is a certain pleasantness in my life. The Psalmist sang:

“How lovely is your dwelling-place, O LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.” (Psalm 84:1-2)

Truly His dwelling places are satisfying. In Proverbs we are told of the ways of wisdom. Wisdom refers to Christ Jesus, for Jesus is our wisdom.

“Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who embrace her;” (Proverbs 3:17-18a)

True delight, true joy is found as we make God our King.

“Mahlon” - A Song

As we make God our King, there is a song in our hearts. Then we can say **Jesus is my song** rather than *Jesus gives me a song*. The former has more depth. In the Old Testament there is a triplet phrase repeated a number of times:

The LORD is my **STRENGTH**

The LORD is my **SONG**

The LORD is my **SALVATION** (Exodus 15:2 and Habakkuk 3)

Whatever the circumstances we can sing as Habakkuk did. In Chapter One of Habakkuk he cries out to God with a burden,

“LORD, are You there?”

“LORD, do You care?”

“LORD, is it fair?”

We sometimes feel the same in certain circumstances. In Chapter Two God gives Him a solid answer, then in Chapter Three, without any change in the circumstances, Habbakuk sings a wild and ecstatic song of praise. The three stanzas of his praise song begin with these vital phrases:

God came (Habakkuk 3:3-5).

God stood and shook the earth (Habakkuk 3: 6-11).

God marched (Habakkuk 3: 12-15).

At the conclusion of this song he sang these immortal words:

“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.”
(Habakkuk 3:17-18)

I would like to paraphrase this verse for mission hospital leaders:

*Though supplies are running low and there are no funds to pay our staff,
Though our patient load is overwhelming and the death rate in the Neonatal unit has increased,
Though morale is low and some of our key staff plan to leave, Though the visas for the two doctors have been refused,
Yet will I rejoice in the Lord.
I will joy in the God of my salvation.*

Why not put down this book and give Him a shout of praise, regardless of your circumstances? The words, ‘Be Joyful’ in the Hebrew means to twirl around with joy. It pictures an exuberant child twirling around with delight. What a blow to Satan when we can praise God like this, despite our circumstances. Hallelujah!

In July 1983, our home was burned down during local communal riots. Our family had managed to escape just before the attack. The next morning I went back to assess the damage. It was a terrible mess. As I walked into what used to be our bedroom, something amazing caught my attention. Everything was in ashes, including our beds, the mattresses, the chairs and our clothes, apart from a small piece of a shirt, which remained unburned. Yet on the floor were four songbooks that we had used for our family devotions. They were charred but not burned! I still don’t know how it happened, but one thing I do know. As I stood in the room and surveyed the damage, the Holy Spirit of God spoke very clearly to my heart “They can burn everything and take away everything but they cannot take the song from your heart.”

Yes, JESUS IS OUR SONG!

“Kilion” - Completeness, Fulfilment

Today, the world craves fulfilment. The emphasis is wholly on self-fulfilment or personal happiness. Surprisingly, God’s purpose for us is not personal happiness, but doing His will. The world has lied to us that we should seek personal happiness. However, the truth is that only as we fulfil God’s will for our lives will we experience true satisfaction and fulfilment. Joy is a bonus and by-product. Take, for example, a mother who pours out her life for her family. She dies to her own interests. She is not seeking personal fulfilment but in this act of self-giving she finds deep joy and fulfilment. She is fulfilling her God-given role and she is content.

The Psalmist says:

“Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.”

(Psalm 73:25-26)

Yes, God is my portion for evermore. Jesus said, “*My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.*” (John 4:34).

A song we sang in our youth clearly expresses this truth:

All my life long I had panted,
For a draught from some cool stream.
That I knew would fill the longing,
Of the thirst I felt within.

Hallelujah I have found Him
Whom my soul so long has craved.
Jesus satisfies my longing
With His blood I now am saved.

On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles it was the custom for the High Priest to ceremonially march from the temple and to collect water from the pool of Siloam. He would then go back into the temple and in a deeply emotional moment, pour out the water, signifying God's abundance at harvest. The people would be praising God with faces upturned to heaven and with tears streaming down their faces. It was probably at this very moment that Jesus stood up and with a loud voice cried, *"If anyone is thirsty, let Him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."* (John 7:37,38). What a moment! *He* was the fulfilment of the custom and *He* is the water of life; the well of living water. Jesus alone is our source of fulfilment and the One who truly satisfies.

"Bethlehem" - House of Bread

As we walk with Jesus as our King and Lord, He feeds us daily with an abundance of His heavenly bread. God's initiative towards us is:

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it." (Psalm 81:10)

Like the mother-bird, He will fill our mouth with good things. When the children of Israel were in the wilderness for forty years, the Lord fed them with manna, giving them a double portion on the sixth day in preparation for the Sabbath. Amazing! What was kept overnight on the sixth day did not spoil but what was kept overnight on other nights did. What a God of precision, planning and purpose.

Later, Jesus invited us with these words:

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35)

“Judah” - The Land of Praise

When Jesus is our King, praise becomes an important part of our life. This will be our major occupation in heaven, so we had better get started now. The tribe of Judah was camped at the eastern side of the tabernacle. As the sun rose they had to rise and lead God’s people in praise. They always led the way whenever Israel journeyed onwards. This again signifies to us God’s priority of praise.

Praise in the Bible was always a response to specific attributes and actions of God. They praised God for His names, His character and His mighty acts. Praise was offered to God regardless of circumstances. Some examples of Biblical praise are given below for your edification. Let us use these same words to praise our great Redeemer and Friend. Remember praise must be vocalized.

Spontaneous Praise for What He Has Done:

Mary’s magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)

Zechariah’s song (Luke 1:67-79)

Jesus’ outburst of praise (Luke 10:21)

Paul’s doxology (Romans 11:33-36)

This came after an involved discussion on theology; theology must always be combined with doxology.

Daniel’s response of praise (Daniel 2:19-23)

Hannah’s song (1 Samuel 2:1-10)

She had just left her only son in the temple. Yet with tears in her eyes and joy in her heart she praised the Lord.

Jehoshaphat and all Israel - (II Chronicles 20:26-28).

Praise in Acute Crisis Situations:

Paul and Silas in prison - (Acts 16:25-26)

Praise in chronic, adverse circumstances:

(Habakkuk 3:1-19)

Praise and Spiritual Warfare:

"Let the saints rejoice in this honour and sing for joy on their beds. May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all his saints."

(Psalm 149:5-9)

As we praise God, the Lord binds up the powers of darkness. Together, praise and the Word helps us carry out God's sentence against unseen principalities and powers. In II Chronicles 20, we see this in actual practice. The singers went ahead of the army praising the Lord. The Lord responded by sending confusion among the enemy and they began to fight each other. This is a strategy the Lord still uses. When we praise Him and exercise our God-given authority, He acts.

I conclude this chapter reviewing the wonderful truth of our inheritance in Christ. When God is our King we have delight in our lives, a song in our hearts, a sense of fulfilment, abundance of supply and we can live in an attitude of praise. Are you experiencing this? The song writer put it well:

I'm living on the mountain, underneath a cloudless sky
 I'm drinking at the fountain, one that never shall run dry
 And now I'm feasting at the manna of a bountiful supply
 For I'm dwelling in Beulah land

If we are not experiencing this, we should take time to reflect why not. Through the messages contained in this book you can experience all that God has for you. So let us move on and see what happened to this lovely Israelite family.

3

DECISIONS DETERMINE DESTINY

In the last chapter we talked about a happy Israelite family. Unfortunately, something had gone wrong. Of all places, there was a famine in Bethlehem, the house of plenteous bread! Why did they have this famine? Yahweh had clearly told His people that if they turned from Him, He would send corrective disciplinary judgements. These were sent by the LORD with the intention of bringing Israel back to Him. One of the judgements was famine. We find this clearly expressed in a number of places in the Old Testament. However, the LORD also gave them the prescription for the cure - so they knew the cause, the consequence and the cure for their misfortunes. The cure was confession of sin and coming back to their God. This is expressed powerfully in the following scripture:

“ When I shut up the heavens so there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. ”
(2 Chronicles 7:13-14)

Sadly, this is what often happens in our walk with God. We turn away from the Lord or step away from His ways and then, as a result, experience a spiritual famine. Amos, the prophet describes this vividly for us:

“ The days are coming, ’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ’when I will send a famine through the land - not a famine of food or a

thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it. ' "
(Amos 8: 11-12)

The joy and freshness of our Christian life is lost. This is reflected in our families, our churches and our fellowships. Prayer becomes a strain and Bible study boring. Fellowship with other believers gets stale whilst witnessing for Christ becomes a duty that we would rather avoid. Our morning devotions start slipping and we cease to hear afresh from the Lord.

The excitement of our Christian life is lost and our faces reflect this sad state. Beloved friend, are you in this state? Don't lose hope. God has made a way for us to come out of this situation.

Now we are introduced to some vital decisions. We will look at three of them in this chapter. Remember, **DECISIONS DETERMINE DESTINY.**

Elimelech's Choice:

As we saw in Chapter One, Elimelech, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. This was a most unfortunate and selfish choice that ended in disaster. Why was it selfish? Wasn't it right for a father to be concerned for his family? Yes, but there are two reasons why this was a selfish decision. Elimelech was most likely a man of standing in Bethlehem. He was probably better educated and wealthier than most of the other men. He knew God's word and God's promises of restoration if God's people repented. He should have stayed with them and led them in repentance and in crying out to God to heal their land. He should have sought the face of God to ask Him for the cause of this terrible famine, as David did (see 2 Samuel 21:1). Had he done this he may have been able to change the history of the famine and have led his people back to God. Instead, he chose selfishly. He looked after his own interests, and the result was disastrous.

Disastrous Results:

Selfish decisions ultimately end in disaster for us and our families. Francis Grim, founder of Hospital Christian Fellowship International, taught us a saying which spoke deeply to me:

“The mills of God grind slowly but they grind exceedingly fine.”

Jesus, when faced with the choice between a chair of philosophy in Athens and a cross in Jerusalem, spoke these powerful words of truth:

“ The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me. Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” (John 12:25-28)

We are reminded of Lot’s selfish choice in Genesis Chapter 13. The result was a downward spiral until finally this righteous man became the father of the Ammonites and Moabites, the enemies of God’s people. We can trace the results of Lot’s fateful decision in a series of downward steps:

- ◆ Lot lifted his eyes and saw the well watered plain of Jordan (Sodom and Gomorrah).
- ◆ Lot chose for himself (Genesis 13 : 11). What a sad choice.
- ◆ Lot separated from God’s friend Abraham (Genesis 13:11).
- ◆ Lot pitched his tent as far as Sodom (Genesis 13:12).
- ◆ Lot dwelt in Sodom (Genesis 14:12).

- ◆ Lot was sitting at the gate of Sodom (Genesis 19:1).
- ◆ Lot's wife became a pillar of salt (Genesis 19: 26).
- ◆ Lot narrowly escaped from the destruction of Sodom due to Abraham's prayers.
- ◆ Lot became the father of the Moabites and Ammonites (Genesis 19: 30-38).

What a disastrous ending for the man who could have inherited the blessings of Abraham!

May God deliver us from such self-centred choices! In contrast, Abraham allowed God to choose for Him and he experienced increasing blessings from God.

Elimelech went to Moab, the neighbouring Gentile, heathen nation where it appears that they did not have a famine. But they were one of the nations that God had told His people not to mix with.

"No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam, son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you. However, the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live." (Deuteronomy 23:3-6)

In addition, the Moabites worshipped an idol who demanded child sacrifice. Thus, from God's point of view, Elimelech and his family were leaving home and going to reside with, and to depend on a nation which worshipped idols. We can glean several lessons from the above.

Responsibility:

Firstly, it is a sad thing when leaders abdicate their responsibility. It leaves a vacuum among God's people. Responsibility is a word, which many of us do not like. We talk more about our rights than our responsibilities. Let's look at some examples to see the results of accepting responsibility. Think of a carefree young girl. She never has a sleepless night, is free to go out whenever she likes and has much time to herself. Then she marries and has a baby. Suddenly, we see this same girl, whatever her age, as a responsible mother. No matter how often her baby cries at night, she's up to care for it. Even though she is tied down at home, it's a joy to her. She has gladly accepted the responsibility of being a mother. My wife loves her sleep but with our first child it was she and not me who was up first when our little girl cried!

In 1 Samuel 17, David tells Saul that he is able to defeat Goliath. As evidence he tells Saul that when a lion and a bear attacked and took one of his father Jesse's sheep, he went after the lion and the bear and killed them both. Now you may say: What folly! What a foolish risk to go after a lion just to save one sheep. Whose life was more valuable? David's or one of his sheep? The answer, of course, is David's. Then why take such a risk? Because David had accepted responsibility for *all* of his father Jesse's sheep. Therefore, he would not abdicate his responsibility. Can we see what an awesome thing it is to accept responsibility? Brother Andrew is the one who shared this insight with us. It spoke to me deeply. So Elimelech should have stayed with his people and led them back to God and delivered them from famine. As a leader, he was responsible but he chose selfishly and abdicated his responsibility.

Taking responsibility is well illustrated in the life of our Lord. Jesus accepted responsibility for a number of things, which His Father entrusted to Him:

- His disciples (John 17:6-19); (Luke 22:31-32).
- The task which the Father gave to Him (John 17:1-5.)

- His mother (John 19:26-27)
- The cup of suffering (Matthew 26:36-42)

Nothing could deter Him from completing His Father's assignment: The redemption of the world and victory over Satan. He set his face like a flint until He cried out in triumph, "It is finished!"

Elimelech Went to Moab - A Step Into Stagnation

In times of need we should not turn away from God but run into His arms. Elimelech chose to go to Moab, an idol worshipping people. As I said earlier, God did not approve of this but Elimelech was probably able to justify his decision and explain it all with reasonable arguments. Today, too many of us cleverly explain our reasons for running from God's will. Sometimes we even use Biblical support! But it's a step towards stagnation, a step into God's disapproval. Moab was definitely a place of spiritual stagnation as Jeremiah proclaimed.

"Moab has been at rest from youth, like wine left on its dregs, not poured from one jar to another - she has not gone into exile. So she tastes as she did, and her aroma is unchanged." "
(Jeremiah 48:11)

When we take similar steps we, too, become like the Moabites, like wine left on its dregs. We come to a standstill in our spiritual growth. A place of complacency and lukewarmness which God hates. In fact in Zephaniah 1:12 the Lord says he will search out and punish the complacent. Let us beware of complacency.

He went 'for a while':

Elimelech thought his choice would be a temporary one. The sad fact is that he and his family got stuck in Moab for ten years. Dear

friends, let us be very careful of temporary detours from God's plan and purpose. We think it's only for awhile but often we get stuck in Moab. Sin tends to have this effect. An example of this is what happened to Abraham as recorded in Genesis 12:10-20. Abraham went to Egypt because of a famine in Canaan. If it had not been for God's grace this would have ended in disaster. Abraham even had to lie and be rebuked by Pharaoh to get out of the country. It was also in Egypt that Abraham picked up Hagar, his wife's maid, who later became the mother of his first born son, Ishmael. Thank God, in Genesis 13 he returns to the altar he had built earlier to worship the Lord.

I have talked with, and counselled people, who have deeply regretted such temporary detours. One regretted five wasted years and another thirty four. What anguish they went through. Praise God, they found their way back to the Lord. I was speaking to a couple who wanted to send a fake medical certificate to get a transfer from a war torn area. Their reasons for a transfer were genuine and understandable. When I told them I felt they should not resort to this, they were upset and hurt. I felt bad also, wondering if I had been insensitive to someone's suffering but then, in a flash, a word came to me, "Dear friends, don't sacrifice God's long term blessings for short term gains." Isaac's son, Esau, did this as he sold his precious birthright to his twin brother Jacob for some stew. Elimelech did this too. He lost his family inheritance and God's favour and blessing because of this selfish choice. May I challenge you to seek and accept God's way for you and your family.

One issue which has come up in unsafe countries, is the issue of leaving and migrating to a more stable country. Many Christian leaders and professionals have done this. Let me state here that we cannot apply Elimelech's choice directly to the issue of migration. It would not be a true interpretation of the text. Elimelech left God's people and went to an idol-worshipping country. Many who have migrated to other lands in our days have been drawn much closer to God in their new country. I am convinced that the Lord of history

Himself has led many to leave their motherland and go abroad. In fact, the Lord is using the migrating movements for His own purpose, including the salvation of millions.

My own mother left Sri Lanka to be with my sister and her family in the USA. She hesitated to make this decision and I remember advising her, “Amma, our citizenship is not on this earth, our citizenship is in heaven from whence we await the appearing of our glorious God and Saviour Jesus Christ. I believe the Lord is leading you to go and be with my sister and brother-in-law.” She went to the USA and a few years later suffered a severe stroke. Fourteen years later, I am writing these words in my sister’s home, where I’ve come to celebrate my mother’s eightieth birthday. There is no doubt in my mind that the Lord sent her to the USA for a purpose. At her baptism in 1981 in the Mahaveli River in Sri Lanka, she said, “I’m dedicating myself to be an intercessor for Sri Lanka.” In August 1998 my mother went home to be with the LORD. Yet we expect a Divine intervention in the affairs of our land.

A few dear friends from Sri Lanka have left to go abroad. We miss them but the Lord is using them wonderfully for His glory. Some have generously supported the work back home. One dear friend has so sacrificially supported us that we’ve been overwhelmed time and time again by God’s goodness and provision to us.

However, I would not be true to my conscience if I do not state that I strongly believe many people have left their country who should have stayed. Elimelech’s choice does have something to say to us. For example, professionals who have migrated, have left some degree of vacuum in needy areas in our country. Some common reasons given for such a move are:

Children’s education

Personal and family safety

Discrimination at home

Civil war

Personal loss during riots

Job dissatisfaction

Financial difficulties

Need to help others in the family

The rest of the family is migrating so I have no choice

I applied for a visa and got one

I'm getting married and my fiancé is abroad

These all seem to be legitimate and valid reasons, but we need to think through this issue carefully. For example, an open door is not always an indication of God's will. Remember Jonah. When he was running from God's will, the devil provided the transport; a ship on the way to Tarshish.

Another area is the one of marriage. Whenever a marriage is arranged between believers, one from an unstable country and one from a safe country, there is an inevitable result. The person in a war-torn or poor country may have a good ministry and be in a place of responsibility in spiritual or secular work. This could be the bridegroom or the bride. The one in the unstable country often moves to the safer country. They rarely reverse this decision for the sake of suffering humanity or doing the Lord's will. How we long for a reversal of this trend. Thank God that we are beginning to see the reverse taking place.

Refusing by Faith:

One day when our pastor was preaching, a word suddenly caught my attention and my mind went on a detour. The thought came to me that we must not only receive by faith but also **refuse by faith**. The classic example of this is found in the commentary on Moses' faith in the epistle to the Hebrews.

"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter: He chose to be

ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.”
(Hebrews 11:24-26)

There are a number of things said about Moses. One is that: ‘By faith - he refused.’ Today, we hear a lot about ‘receiving’ by faith. Yes, indeed, we receive a lot by faith: Salvation, the Holy Spirit and healing of body, mind and spirit. But we often forget the other side of the coin: ‘**Refusing by faith.**’ Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter and said no. This launched him on an amazing career with God. Often, God’s heroes are called to say ‘**No**’ by faith.

Moses said ‘**NO**’ by faith to four deceptive offers of Pharaoh. First Pharaoh said, “*If you want to worship your God, do it in this land.*” Later, he said, “*Alright, you may go but don’t go very far.*” Then Pharaoh tried his third ruse, “*You may go but only the men.*” Moses said no to all of these offers. Finally, Pharaoh made his last attempt at deceiving Moses. He said,

“You may take your families, but leave the livestock behind.”
*To this Moses replied, “Our livestock too must go with us; **not a hoof is to be left behind.** We have to use some of them in worshipping the LORD our God, and until we get there we will not know what we are to use to worship the LORD.”*
(Exodus 10:26)

In similar vein, Abraham said ‘**NO**’ to the king of Sodom’s seductive but attractive offer. He gave a classic answer, worthy of memorising:

*“I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that **I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal,** so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram*

rich. 'I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me - to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share.'

(Genesis 14:22-24)

Following his refusal, Abraham received God's amazing promise:

"After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

(Genesis 15:1)

Abraham said, "Not even a shoelace will I take from you." Moses said, "Not even a hoof will we leave behind." Similar refusals for the same reasons. By faith, they said a resounding 'NO' Oh, may these clear cut resounding 'NO's by faith ring out from our lives. For every such no there will be a hallelujah chorus in heaven!

There are a few other Bible characters who also said a clear cut no to the subtle and seductive traps of the enemy. Shall we look at some of them:

Joseph:

When Potiphar's wife repeatedly pressurised him to commit adultery with her, Joseph steadfastly refused. He gave her a clear-cut resounding no. Thank you, Joseph, for your example to us.

Nehemiah:

The enemies of the Jews had resorted to every trick in the book to try and stop Nehemiah from completing the repair of the walls of Jerusalem. In one of their final attempts they called him to a dialogue:

"Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono. But they were scheming to harm me."

(Nehemiah 6:2)

His reply is classic:

“So I sent messengers to them with this reply: I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?” (Nehemiah 6:3)

To paraphrase this: Sanballat and Geshem told Nehemiah to come to one of the villages of Ono to talk and Nehemiah said, “O no”! Thank you Nehemiah for your example. Another example of Nehemiah refusing by faith is found in Nehemiah chapter five, “...so did not I, because I feared God.” (Nehemiah 5:15b). Nehemiah said, “No” to even a seemingly legitimate right. What a contrast his attitude is to that which prevails today even among Christian leaders. We often say, so did I because everybody is doing it. But Nehemiah said, “so did not I, because I feared God.”

Jesus:

Jesus had to decide between the battle of the cross and the pressure of the crowds who wanted to make Him their earthly King. By faith Jesus refused and, over the strong objections of His disciples, went forward to the cross. We read in John Chapter twelve that the Greeks were offering Jesus a chair of philosophy in Athens, rather than a cross in Jerusalem. Jesus’ response was a clear cut no. His words must burn into our hearts:

“ ‘Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? ‘No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!’ ”. (John 12:27,28)

The Father was so pleased, He responded with the words, “I have glorified it and will glorify it again.” Heaven endorses when we respond by faith to the LORD.

Yes to God:

Moses not only said no to Pharoah, he said yes to Yahweh the Lord and His promises. Shall we also follow Moses’ example?

“He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger: he persevered because he saw Him who is invisible.”

(Hebrews 11:25-27)

- ◆ By faith, he chose to suffer with God’s people.
- ◆ By faith, he regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ, as of greater value than the pleasures of Egypt.
- ◆ By faith, he left Egypt.
- ◆ By faith, he kept the pass-over.
- ◆ By faith he and Israel crossed the Red Sea - All because he saw Him, God, who is invisible. May these words burn in our hearts.

A close friend of mine and his wife and two children returned to Sri Lanka after fourteen years in the USA. This was a tough choice but what a blessing they have been to us. I also think of a Filipino dental surgeon who refused by faith an offer to migrate to the USA. At the end of a talk on completing the task, she came to me in tears and said, “Today, I’ve decided to stay in the Philippines and complete the task.” She had a green card and needed to go to the USA to maintain it but she refused an open door by faith. Ten years later she is still in the Philippines and being used of the Lord.

*From subtle love of softening things,
From easy choices weakening,
Not thus are spirits fortified,
Not this way went the crucified.
From all that dims Thy Calvary,
Lamb of God deliver me.*

Amy Carmichael

May God speak to us and may we not make Elimelech’s mistake and sink into spiritual stagnation.

Naomi's Choice:

When in Moab Naomi heard that the Lord had come to the aid of His people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah (Ruth 1:6-7). In contrast to Elimelech's decision, this was a good choice. As we read these two verses, some phrases stand out:

- Prepare to return home.
- Left the place she had been living.
- Set out on the road.
- Take them back to the land of Judah.

It sounds very much like the prodigal son Jesus spoke about in His parable in Luke 15:11-31. Naomi has rightly earned the honour of being called the prodigal daughter of the Old Testament. Praise be to God, the road is always open for us to go back to Him. Wherever we are, however far we have sunk or fallen, we can return. So, beloved, back-slidden friend, welcome back to Jesus and to God's people. In whatever area we have fallen, we can return. Is it in Bible study, prayer, separation, commitment, giving, witnessing, moral purity, relationships, unbelief, pride or something else? Whatever the area, let us return to the Lord.

Why Did Naomi Return?

There were probably two reasons. Firstly, the corrective discipline of God. She had gone through one disaster after another and through it the Lord must have spoken clearly to her. God never punishes us for a wrong purpose. He is merciful and gracious and slow to anger (Exodus 34:6), but He does discipline us in order that we may repent and turn to Him. Secondly, she had had good news from home - the rains had come! The barley harvest was coming.

God's people were once again rejoicing. In all probability, some leaders had led God's people in repentance and in crying out to Him. The Lord heard and had answered, then He ensured that Naomi heard the news. Dear friend, if you are like Naomi, I pray that through reading this book, God will be getting the message across to you. The final harvest is about to be reaped. Come back and share in it. You are welcome back!

True Repentance:

Five times Naomi acknowledged it was the Lord who had afflicted her:

"The Lord's hand has gone out against me." (Ruth 1:13)

"The Almighty has made my life very bitter." (1:20)

"The Lord has brought me back empty." (1:21)

"The Lord afflicted me." (1:21)

"The Almighty has brought misfortune on me." (1:21)

She recognised God's hand in it all and acknowledged her guilt. Unacknowledged guilt creates a distance between us and God (Hosea 5:15). She acknowledged that God was just and righteous even in His judgements. So it seems Naomi's repentance was genuine. The initial decision to go to Moab may not have been hers, though she probably agreed to it. Or may be she was the one who urged Elimelech to go. Whatever the case, she neither blamed God nor her husband for her situation. This is true repentance. We agree with God about His verdict, and when we repent it brings deliverance, joy and blessings.

Naomi's Pain and Faith:

Naomi takes center stage in chapter one of the Book of Ruth. Her faith and confidence in Yahweh shine brightly in the dark days of apostasy. What pain she had to undergo. First the famine, then the awesome choice to leave home and then a series of tragedies in Moab. Three bereavements, a husband and two sons, must have torn her

apart. Add to that the sense of distance from Yahweh and the guilt it brought. There must have been moments and days of utter despair, hopelessness and helplessness. So much so that she says, “ ‘*Don't call me Naomi, call me Mara.*’ ” (Ruth 1:20). Mara means bitterness or a bitter person. Yet through her sorrow she saw God's hand on her life. Yahweh afflicted her in order to bless her and to bring her home.

We live in a world full of pain. None of us could cope with even a fraction of the aggregate of human suffering. And yet there is hope because we serve a God of Hope. Dear reader, are you at this moment going through some deep personal difficulty or pain? Do you feel, like Naomi, that your life is bitter? Then please read on with hope. I can think of a number of painful situations that I have encountered.

- ◆ I recently visited a loving wife and mother with a recurrence of cancer of the colon a day or two before her second operation. She looked attractive but there was a deep sadness in her eyes. What inner pain and trauma she and her husband and children must be going through. Scenes like this are happening every day all around the world.
- ◆ A man came to see us in 1983 in Badulla after the ethnic riots in Sri Lanka. He was in a state of shock and bewilderment. All six members of his family had been butchered to death. He was the only survivor.
- ◆ I remember the visits to a senior surgeon who was dying of cancer of the nasopharynx. He could hardly speak. His wife was broken-hearted. We could only communicate through a writing pad. Thank God that before he died he prayed, “Jesus I receive you. Forgive my sins. Take me...”
- ◆ I've stood at the open grave of my nephew, the only son of my youngest brother and heard the pastor say, “You need strong shoulders to cry on. We give you permission to grieve.”

- ◆ Think of the tragedies in Sri Lanka, Rwanda, Kosovo and many other countries. There are thousands of young widows who have hardly been able to grieve over the loss of their husbands or those who are missing.

Does God have something to say to all these people? Yes He does. Yet it is not the sort of slick answer of Job's comforters. God provides real answers to the problem of grief and suffering. We may not know why, although sometimes we may learn the reason. The best answer God gives us is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. God Himself shares the depth of this world's suffering and sin. So much so that there is that awful cry from the cross which shows the tearing apart of fellowship between the Father and the Son, " *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?'*" (Matt 27:46). Through this costly grace God shows us that He understands our pain and hears every prayer which cries "My God! - Why?" In fact, He invites us to place our pain and our sin on Him. Only in the cross and in the heart of God is all of human pain, suffering and sin borne.

In spite of her grief, Naomi's faith shines out. She saw the Lord's hand in the restoration of blessings to Bethlehem. She recognised that it was His hand which had gone against her but that these same hands would lead her back to blessing. The prophet Hosea puts it so well:

" Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me. "
(Hosea 5:15)

" Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth. "
(Hosea 6:3)

This is the faith that brought Ruth to Yahweh. "Thank you, Naomi, for your example to us."

El-Shaddai:

Naomi refers to God twice as the Almighty. In Hebrew this is the name Shaddai, or El-Shaddai. What is the meaning of El-Shaddai? In the book of Genesis we see this name appear a number of times. In his book, "The Message of Truth" from 'The Bible Speaks Today' series, David Atkinson writes, "The first occurrence [of El-Shaddai] is in Genesis 17:1 when the Lord comes to Abraham and promises Him and Sarah a son. **El-Shaddai seems to be the one who can transform man's helplessness into a blessing.** The second occurrence is in Genesis 43:14, where Jacob, during a severe famine, reluctantly agrees to send Benjamin back to the hitherto unrecognised Joseph, now a high official in Egypt: 'And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you.' (Genesis 43:14). **Shaddai here speaks of the hope of God's protection in a time of uncertainty.** The third occurrence is in Jacob's deathbed prophecy about Joseph. **He speaks of the coming fruitfulness in spite of all the harassment he had endured;** 'Because of your Father's God Who helps you, because of the Almighty Who blesses you with blessings of the heavens above, blessings of the deep that lies below, blessings of the breast and womb.'

After 13 years in prison Joseph is raised to be Prime Minister of Egypt. This is how El-Shaddai blesses."

Some say that the word Shaddai is close to the word Shad which refers to the mother's breast. El-Shaddai may be reverently called the 'full breasted one', the nourisher, provider, satisfier and life-giver. The mother side of God. Interestingly, of the forty-eight appearances of Shaddai in the Old Testament, thirty of them are in the Book of Job. This seems an unnatural place to find this name for God. Shaddai is the God of blessing. Job is the book of suffering but the precious truth is that Shaddai afflicts in order to bless. He prunes us only to provide more fruit. Job went through untold sorrow

and grief but then received a double blessing from Shaddai. After all his afflictions, he produced 3 daughters who were said to be more beautiful than any other girls in the land. Their names are very descriptive:

- ◆ Jemima means Radiant Beauty;
- ◆ Kezia means Fragrance;
- ◆ Keren-happuch means Strength.

After the pruning and affliction this is a picture of how El-Shaddai intends to bless us. We have also claimed this promise for health-care Christian workers all over the world that they will be like Job's daughters.

Dear reader, are you saying like Naomi, "The Almighty has afflicted me"? Then there is good news for you. As Naomi did, you can return to the Lord. He has torn but He will heal. He has stricken but He will revive. After a few days He will revive and raise you up that you may live in His sight.

I Came Back Empty:

Naomi said, "*I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty.*" She came back with nothing. Probably she had very little money, no sons, no husband. She came back to unattended lands and no males to help her restore them. When we come back to God, we too, sometimes come back with nothing. We have lost all in a far country. But, beloved reader, if you come back, you will not remain empty for long. Like the prodigal son and like Naomi, soon the Lord will begin to fill you. But did she really come back empty? No! She brought back a precious treasure: her daughter-in-law, Ruth, a convert! Naomi was God's instrument in Ruth's conversion. One day she was to become a princess and King David's great grandmother. Her name would be included in God's hall of heroes. Yes, prodigals don't come back alone. Prodigals bring others along with them. When we repent and return to God, others will be attracted to Him.

I remember many years ago on a Friday night, two ladies coming to our home. Both were dental students. One of them was a dear friend of ours. She was a Christian but was going through a deep valley in her life. Yet, she brought with her a Buddhist girl, who told us, "Tonight I want to pray, if necessary the whole night. I want to meet with God." What attracted her to Jesus? It was the testimony of her fellow Christian student, repenting of sin and coming back to God. Praise be to God. The story of the prodigal son, preached, read or sung, has touched thousands of lives and brought them back to the forgiving, loving heavenly Father. I am one of them. So take heart, dear reader, and return to the Lord. As you do so, others will follow you.

Why Did Ruth Accompany Naomi?

This is an interesting question. What attracted her to Naomi and Naomi's God? No doubt it was the Lord sovereignly working in her life. Ruth saw Naomi repenting and returning to God. She realised that Naomi's God was not just a God for the righteous but a God for sinners. She felt that this God was worth following. Is not this the God of hope? In our own testimonies we too, should give the sinner's testimony and exalt the grace of God. Then others will be drawn to Him as well.

There is one puzzling question. Opinions differ on the correct answer: Why did Naomi ask her daughters-in-law to go back to their heathen gods? There are two possibilities:

1. She wanted to cover her sin. Her repentance was not complete. She had sinned in going to Moab and sinned in giving her two sons to Moabite women which was against God's law. She did not want her town people to know this.
2. She did not want them to come unless they really knew all the hardships which awaited them and still decided for the Lord and His people. Because of her insistence, she got one jewel of a convert. A convert like Ruth is more valuable than many Orpahs

who often want to only emotionally follow God's people and the Lord. They drain the Christian leaders and don't really want to follow Jesus all the way. I am always amazed that Jesus never called the rich young ruler back and said, "Why don't you join our Bible study group?" or "It's okay, you can give seventy percent of your possessions now and we'll discuss the rest later, you can grow into it slowly." That's probably what we would say today. I personally think the latter explanation to be the reason that Naomi asked her daughter in law to return. We thank God for Naomi's choice to return to the Lord and to God's people.

Orpah's Choice:

"At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. 'Look,' said Naomi, 'your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.' "
(Ruth 1:14,15)

When Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem, Orpah and Ruth began the journey with her. Naomi pleaded with them to go back to their home. She wished that they would both find husbands. However, they both insisted, "*We will go back with you to your people.*" (Ruth 1:10). They kissed her and wept loudly as they said this, yet Naomi persisted. She used some extremely valid arguments as to why they should go back:

- ◆ The Lord's hand is against me.
- ◆ I am too old to have a husband.
- ◆ Even then, if I have a son, it's too long for you to wait till they reach marriageable age.

With this second argument, they both wept again. Then Orpah gave her mother-in-law one long last emotional kiss and took a fatal decision. She wished Naomi goodbye and returned to her people and her gods. With that she also went out of the pages of the Bible

and redemptive history. She lost the greatest opportunity of her life. We do not hear of her again. She was so close and yet so far from the kingdom of God.

Many of us are like Orpah. We shed tears at meetings, conferences and even in church. We are moved emotionally. But we don't commit our wills to obedience to the Lord. Tears alone are not enough. Our wills must choose God's way. There must be no indecision. When life becomes difficult or when the world beckons us, we turn back to our 'gods'. There are many examples of this sort of choice in the Bible.

Pilate - Luke 23:1-25:

He knew that Jesus was innocent. Three times he said so, yet he chose to wash his hands. He refused to take a stand. He gave in to the shouts of the crowd. Had he taken a stand, there may have been four crosses on Golgotha the day Jesus was crucified and Pilate would have been eternally hailed as God's hero. Instead, we repeat in the creed as "Jesus Christ, crucified under Pontius Pilate". **What a sad choice he made.**

Demas:

"for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica." (2 Timothy 4:10)

What a pitiful commentary on Demas. He was part of the Apostolic team but he loved this world and deserted Paul. **What a sad choice he made.**

The Rich Young Ruler:

"At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth." (Mark 10:22)

He heard the requirements from Jesus. He was a good man. He asked the right questions. He came to the right person. He came

with the right attitude. Jesus loved Him and yet he went away sad, back to his wealth which was going to rot anyway. Out he went from Bible history. **What a sad choice he made.**

King Agrippa:

The apostle Paul pleaded, “ *The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.* ” (Acts 26:26-27). Agrippa was so close to God’s kingdom. He was almost persuaded but his pomp and his position kept him from following Jesus. **What a sad choice he made.**

Oh, beloved reader, please don’t make a decision like Orpah or those mentioned above. There is a hymn which vividly brings out Agrippa’s dilemma of being almost persuaded:

“Almost persuaded now to believe,
 Almost persuaded Christ to receive.
 Seems now some soul will say
 ‘Go, Spirit go Thy way.
 Some more convenient day on Thee I’ll call.”

After Orpah left, we read that Ruth clung to Naomi, “ *‘Look’, said Naomi, ‘your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.’* ” (Ruth 1:15). Then Ruth made the most wonderful statement:

“ *‘Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.’* ”
(Ruth 1:16,17)

I will discuss Ruth’s great choice in the following chapter.

4

YOUR GOD IS MY GOD, YOUR PEOPLE ARE MY PEOPLE

Now we turn our attention to Ruth's wonderful decision, which is one of the greatest choices made in history and recorded in the Bible. First of all, let us pick up the story as Orpah leaves.

Ruth Clung to Her:

"At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her. 'Look,' said Naomi, 'your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.' "
(Ruth 1: 14, 15)

It must have been hard to see Orpah go. Furthermore, her mother-in-law wanted her to return. For the third time, Naomi says "go back". Then Ruth clung to her. She hung onto Naomi. I believe it was an emotional, mental and physical clinging. I'm sure she held her very tightly as if she'd never let her go. Her mind was set. Tears must have streamed down her face and her heart was bursting with love and deep feeling. But her spirit was also involved. Deep down she was making a choice to follow Yahweh and His people. She also loved her mother-in-law. Of course there was sorrow at the thought of leaving her land, her home, her people, her father, mother, brothers and sisters, her friends and loved ones and of course her sister-in-law, Orpah. Yet like the song writer she was saying, with every fibre of her being:

"I have decided to follow Jesus
No turning back, No turning back.
Though none go with me, I still will follow
No turning back, No turning back!"

Clinging to God:

This clinging to God and God's people is an important characteristic that God looks for in His people. Do we really desire His love and His kingdom? Is it an all consuming desire or just a if it's convenient decision? A lukewarm decision? We read in Revelations 3:15-16:

" I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth."
(Rev 3:15-16)

Three times Naomi asked Ruth to go back to her people but because she refused and clung to Naomi she received great blessing. There are some striking examples in the Bible that highlight this characteristic in God's people.

Elijah and Elisha:

In 2 Kings 2:1-15, Elisha asked the mighty prophet Elijah three times if he could come with Him. Each time Elijah tried to put him off but Elisha persisted. This happened at Gilgal, at Bethel and at Jericho. Finally, after crossing the Jordan, Elijah asked him "*What can I do for you...?*" (verse 9). He did not ask the question at Gilgal but only after Elisha had determinedly 'clung to' Elijah during his travels. Then Elisha dared to ask for something big, "*Let me inherit a double portion of your Spirit.*" (verse 9). Well, he was granted his desire and received a double portion of his mentor's anointing. He received it because he had clung to Elijah and desired God's best.

Jacob:

The patriarch Jacob, father of Israel's twelve tribes, was returning home after a bitter fight with his twin brother Esau many years before. He needed to hear from God. In Genesis 32:22-32 we read the account of Jacob's wrestling with God. Jacob resisted until the Heavenly Wrestler dislocated his hip joint. Then he clung to Him (probably the Lord Jesus Christ) and spoke the immortal words, *"I will not let you go unless you bless me."* (verse 26). Jacob persevered and clung to God. He received the blessing and a new name - 'Israel', **Prince with God!**

Bartimaeus:

The blind beggar Bartimaeus was also blessed because of his persistence. Even when the crowd told him to be silent, he continued to cry out to the Lord (Mark 10:46-52). He was rewarded by Jesus asking him what he wanted. He asked for his sight, received it and then followed Jesus.

The Two Disciples on the Road to Emmaus:

After the crucifixion, two dejected and confused disciples were walking to the nearby town of Emmaus. A stranger joined them and began to explain the happenings of the previous days. It was the risen LORD Himself, but they did not recognise Him, although their hearts were strangely warmed.

"As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them."
(Luke 24:28-29)

They probably had the most wonderful walk in history. Their hearts were burning. Jesus acted as if He was going further. I think He was testing them. Did they really hunger and thirst after

righteousness? When they urged Him to stay, He did and they suddenly recognised Him as the crucified resurrected Lord. Then He was gone. In their joy they ran the seven miles back to Jerusalem to tell the others.

Ruth's Great Commitment:

So Ruth clung to Naomi and spoke these timeless words:

“ Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.”
(Ruth 1:16 & 17)

What precious words! May I suggest that we memorise them. These were not empty words. Each one was full of meaning, backed by a strong desire and determination to keep them:

“Where you go - I will go.

Where you stay - I will stay

Your people - will be my people.

Your God - will be my God.

Where you die - I will die and be buried.

May Yahweh deal with me severely - if anything but death separates you and me.

In other words, this commitment is ‘til death us do part.’ Ruth committed herself to Naomi, her people and her God. A threefold commitment, not just for a few years but for her entire life, including the place of her burial. In those days the place of burial was extremely important. In Genesis 50:24-25 we read that Joseph made his brothers swear that his bones would be taken out of Egypt during the Exodus for burial in the Promised Land. What an amazing commitment that was not fulfilled for hundreds of years.

Ruth had nothing to look forward to and yet, like Abraham, she 'went out not knowing where she was going.' "Beloved Ruth, God must have smiled on you from heaven. I wonder if an angel didn't whisper in your ear."

*"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him."
(1 Corinthians 2:9)*

TO ALL WHO BEAR THE NAME RUTH

I would like to address you if your name is Ruth. God did not give you that name through your parents by chance. Are you at the cross-road of a similar decision? Remember the God of your name-sake Ruth, the God of happy endings, and step out in faith. Whatever the cost, God has great surprises in store for you. Ruth never could have dreamed or imagined what blessings God had prepared for her as she stepped out in faith. Perhaps God granted her a quickening of her spirit with His words, written down centuries later by the Apostle Paul:

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." (Ephesians 3:20)

In our ministry we emphasise this threefold commitment:

- i) Commitment to God.
- ii) Commitment to each other.
- iii) Commitment to the task.

With even a few people committed like this, the Lord is able to do amazing things. Two colleagues come to mind. Both have made a life-long commitment to ministry. When I first heard one of them declare this during a world staff conference in Israel, I was taken aback. I wondered if it was right to make such a commitment. At the

same time, a strange, deep confidence and assurance came into my heart. From then onwards, whenever this brother speaks, I pay attention. Even when areas of weakness are discussed or criticised, I listen carefully because he speaks as one who has made a commitment for life. He has won the right to be heard. I'm thankful for the sense of security he has given us.

The area of personal commitment to ministry has been one of the greatest battles in my own life. During times of doubt and discouragement I've wondered if I was in the right place. Should I go back to practising medicine? Should I work full-time with a local church? Had I made just an emotional commitment? Had I wasted the best years of my life? Had I clearly heard God's voice or was it man's voice speaking when I stepped out of medicine and into full-time ministry? If there is one portion of Scripture that has brought me back time and time again to a reaffirmation of my commitment to the Lord, to the ministry and to the task at hand, it is Ruth's personal commitment in Ruth 1:16 & 17. I have wept over this verse and just recently had the joy of making a life-long re-commitment to God, to HCF and to the task before us. I regret past uncertainties. It was the sin of unbelief, but God has graciously forgiven me.

My wife's grandfather is another example of commitment. Born into a Hindu family, he was a dutiful son and his name was Sivanadian which means "slave of one of their gods". When he accepted the Lord, he said he wanted his name changed to Yesuadian: "slave of Jesus" (in Tamil). It was very difficult for him to make this break, but he was determined to follow Jesus. Today, we see the fruits of that decision. Many of the extended family members know the Lord and are serving Him. It all began with the choice to be committed.

May the words of Ruth sink deep into our hearts and minds.

Short-term and Long-term Commitment:

Some of you may have wondered if I was suggesting that short-term commitments are not valid in the light of Ruth's

commitment. That is not the case. God has definitely blessed many who have made short-term commitments to various missions, mission hospitals or church outreaches. We should thank God for these people and remember that even a cup of cold water, given in Christ's name, is rewarded by Him. I do not think it is necessary to always make a life-time commitment to a vision or a task God has given us. In fact, it could be dangerous and foolish to make such a vow and then to have to break it later. However, we do need to make the following life-time commitments:

- ◆ a life-long commitment to be the Lord's disciple.
- ◆ a life-long commitment to serve Him wherever He may lead us.
- ◆ a life-long commitment to the body of Christ.
- ◆ a life-long commitment to the suffering church.

In the first chapter of 1 Samuel, we read three times that Samuel is the Lord's for his whole life. His mother Hannah, longing for a child, prayed,

“And she made a vow, saying, ‘O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.’”
(1 Sam 1: 11)

Later, when she had delivered her son, she said to her husband, *“I will take him and present him before the LORD and he will live there always.”* (1 Samuel 1:22). Finally she declares,

“So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he shall be given over to the LORD.”

My initial commitment to the ministry was for one year. It was in that year that God spoke to me through 1 Samuel. Later, that commitment was challenged to long-term participation. However, this does not mean that, after a full-time commitment, we can never go back to a secular job or other involvement, as the Lord leads.

God may lead us back into medical work again or into another ministry. After all, He is the One in charge. The important thing is a clear leading or guidance from the Lord. There is one danger however. When we get discouraged or do not see much fruit in our ministry, we may look elsewhere. At such times we may be called to persevere and in due time we shall reap a harvest, if we faint not.

At a recent conference one of the speakers mentioned the need for long-term commitment to the mission field. This gives time to learn the language and culture and make an impact for the Lord. I heard about two Moravians who were willing to be sold into slavery to reach a certain country. It was their only chance to get there and they were willing never to come back. Quite an example of a life-long commitment. How grateful church and missions are for such people. They are truly pillars of a ministry. So, beloved reader, may God guide us. Let us be fully committed to the Lord, our fellowship, our church and the vision or the task the Lord has given us. Let us not move unless the Lord clearly guides us. We do need more long-term commitments like the one Ruth made, *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”*

(Colossians 3:23 & 24).

Some Other Great Decisions:

Abraham:

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.” (Hebrews 11:8)

Abraham set out not knowing where he was going. Of course, he had God’s Word assuring him of enormous blessings that were yet to come. Likewise, we should always make choices based on God’s Word and His guidance. If not, we are courting disaster.

Rebekah:

“So they called Rebekah and asked her, ‘Will you go with this man?’ ‘I will go,’ she said. So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and Abraham’s servant and his men. And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, ‘Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the gates of their enemies.’ ”

(Genesis 24:58-60)

Rebekah decided to go. She did not know Abraham’s servant Eliezer. She went on his word which in turn was based on God’s Word. Rebekah left her family and embarked on a four hundred mile journey to an unknown destination, to marry an unknown man named Isaac. Yet what amazing blessings resulted.

God is calling many of us to make such great decisions. Robert Coleman, in his book “Songs of Heaven” tells a very touching story from the early days of the Church. There were forty soldiers who had been condemned to die because they would not bow to the Emperor. They had become Christians. Their sentence was to be stripped naked and stand all night on a frozen lake. At the shore of the lake was a tub of warm water should anyone decide to renounce Christ and worship the Emperor. As the soldiers stood huddled on the ice they sang:

“Forty soldiers for Christ, we will be true to Him.”

As the night wore on, their voices became dimmer and dimmer. Then suddenly one of the forty broke from the rest and ran to the tub and warmed himself. The others continued singing faintly:

“Thirty-nine soldiers for Christ, we will be true to Him.”

Then there was a dramatic turn of events. The Captain of the Guard, who was assigned to watch over these soldiers, suddenly

tore off his clothes and ran to the centre of the lake and joined the shivering martyrs. A sudden crescendo occurred in the singing as they sang together with their new brother in Christ:

“Forty soldiers for Christ, we will be true to Him.”

All forty soldiers of Christ died on the ice.

In the morning the General was inspecting the bodies and he asked with surprise, “What is this man doing here?” It was the Captain of the Guard, who had supervised the death sentence. He was drawn to Jesus by the testimony of the soldiers. His first act as a believer was to be willing to die for his faith along with his brothers. What a great choice he made. What a welcome he would have received in heaven. This is what leaders like Pilate, King Agrippa and Festus should have done. They all missed glorious opportunities. May the story of these forty men speak to us today.

Resolute Determination:

“When Naomi realised that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.”
(Ruth 1:18)

Naomi saw Ruth’s determination. This kind of resolute determination is extremely important as we make our choices for God, otherwise we will be easily side-tracked. Whilst writing this book I have had to make a resolute determination to stick to the task. There are always other ‘good’ things to do.

I have to chuckle when I remember an incident at a conference in Holland. A colleague of mine, a dental surgeon, and I had decided to fast during lunch one day and seek the Lord in prayer. The purpose for this time was to find out if God was calling him into the ministry. After the morning sessions we were going to pray while the others were going to lunch. Passing the lunch room I noticed that the menu that day was rice and chicken. We Sri Lankans had been longing for

some rice during the conference and rice and chicken was our favourite. I asked my friend, "Do you really think we should fast today?" Yes, he had made up his mind and so, rather reluctantly, I went with Him. That afternoon God touched us. My friend wept before the Lord and his call to the ministry was confirmed. The Lord also had a surprise for us. An Indian friend had a full plate of rice and chicken in his room for someone else who didn't show up. It became our supper that night! I'm glad my friend made a firm resolve.

Let us now look at some Biblical characters who exhibited resolute determination.

Abraham:

"But Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.'"

(Genesis 14:22, 23)

Abraham had made a vow so he gave a definite "no" to the seductive and attractive offer from the king of Sodom.

Joseph:

"Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, 'Come to bed with me!' But he refused.

'With me in charge,' he told her, 'my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care.

No-one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?'

And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. ' (Genesis 39:6b-10)

Joseph refused the advances of a very attractive woman - Potiphar's wife. He had the opportunity to commit adultery in secret. We read that he refused repeatedly. He had made a resolve with his God not to sin by committing sexual immorality. This resolve helped him when it came to the test.

Ezra:

"For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel." (Ezra 7:10)

Ezra had set his heart on a threefold commitment to study the law of God, follow it and to teach it. What a good life motto for a Christian worker or pastor. If Ezra had not made such a definite decision there would have been many things to distract him from this priority.

Daniel:

"But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way." (Daniel 1:8)

Daniel passed the "food test"! How difficult it is to say 'no' to good food and to eat vegetables instead but because of a firm resolve Daniel and his friends were able to overcome temptation and remain true to Yahweh.

Jesus:

"As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." (Luke 9:51)

Jesus set His face like a flint to go to Jerusalem. He knew what awaited Him but there was no turning back. He had a resolute determination.

Dear friends, let us also set our face like a flint to follow Him and to do His will. Then, with His help and in His strength and with full reliance on the Holy Spirit, we can overcome all the difficult testings and temptations on the way. The tests may involve:

- ✦ To go alone with God.
- ✦ To leave the familiar to follow the Lord.
- ✦ To sever earthly ties.
- ✦ To concentrate on God's Word.
- ✦ To refuse the temptation of leisure, sleep, food or sex when God demands our time.

(All are good in the right place and circumstances but God may lead otherwise.)

- ✦ To risk our lives.
- ✦ To go to our personal Calvary, "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back."

May the Lord also help us make a resolute decision to follow Him all the way.

While writing, I feel led to say a word about my eldest daughter. This year, as she sat her "A" Level examination the Lord led her to make a resolve not to go for tuition classes on the Lord's Day (Sunday). This was confirmed at least twice through messages in Church. It was a very difficult decision for her to make. But I was so glad for this choice she made and felt God would reward her with the tenfold wisdom he gave to Daniel and his friends. Now nearly six months later, she has just received her results of the above examination and has done very well, much above her expectation! To God be the glory! Hallelujah!

“As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him.”

(2 Samuel 22:31)

Ruth's great choice launched her on an unbelievable journey of faith which resulted in great joy, fruitfulness and blessing to the whole world. What a stark contrast Ruth was to the general attitude in Israel during the time of the Judges. In the midst of such apathy and apostasy, she displays a tenacious clinging and a deep commitment to Yahweh whatever the cost. She walked out of darkness to light. She walked out of the shadows into God's way. She walked out of death, idolatry and sin, into the ever loving and shielding wings of Yahweh.

Dear reader, may I urge you to make such a choice and go all the way with God.

ONCE TO EVERY MAN AND NATION

*Once to every man and nation
Comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth with falsehood,
For the good or evil side;
Some great cause, God's new Messiah,
Offering each the bloom or blight -
And the choice goes by for ever
Twixt that darkness and that light.*

*Then to side with truth is noble,
When we share her wretched crust,
Ere her cause bring fame and profit,
And 'tis prosperous to be just;
Then it is the brave man chooses,
While the coward stands aside,
Till the multitude make virtue
Of the faith they had denied.*

By the light of burning martyrs,
Christ, thy bleeding feet we track,
Toiling up new Calvaries ever
With the Cross that turns not back.
New occasions teach new duties;
Time makes ancient good uncouth;
They must upward still and onward
Who would keep abreast of truth

Though the cause of evil prosper,
Yet 'tis truth alone is strong;
Though her portion be the scaffold,
And upon the throne be wrong -
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow,
Keeping watch above His own.

5

THE WHOLE TOWN WAS STIRRED

“So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, ‘Can this be Naomi?’ ”
(Ruth 1:19)

Two simple women, both widows, stirred up the whole town. When we turn back to God, He will do amazing things. Naomi, who had known the Lord, was now coming back to her God, her people and her land. She was a broken woman but with hope in God. In His sight she was precious and like Job, she may have been saying in her heart, *“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.”* (Job 13:15, KJV).

The younger Ruth was also a widow and a new convert to Yahweh the LORD, determined to follow Naomi and Naomi’s God. A destitute woman, she had probably resigned herself to obscurity in her new land. All she wanted was to be with Naomi’s God and her covenant people.

Yet these two women caused a stir in Bethlehem. Towns are not always stirred by great politicians or sportsmen. Towns can be stirred by simple people like you and me as we return to God. And not only towns, but also hospitals, clinics, schools and workplaces can be stirred.

Think of the young virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, a simple girl who had yielded herself wholly to her Master and Lord. Here she was, a few months pregnant, running up the hill to see her cousin Elizabeth. When she greeted Elizabeth, the baby in Elizabeth’s womb,

the future great prophet John the Baptist, was stirred by the Holy Spirit and leapt for joy. It only took a greeting to cause a stir in Elizabeth's womb. Today, we want to see God's Holy Spirit stir our hospitals, our neighbourhoods, our families, our towns, our nations. He will do it by using ordinary people like you and me.

There are a few other examples of this in the Bible.

The Four Lepers - 2 Kings 7:3-9:

These four lepers went to the enemy camp in search of food. Then they returned to Jerusalem with the good news that the siege was lifted and that there was plenty of food available. It caused a stir among God's people. Even the king got up in the middle of the night. There was such a stampede to the enemy camp that one of the king's officers was crushed to death. Earlier, he had refused to believe the Lord's words through the prophet Elisha, that things would dramatically improve. Let us beware of unbelief. The Lord used four lepers to cause a stir in the enemy camp and among God's people. **Doesn't He desire to do the same today?** He wants to use you and me to cause a stirring in the enemy camp as well as among God's people.

The Woman of Samaria:

Remember the woman at the well. Jesus asked her for a drink of water and then told her all about her sordid past.

"Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?' They came out of the town and made their way towards him." (John 4:28-30)

Her words caused a stir among her town people and they came out to meet Jesus. As a result, many from that town became believers. A repentant, immoral woman caused a stir in Samaria resulting in the salvation of souls. **Won't the Lord do this again today?**

Paul's Team in Thessalonica:

Jealous Jews caused a riot in the town Paul was visiting.

"But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: 'These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.' When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil."

(Acts 17:6-9)

The whole town was stirred as they shouted, "These men have turned the world upside down!" Actually, as Brother Andrew once remarked, they had turned the world right side up. They were simple folk yet they created a stir wherever they went. **Won't the Lord do this again today?**

Mission Team:

A few years ago, a dedicated team of four simple people went to a mission hospital in India. Their visit caused a mighty stirring among the staff and many lives were touched. A missionary working there said it was the 'deepest moving of the Holy Spirit she had seen in the hospital in twenty-five years! **'Won't the Lord do this again and again today?** Yes He will! He is only waiting for us to fully return to Him.

God's Timing:

When they returned, the barley harvest was beginning. What wonderful timing by God. He was watching over these two dear women. Their return was precisely timed with the beginning of the barley harvest. Even so God's eyes are forever over us as we return to Him. One of the greatest events in the Old Testament was when the people of Israel came out of Egypt after four hundred and thirty years of bondage and slavery, yet the Lord was watching over them:

“At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the Lord’s divisions left Egypt. Because the Lord kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honour the Lord for the generations to come.”
(Exodus 12:41-42)

When the Israelites came out of Egypt, the Lord kept a vigil.
 How wonderful that:

“... he who watches over Israel, will neither slumber nor sleep.”
(Psalm 121:4)

Why should I feel discouraged?
 Why should the shadows come?
 Why should my heart be lonely
 And long for heaven and home?
 When Jesus is my portion,
 My constant friend is He.
 His eye is on the sparrow,
 And I know He watches me.

So I sing because I’m happy,
 And I sing because I’m free.
 For His eye is on the sparrow,
 And I know He watches me.

The LORD watched with joy as these two helpless widows returned to Bethlehem. And so it is for us too.

“Come let us return to the LORD.”

As we return, the LORD will be watching over every detail:

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” (1 Cor 2:9)

PART II

RUTH CHAPTER 2 (The Word of God)

Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, 'Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favour.' Naomi said to her, 'Go ahead, my daughter.' So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech.

Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, 'The LORD be with you!' 'The LORD bless you!' they called back. Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, 'Whose young woman is that?' The foreman replied, 'She is the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi.' She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' 'She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.' So Boaz said to Ruth, 'My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.'

At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, 'Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me - a foreigner?' Boaz replied, 'I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband - how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May

you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.'

"'May I continue to find favour in your eyes, my lord,' " she said. 'You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant - though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls.'

At mealtime Boaz said to her, 'Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.' When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, 'Even if she gathers among the sheaves, don't embarrass her. Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don't rebuke her.'

So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough. Her mother-in-law asked her, 'Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!' Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. 'The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,' she said. 'The LORD bless him!' Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. 'He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.' She added, 'That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.'

Then Ruth the Moabitess said, 'He even said to me', 'Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.' ' Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, 'It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with his girls, because in someone else's field you might be harmed.' So Ruth stayed close to the servant girls of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

6

WHAT CANNOT BE TESTED CANNOT BE TRUSTED

In Chapter one of the Book of Ruth we saw a lot of sorrow and a near hopeless situation. But in Chapter two, hope begins to dawn. Truly our God is a God of hope. We closed chapter one with two lonely widows returning to Bethlehem. They came back empty. Chapter two starts with an introduction to one of the key characters in this story, Boaz.

“Now Naomi had a relative on her husband’s side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz.”
(Ruth 2:1)

Here was a wonderful man, a man of standing and a relative of Elimelech. He brought great hope to Ruth, the Moabitess, a helpless widow. He is a beautiful type of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Naomi had a relative named Boaz, but we have an elder Brother named Jesus Christ. We will leave Boaz for the present and talk about him later.

When they returned to Bethlehem, Naomi and Ruth found themselves in an awkward, acute situation without food. What could they do? Ruth took the initiative. Her decision and commitment to Naomi, her people and her God was now being tested. She was proving in Bethlehem that she meant every word she said to Naomi in Moab. This is a vital Biblical principle. Our commitment to the Lord will be tested in the crucible of life. **FOR WHAT CANNOT BE TESTED CANNOT BE TRUSTED.**

A Test of Humility:

A gleaner did not even have the status of a labourer and was only allowed to gather the stray bits of grain left by the reapers. Yet Ruth, who had probably been a woman of some standing in Moab, now willingly takes a large social step down and becomes a gleaner. She passed the test with flying colours.

When I first joined our ministry full-time, I had some naive ideas about what it would be like to be involved in Christian ministry. I had left a good position as a Registrar/Lecturer in Paediatrics at the University Hospital in Kandy. One day, shortly after my resignation, I found myself at the post office with a stack of letters to be mailed. I had made some errors with the envelopes and a rude clerk yelled at me in front of the other people waiting which made me feel very small. “What am I doing here?” I silently fumed. “Why should I go through this humiliation? No one would have treated me like this in the University!” But the commitment was already made - for better for worse - and in that I was strengthened. I learned that day that **WHAT CANNOT BE TESTED CANNOT BE TRUSTED.**

A Test of Ruth’s Commitment to Naomi and Her God:

She could have complained and become bitter. She could have said, as many of us say:

“I never expected this. I came to preach or to teach. You never told me I had to do these menial tasks. I’m going back.” But Ruth was not thinking of herself. She was thinking of Naomi and her welfare. Today, many people in Christian service are looking for personal fulfillment in their work. I think that’s the wrong priority. First, we should seek to do God’s will and think of others. In doing this and losing our lives, we will find true fulfillment. We need to be wary of the emphasis on self-fulfillment and self-image. Ruth was also thinking of her commitment to God. So how could she go back? Oh, that we may remember the vows we made to the Lord.

A Test of Faith:

Ruth said to Naomi, "I will go and find someone in whose eyes I find favour." That was a risk. She could have been ill-treated. She could have been molested but by faith she was claiming her rights, according to God's law, to be a gleaner. These laws were,

"When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God." (Leviticus 19: 9-10)

AND

*"When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. **Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow**, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands."* (Deuteronomy 24:19)

Jehovah had made provision for her, a widow, in the law that He had given to Moses, and she was putting her trust in Him.

A Test of Being Willing to Work Hard:

We live in a world which has leisure as one of its gods. Gleaners worked long hours and gathered little. Ruth knew this but she was willing to work hard and steadily. I've always admired certain women for their ability to work hard. This includes my mother, my wife, my mother-in-law, Mrs Erasmia Grim and many of my colleagues. The ideal wife, as described in Proverbs 31, was the first one to get up in the morning and the last one to go to sleep in her household. It thrills me to read in Romans 16, when the Apostle Paul greets the saints in Rome, he mentions four women by name who had a common characteristic, they worked very hard (Romans 16:6, 12). Hard work is noticed by God. Ruth passed all these tests with flying colours.

Ruth's Attitude:

There's something beautiful about Ruth's attitude, characterized by a willing submission. First, submission towards Naomi. She asked Naomi for permission to work. She had voluntarily submitted herself to Naomi whilst they were still in Moab. Now she asks for and receives permission from Naomi to go to work. Secondly, Ruth demonstrates submission towards the foreman. Though it was her right by Mosaic law to glean, she nevertheless humbly asked him for his permission. Lastly, Ruth has a submissive attitude towards Boaz. When he showed kindness to her, she bowed down in front of him with her face to the ground. She was deeply grateful to him and did not take his kindness for granted. What a winsome woman she was. Who could help but like her? This attitude is so important in our lives, whether it is towards our family, colleagues or strangers. There are two other examples of a correct attitude that are worth looking at.

Daniel:

Think of Daniel and his friends. They refused to eat the king's food which was offered to idols but they asked this with humility and submission and suggested an alternative.

Joseph:

He was so winsome, kind and humble that he made a deep impression on Potiphar and later the jailer. They were so impressed with Joseph that they gave him positions of great responsibility.

Let us look at a few Biblical accounts which demonstrate this principle of our commitment to God, being tested.

Gideon - Judges 6 & 7:

God called Gideon, one of the Judges who ruled in Old Testament times, to deliver His people. Gideon responded and experienced a

miraculous confirmation of his call. God even sent fire from heaven and then put him through a personal test. He was asked to tear down the altars of the false gods which the heathen worshipped - of Baal and the Asherah pole beside it. However, there was a catch. The two idolatrous structures to be torn down were in his father's house. That was a tough test. Thank God, Gideon did it, though at night under the cover of darkness. For this he earned the title 'Jerub-baal' - contender of Baal. Then God used Gideon to test His people. Thirty two thousand responded to join God's army. There were two simple steps of elimination. One: those who were fearful were asked to go home. Secondly, the others were asked to drink from the stream. From the way in which they drank, it became apparent whether or not they were ready for battle. Thirty-one thousand seven hundred men were sent home, leaving an army of only three hundred. That was less than one percent, but through Gideon's 300 men a great victory was won. **WHAT CANNOT BE TESTED CANNOT BE TRUSTED.**

The Levites - Exodus 32:26-29:

Shortly after the Israelites miraculously crossed the Red Sea, Moses went up to Mount Sinai and seemed in no rush to come back. The people began to complain and, to please them, Aaron made a golden calf to worship. Thus they sinned grievously against the Lord. When Moses finally returned, he became very angry and asked the people, "Who is on the Lord's side?" The Levites rallied to Him but were given a searching test, "Kill your brothers, friends and neighbours." They did and three thousand Israelites died. On the strength of this act they were set apart for the Lord from that day. The key principle was that they should put God above their family. They passed the test. On the strength of this act, Deuteronomy 8:2 also confirms this truth:

"Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands."

WHAT CANNOT BE TESTED CANNOT BE TRUSTED.**Naomi's Response:**

Let us briefly look at Naomi's response. Ruth asked her permission to go and glean. She said: "*Go ahead, my daughter.*" She knew the dangers to Ruth. We know this by what she told Ruth on her return, "*It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with his girls, because in someone else's field you may be harmed*". She must have said "go ahead" with pain as she, herself, must have felt humiliated. Yet she swallowed her pride and let her daughter-in-law go.

This is another principle for us. When others, particularly those under our care or supervision, decide to do something for the Lord which is difficult or humbling or dangerous, let us not stop or discourage them.

How many young people have stayed away from God's call because a loving mother pleaded with them, "Don't do that, son - daughter! I know you are qualified for this job but it's dangerous. Think of your future. You can serve God here too, can't you?" Teachers, friends or pastors may do the same. If God is speaking to those under us, let them go. Of course, we need to use discernment and warn those who may be going for other reasons. Even though we have to guide and warn, we must also be careful not to stop them from following God's true call on their lives.

Many years ago, a colleague, who was also one of my best friends, had strongly advised me not to give up medicine to go full-time with Healthcare Christian Fellowship. He himself was involved in pioneering HCF in Sri Lanka but he wondered if I was doing the right thing. Eventually, I did leave my position in medicine and joined HCF full-time. A few years later we were travelling together and a hospital administrator, a dear friend, offered me a job in a mission hospital. I was seriously considering this when this same friend said to the hospital administrator, "Don't influence Arul. He must stay here with our ministry." What strength his words were to me.

Brother Andrew makes an interesting point: when asked how to get into difficult countries to share the Gospel, he says, “I can tell you how to get in but I can’t tell you how to get out.” In other words, when God tells us to “Go”, there may be no assurance that we will come back but He does assure us that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

My last example is of a precious friend in our country, a doctor who committed herself to support one of our single staff members. This meant she had to give about one third of her salary. She had quite a few other commitments including the support of her family in a war torn area. My wife and I were wondering if we should stop her from giving so much, so we asked her, “Can you manage all this? Are you sure you want to give that much?” Her faith was a rebuke to us. She replied, “I’m giving it to the Lord and He will meet my every need.” And He has, though I am sure she has had to do without some things. The Lord later blessed her in such a way that she has risen to the top in her profession. She knew that **WHAT CANNOT BE TESTED CANNOT BE TRUSTED.**

So Ruth walked into the fields of Bethlehem, with a trembling but trusting heart. The LORD, Jehovah Jireh was getting ready to do His utmost for her. May God help us to follow Ruth’s example.

7

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

“So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, ‘The LORD be with you!’ ‘The LORD bless you!’ they called back.”
(Ruth 2:3 & 4)

It so happened, that Ruth found herself in a field belonging to Boaz. We see here God’s amazing providence unfolding. Ruth was being obedient to her commitment. She humbled herself and went out to collect grain as a gleaner. There were probably hundreds of barley fields in Bethlehem and the surrounding area but without even her realising it, the Lord guided her into the one field in which He could work out His glorious destiny for her life.

As we step out in obedience to Him, walk with Him, and carry out our commitment to Him, HE, our Lord and Master, begins to work out His sovereign will in, and through, us. And He does it in the most wonderful and seemingly natural ways. So it was for Ruth and so it is for us. Providence is a word which comes from two roots:

1. Pro - which means before.
2. Video - which means to see.

Thus, God sees ahead and then engineers the circumstances in order to carry out His will. Once as I meditated on this, the following definition came to my mind :

“Providence is where God does the extraordinary through the ordinary events of life.”

Through a series of very ordinary circumstances Ruth stumbled into a field where an amazing destiny was to be worked out with implications for the whole world. Praise God!

Fatalism:

We must distinguish God’s providence from the fatalistic worldview that many religions adhere to. Strictly speaking, Christianity is not a religion. *It is a love relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ, lived out in a community of “called out” ones, The Church, in order to bless the world and to fulfil God’s purpose on earth.* In the fatalistic worldview everything that happens is considered our fate. It is due to something that happened in the past over which we have no control. In other words, the script of life has been written and cannot be changed. Everything that happens is considered to be God’s will.

A Biblical view is quite different. It tells us that a lot of things happening in the world today are not God’s will but the outworking of either Satan’s deceptions, his actions or man’s will. Of course, God is sovereign, but there are consequences of sin, judged by God. The Bible teaches that those redeemed through Christ are being restored to the original plan of God, which is for man to rule with God on this earth. We need to resist the status quo and pray “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.” Brother Andrew says that Christian fatalism is one of the worst diseases in the church. We accept the status quo and refuse to co-operate with God in bringing renewal and change.

So, as Ruth steps out for God and obeys Him, the God of history begins to act. Now we can join Paul and Ruth and say:

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”
(Romans 8:28)

We often only quote the first part of this verse and live in a false sense of security. The truth is not as we sang as children:

Que sera, sera,
 Whatever will be, will be,
 The future's not ours to see,
 Que sera, sera.

The sentiments expressed in this song are typically from a fatalistic worldview. Romans 8:28 can only be claimed conditionally.

All things work together for good:

- (1) To those who love Him and
- (2) Are called according to His purpose.

Let us now look at a few other examples in Scripture where we see the marvellous providence of God at work. These are included in order to establish and confirm the truth. The Word of God says that by the testimony of two or three witnesses a matter is established. My prayer is that it will please the Lord to let His wonderful truth sink into the mind and heart of you, dear reader, right now. May it thrill your soul and make you rejoice in Him, the God of Providence.

Examples of God's Providence

◆ The Book of Esther:

The name of God is not mentioned in this Old Testament book but as I said earlier, God does some very extraordinary things through the ordinary events of life. Time and space prevents me from digging deeply into this book but may I challenge you to think about it. Here are some of the examples from the Book of Esther:

- ◆ Esther or Hadassah (her Hebrew name) is an orphan adopted by her cousin Mordecai.
- ◆ She was an exceptionally beautiful girl.
- ◆ The position of queen became vacant at a crucial time when the former queen Vashti was deposed and Esther was chosen to be queen.

- ◆ Mordecai had a job at the king's gate, and exposed a plot to destroy the king.
- ◆ Haman the Agagite plotted to kill the Jews from India to Ethiopia.
- ◆ The king could not sleep one night and providentially reads about Mordecai's kindness to him.
- ◆ The king accepts Esther even though she came without being asked. Of course, this was preceded by three days of desperate fasting and prayer.

Finally, the whole Jewish race was saved. The tables were turned on the enemies of God and God's name honoured. Only God could have foreseen the terrible plot of Haman and providentially placed His child in the right place at the right time.

● **Paul, Aquila and Priscilla - Acts 18:1-3:**

A number of providential acts of God are seen here. God led Aquila, a Jew, to marry a Roman named Priscilla. God even used a harsh decree of Claudius - to expel all Jews from Rome - to work out His purpose. Even Priscilla and Aquila's profession as tent makers was part of God's providence. Further, out of all the cities that they could have lived in they chose Corinth. Finally, Paul arrives in Corinth and meets this wonderful couple, perhaps the greatest couple in the New Testament after Joseph and Mary. What a meeting that must have been! Their names are mentioned seven times. They stood with Paul to the end and even risked their lives for Him. It all started with a "chance" encounter in Corinth, carefully engineered by God. Oh, the wonder of God's providence!

● **Peter and Cornelius - Acts 10:17-18**

"While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there."

God saw Cornelius and longed to bless Him but Peter needed a supernatural vision first to convince Him that God's salvation was also for the Gentiles. Again, the timing was perfect and with what results! The door of salvation opens for the first time to the Gentiles.

Divine Timing:

One feature of the above examples is God's perfect timing. The Lord is never too early or never too late. In the Greek translation of the Bible there are three words for time:

Eon: A period or epoch of time, e.g. the time of the Judges.

Chronos: A quantity of time, e.g. three hours or four months.

Kairos: The opportune time; the right time, e.g. Jesus saying,

"my time has not yet come." (John 2:4).

It is amazing how many "kairos" moments God gives us in our lives. He leads us in His perfect timing to different places and to different people. Often, we can stand back and exclaim, "Oh, the marvellous hand of God!"

One area of kairos timing has to do with sharing our faith. One of my dear friends, Dr. Kumar Fernando, likened this to a rugby football player who sees an opening in the opponent's defence and runs through it. Very often the opening is there only for a second or two and then it closes. We have to seize the moment! May God make us more aware of these divinely planned "kairos" moments and may we work with the Holy Spirit to accomplish His will.

I would like to say to every reader of this book, "Don't miss the daily 'kairos' moments that God gives you to share His love with others." Our friends and colleagues in healthcare and patients are heading for a Christless eternity if they do not know the Lord Jesus. Perhaps their sickness is a "kairos" moment to be used by those who

care for them, to tell them about eternal life in Christ. It is our privilege as well as our God given responsibility. May God forgive us for missing so many of these “kairos” moments in our lives. The memory of some of them may be painful. ***“But today, Lord, we dedicate ourselves by your grace and through your Spirit to recognise and act upon such opportunities you give us.”*** Do you dare pray this prayer? The Lord may have a surprise in store for you. John Hyde prayed, and claimed one person, then two, three and finally four people for a day to receive Christ. It is harvest time. Let’s go and share Christ wherever we are.

God’s providence is seen not only in timing but in many other circumstances as well. Dear reader, you may not remember many incidents in your life, work or ministry when God’s providential circumstances were manifested but they were there! Perhaps a moment of thanksgiving is in order to praise Him for these moments. Permit me to share a few of our experiences:

- ◆ When our son was to be registered for school, we needed a fairly substantial amount of money. It was more than we had anticipated. Around that period, my brother in England sent us a sum of money as a gift, which was almost exactly the amount we needed. My brother did not know about our predicament, but we are certain it was God’s providential hand that moved him.
- ◆ Another time in India, we travelled nearly twenty-four hours to meet a doctor whom we felt could be a key person in our ministry. To our dismay we found on our arrival that he had left the state. However, the next day we met two brothers from a restricted nation in our region in the same hospital. They had come to India to be trained as Laboratory Technicians.

While in India they had come to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and they were going to be baptised before returning home. Only God could have known and planned this meeting.

God's Call to Ministry - A Personal Testimony:

This morning the Lord reminded me of a series of providential happenings when I was preparing to attend the HCF International Conference in 1975 where God called me into Full-time ministry. I share these for the glory of God and for your edification.

- At that time Doctors were under a six-year bond with the Government and to go abroad one had to leave quite a substantial amount of money as a sort of guarantee. This money would be released only after the person returns. Since my parents did not have the money, I had almost decided not to go for the Conference. On a weekend visit to Colombo, I went with my parents to see my grandmother. My mother and I were telling my grandmother of the situation and my uncle who happened to be in the next room overheard this. He came across and asked me about this and then to my utter surprise offered to pay this very large sum of money as a bond until I came back. So providentially God opened the door.
- In addition, because I was part of the University teaching staff there was much red tape involved in obtaining permission to go abroad from both the Education and Health Ministries. Time was very short and one day I found myself at the Education Department around noon with a dilemma. They wanted five copies of a letter in Sinhalese and the officer said he would sign it at 2 p.m. Then I had to take these letters to the Health Ministry and have all approvals before they closed for the day. I stood there perplexed. I knew no one in the Department. I do not remember if there were photocopiers available at that time. Just then a lady walked up to me and greeted me. She had been my patient about three years previously and I had helped to deliver her baby. **She happened to be a stenographer at the Education Department!** Though it was lunchtime, in a few minutes she went back to her office and gladly typed out all five copies for me. I was so overwhelmed by God's amazing timing and providence.

- We were not allowed to take a cent of foreign exchange out of the country, so I was at Amsterdam Airport having to wait about six to eight hours for the flight to Austria. I sat down, reading the Word of God. After some time a lady came up to me and asked me, “Are you Dr. Arul Anketell?” I was very surprised! She was an HCF staff worker also on her way to the Conference. She had seen a photograph of mine at the base and she thought I was the person. It was my first visit to an HCF Conference and no one knew me except Mr Francis Grim and the Asian HCF workers. How God worked! She took me and gave me coffee and cakes and I was so refreshed! In that large airport with thousands of people only God’s providence could have brought us together. The Lord was preparing my heart and mind to respond to His call. What a gracious loving God He is!
- During a free afternoon at the Conference I was casually strolling along the road when, Brother Andrew the main speaker asked me if I would like to walk with Him. What a privilege it was to take a long walk with, and to talk to this great yet simple man of God! My heart was burning as we talked, and that talk was another factor in helping me to decide to commit myself, full-time to the Lord’s work through HCF at this Conference.

I share some of these experiences with a deep gratitude to God. Shall we get silent for a few minutes? Can you think of how He worked for you or for someone you know?

Silence.

Now let us sing that great hymn of faith with deep conviction and joy. Sometimes even our trials and tribulations, failures and frustrations are providentially planned by God, and lead to even greater opportunities and openings than we have dreamed of.

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon storm.*

Deep in unfathomable mines
 Of never failing skill
 He treasures up His bright designs
 And works His sovereign will.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense
 But trust Him for His grace;
 Behind a frowning providence
 He hides a smiling face.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
 And scan His work in vain;
 God is His own interpreter
 And He will make it plain.

William Cowper

The Surprises of God:

“Since ancient times no-one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways.” (Isaiah 64:4-5a)

The words speak for themselves. God acts on behalf of those who wait for Him. It may be through something supernatural but, more often, through the ordinary events of life.

In 1996, I had the privilege of visiting my mother in USA and being with her on her eightieth birthday. I had a desire to be with her and God surprised me by opening the door. During this time my mother, my aunt and myself shared together from God’s Word about the surprises of God. How our hearts were blest as we shared and talked. Later, together with my sister, we sang with all our hearts:

**God moves in a mysterious way
 His wonders to perform.**

Shall we look at some of the surprises of God in His Word?

Ruth in Boaz' fields:

What a surprise Ruth had in Boaz' field. Normally gleaners worked long hours and collected little but she was given "handfuls on purpose" and "more than enough" for her and her mother-in-law. She was surprised that the wealthy land owner Boaz took such personal care over her.

Jacob - Genesis 45:24-28:

For twelve years Jacob had believed that his precious son Joseph was dead. He had grieved deeply. It had broken his heart. Perhaps even his faith in Yahweh had been shaken! Then one day he had an unbelievable, astounding surprise! His other sons returned from Egypt and told him, " *Joseph is still alive! In fact he is ruler all of Egypt.* " (Genesis 45:26). Jacob was stunned by this double news, "Joseph alive! Ruler of Egypt! For twelve years I have believed he was dead." He did not believe them but then they told him everything Joseph said to them and when he saw the carts that Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of Jacob revived. What a surprise! What joy! What amazement! Jacob said, " *I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.* " He did go back and what a moment it was when they both met. Oh! Dear friends, God has great surprises in store for all of us.

Mary Magdalene - John 20:10-18:

Mary Magdalene loved Jesus. She was heart broken that the body of Jesus was not in the tomb. The other women had left the garden. Mary was seeking for Jesus' body at His grave. Suddenly Jesus appeared,

" 'Woman,' He said, 'why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if

you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward Him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means Teacher)." (John 20:15,16)

She came to anoint the dead body of Jesus. She was willing to carry the three day old corpse of her beloved Master. Her hopes were dashed, yet she loved Him till the end and then... she meets the Risen Christ! What joy! What amazement! What a surprise!

Dear reader, may I encourage you to think through this and enjoy meditating on all the **surprises** in the Bible? May the Lord bless you with His wonderful surprises. Let's walk softly and with great expectation in our lives. Let's say with William Carey:

"Expect great things from God,
Attempt great things for God."

One of the sad things that happen to some of us is that we become cynical and lose our childlikeness. Then we cease to expect from God and to look out for his delightful surprises.

Will you bear with me as I share a few surprises that have happened to me? This is just to thank and praise the God of surprises.

- Once when returning after a tiring yet blessed five-week trip to India, Dr. Prithiviraj and I claimed chicken curry and finances to buy a saree for our wives, whilst in Madras. Our colleague in India was amused at our expectations. We had just a day in Madras and the couple who cared for us, whom we had not met before, surprised us both with chicken curry and by buying a good saree each for both our wives!
- Another time when I was returning from a mission trip to India, I just felt a desire to sit in the cockpit of the plane and see the landing. Imagine my surprise when the steward remembered that we had been at the same school. The pilot too was from my

school. So I did sit in the cockpit and had the exhilarating experience of seeing the landing from there!

- On another occasion, we were praying for a room in which we could hold our HCF meetings for Jaffna hospital. It was extremely difficult to get permission. Very casually I remarked, “Isn’t there a room near the mortuary that we can ask for? No one will want it and we may get it.” It seemed a joke and we laughed. A few days later I was seated next to the Director of the hospital at the Doctors’ Lounge. I said to her, “Madam, we need a meeting place for our HCF Group. Do you by any chance have a room near the mortuary we can use?” She looked surprised and told me that there was indeed a room next to the mortuary. It was not being used as there used to be some smell due to lack of refrigeration facilities. Well, we got the room and it was a blessing to our HCF Group there! He is the God of surprises!
- V.O. Cherian, HCF National Co-ordinator, and I sat in the Christian Medical College Vellore Chapel and prayed. I was deeply moved as I thought of the history of that place, and the tremendous example of dedicated Christian medical work there. We were “nobodies” there but God burdened our hearts and we sensed that He would open doors to minister there. Imagine our surprise when in a few days we were speaking and sharing God’s Word in that same place.

I could go on. And you could go on. Let us praise the God of surprises and keep looking to Him and expecting to see Him work.

To summarize; we have spoken about the:

- ◆ Providence of God.
- ◆ Timing of God.
- ◆ Surprises of God.

These are all linked to the Sovereignty of God. I therefore conclude this chapter with four passages of Scripture, which reveal His Sovereignty.

Sovereignty of God.

1. Genesis 22:1:

Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son, his only son, his beloved son on Mount Moriah. Even as Abraham ascended the mountain, God was preparing and sending up a ram on the other side of the mountain. A new name of God is revealed through this touching story. “**Jehovah Jireh - the Lord who provides.**”

2. Revelation Chapters 4 & 5:

There is a threefold focus in these two glorious chapters:

a) The Throne of God:

John saw that the throne was occupied. What a comfort this would have been to Christians who were going through great difficulty. And who occupied that throne? The Living eternal God who is the center of human history and destiny.

This throne was a place of perfect worship. God was honoured, and honoured with profoundly theological truth. He is the Creator. He is the Redeemer. So they worshipped Him falling on their faces before Him. We need to see this throne and keep our eyes on the One seated there.

b) The Scroll:

This was a scroll with writing on both sides. In other words it was the full revelation of God's perfect purpose on earth but it was concealed and so John wept that no one was there to open the sealed scroll. Thank **GOD**, the **LAMB**, our **LORD JESUS** was able to open the scroll.

c) The Lamb:

Then we are introduced to the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. He is worthy to open the scroll. John saw not a Lion but a Lamb with the

marks of the cross. Here is the center of the history of this world. His purpose is to purchase men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Thus, the formation of the Church is the great purpose of history. The Church is not peripheral to the world. It is central to the purposes of God in this world. (I am not referring here to the external, organisational structure of the church but to the living organism, God's "called out" ones, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb). Man will laugh and scoff at this but this is the real purpose of history. Let us join the great crescendo of the universe and cry out:

“ ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!’ ”

He is on the throne. Our cause is in His hands. Hallelujah!

3. Habakkuk Chapters 1-3:

Habakkuk the prophet lived at a time of impending judgement on Israel. It was also a time of decline and trouble in the land. In Chapter one, he asks God three questions out of a broken heart:

- ◆ Lord, are you there?
- ◆ Lord, do you care?
- ◆ Lord, is it fair?

But then in Chapter Two, he changes his posture and looks to the Lord for an answer. God gives Him a brilliant answer. It was in two parts:

- i. He promised 5 woes on various sinful practices in the land.
- ii. God assured Him that He did care, He is there, and He will deal with sin.
- iii. But God also gave Him three powerful affirmations of faith:

- i) The just shall live by faith (Hab 2:4).
- ii) The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Hab 2:14).
- iii) The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth be silent before Him (Hab 2:20).

With this satisfying answer but no change in the circumstances, Habakkuk burst out in an ecstatic song of praise in Chapter 3.

God was in control. Habbakuk was determined to:

WAIT on the Lord (Chapter 2 v 1)		God came (v 3-5)
REJOICE in the Lord (v 17)	because	God stood (v 6-7)
RELY on the Lord. (v 19)		God marched (v 8-15)

What an example to us! What powerful affirmations God gave, that are still very important to us in troubled times.

● Paul - Romans Chapters 9-11:

In these Chapters of the Book of Romans, the Apostle Paul grapples with a difficult theological issue. He is deeply concerned over his people, the Jews. Then suddenly, as I mentioned earlier, he leaves his theology and bursts into a doxology of praise.

“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgements, and his paths beyond tracing out! ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?’ ‘Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”
(Romans 11:33-36)

Shall we join Paul and Ruth and many others and burst forth into a doxology of praise?

Come Thou Almighty King
Help us Thy Name to sing
Help us to praise!
Father all glorious
O'er all victorious
Come, and reign over us
Ancient of days!

To Thee, Great One in Three
Eternal praises be
Hence, evermore:
Thy sovereign Majesty
May we in glory see,
And to eternity
Love and adore!

Anonymous

Let us now move on and see how Boaz lavished kindness on the lowly gleaner Ruth. This kindness is like the kindness God shows us in Christ Jesus. Let us enter the fields of grace.

8

BOAZ AND THE FIELDS OF GRACE

*God of all power and truth and grace,
Which shall from age to age endure,
Whose word when heaven and earth shall pass,
Remains and stands for ever sure.*

Charles Wesley

Ruth had found her way to Boaz' field, taking a low place on the harvesting team, the lowest possible place in fact. Perhaps she was thinking, better to be a gleaner with God's people than hold a good position in Moab. I am reminded of King David's anointed words:

"Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tent of the wicked. For the LORD God is a sun and shield."
(Psalm 84:10, 11a)

We now turn our attention to Boaz, the mighty man. His name means 'man of valour' or 'man of standing.' Boaz is a beautiful Old Testament picture of Jesus Christ, our New Testament Redeemer. The fact that Boaz was related to Elimelech made him a legitimate candidate to be a '**Goel**', a kinsman redeemer. As he appears on the scene we hear him greeting his workers, "The Lord be with you." They call back, "The Lord bless you." What a healthy relationship he had with his workers. Then Boaz notices Ruth in the fields. He inquires about her from his foreman and is told she's the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi.

Hearts Touched:

It is interesting that the foreman called her Ruth the Moabitess. In fact, she is called that six times. It referred to her past history but she was not going to remain Ruth the Moabitess. She was going to become Ruth the Princess. The love and devotion of this Gentile girl from Moab must have touched many hearts in Bethlehem. Boaz, too, had heard about her, even though they had not met until that day. What probably drew him to her in the first place was not that she was young and attractive, or that he was a possible kinsman redeemer. That fact had not dawned on either of them as yet. It was more than likely the touching choice she had made to forsake all and follow Yahweh and His people, as well as her devotion to Naomi. Dear friends, when we step out for Jesus, as Ruth did, you can be sure His heart is touched.

Remember when Stephen, in the New Testament, was stoned to death because of his bold witness for the Lord.

“ ‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see heaven open and the son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’ ” (Acts 7:56)

After the resurrection, Jesus sat down at the Father’s right hand but He was so touched by Stephen, that He - stood up to give His precious son a standing ovation and welcome to heaven.

Boaz is touched by Ruth and he gently tells her:

“ ‘My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the fields where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.’ ” (Ruth 2:8-9)

He pours out his kindness to Ruth. First he notices her, then he welcomes her and calls her ‘daughter.’ What a way to address a lowly gleaner. What comfort it must have brought her.

He tells her not to go into any other field but to stay with his own servant girls. Normally farmers did not tolerate gleaners staying for long but Ruth was warmly welcomed and protected. Even though she was vulnerable, he told his men not to touch her. He also provided for her. Working in the hot Middle East climate, water is very precious to prevent dehydration. So Boaz told her to go and drink from the water jars. Gleaners were not usually given that privilege. Then, at lunch-time he called her to sit with him. He personally gave her as much food as she wanted and she even had some left over for her mother-in-law. After lunch he ordered his men to allow her to glean very close to the reapers. Normally, gleaners would have been chased away from the reapers. Twice he told his men: “Don’t embarrass her. Don’t rebuke her.” He even went one step further and asked them to leave her a generous portion to glean. What amazing kindness to a poor, foreign, widowed gleaner! The fields of Boaz were surely fields of grace. He met her needs abundantly. Here we see a clear picture of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Handfuls on Purpose:

After lunch, when Ruth went back to glean, Boaz left his men several instructions. He asked them to let her glean even among the sheaves. He again told them not to rebuke her. And if all that was not enough, he asked them to pull out some stalks from the sheaves for her. In fact, he asked them to give her **handfuls on purpose**. Oh, the kindness of Boaz and oh, the grace of God. Every day, every week, every month of our lives, He is giving us ‘**handfuls on purpose**’. He has lavished His grace on us. Have you recognised these handfuls in your life? Have you thanked Him? Actually, the generosity of Boaz is nothing compared to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He lavishes on the one who humbles himself before Him, like Ruth did.

What were Ruth's qualifications to receive this kindness? It was her need that qualified her. After all, grace is for the needy, hope is for the hopeless, forgiveness is for sinners. In Roy Hession's book, "Our Nearest Kinsman" he tells of a man who introduced himself at a Revival Conference as follows, "I am the unsuccessful vicar of an unsuccessful parish." This man was a sure candidate for the grace of God. Take heart, dear reader, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is for you. Whatever the need, express it to Him. He has handfuls on purpose reserved for you.

When we humble ourselves and admit our need, we become candidates for the grace of God. Two facts qualified Ruth for this grace: She was a foreigner, a widow who had taken a lowly position and, secondly, in her need she had chosen to come to Yahweh as LORD. In the Bible we have many examples of God's grace. Manasseh, the wicked king, son of Hezekiah, was shown the grace of God when he repented and humbled himself. In the New Testament, we read how the Jews were about to stone the woman caught in adultery. The grace of our Lord reached out to her and gave her another chance. His words to her still ring down the centuries: "*Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.*"

(John 8:11, KJV).

John Newton, slave trader and persecutor of the church was gloriously converted. He wrote the now famous and touching words as his testimony:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now I'm found;
Was blind but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
 I have already come.
 'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far
 And grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
 Bright shining as the sun,
 We've no less days to sing God's praise
 Than when we first begun.

Remember, dear reader, He is not the good person's God, He is the sinner's God. I would like to summarise all that Boaz did for Ruth and compare it to what Jesus does for us. This is from Warren Wiersbie's book, "Put Your Life Together", on the Book of Ruth. As Boaz gave to Ruth, so Jesus, through His grace gives to us: ***guidance; protection; provision; encouragement; fellowship; acceptance and satisfaction.***

Guidance:

Boaz told Ruth not to glean in another field and to stay close to his servant girls. There were no clear, visible boundaries in the fields of Bethlehem. The people knew them, but Ruth did not. She could have gone to the wrong place. That is why Boaz told her to stay in his fields. The Lord Jesus promises guidance to those who stay close to Him and His word:

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." (Psalm 32:8)

Protection:

Ruth was vulnerable. During harvest-time there was undoubtedly much revelry and celebrations. Boaz warned the young men, "Don't touch her." Even if they were tempted, they knew Boaz would deal with them. She was also told to stay close to his maidens. We too,

need to stay close to God's people. Never say, "I don't need anyone. I can manage alone. I don't need a church or fellowship." There is protection in the fellowship of believers. Above all, there is God's presence and guidance.

"For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;" (Psalm 91:11)

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." (Psalm 46:1)

Provision:

Boaz made a generous provision of water, bread, rest and grain for Ruth. This was a lavish provision, more than she needed. Boaz went beyond the Mosaic law, as grace always does. Jesus is our Jehovah Jireh and He will provide.

"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19)

Encouragement and Comfort:

I wept today as I re-read this story. I was so touched by Boaz' kindness. Then Ruth said to Him:

" 'May I continue to find favour in your eyes, my lord,' she said. 'You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant - though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls.' " (Ruth 2:13)

The Hebrew text says, "*Thou hast spoken to the heart of thy handmaiden.*" Boaz comforted her heart and made her feel secure. Today, we too, need comfort and encouragement. We need it when we have been hurt or have failed, or when pressures or circumstances are closing in on us. When we lose a loved one, our job, our health or when friends fail us. Where can we go at such times? Dear reader,

go to your heavenly Father and find true comfort. His grace will be sufficient and His strength will be made perfect in your weakness. I'm reminded of a song I sang as a young Christian:

*Where could I go? Where could I go?
Seeking a refuge for my soul.
Needing a friend to help me to the end,
Where could I go but to the LORD.*

*Neighbours are kind, I love them every one,
We get along in sweet accord.
But when my soul needs manna from above,
Where could I go but to the LORD.*

King David knew this secret. Once his men were planning to stone him after they became very concerned about their families. The Amalekites had raided the city and carried away their women and children. David was also deeply distressed but the Bible says, he "...encouraged himself in the LORD his God." (1 Sam 30:6b, KJV). What a beautiful verse. In the same way, Ruth received comfort and encouragement from Boaz.

Fellowship:

Boaz invited Ruth to "*come and dine.*" This is perhaps the most gracious invitation in the Bible, "*Come and dine.*" Ruth was not only provided for, she was made to feel warmly welcome. What comfort this fellowship must have meant to her, a poor gleaner. This, dear friend, is what Jesus does for us. He gives us His fellowship and His friendship. We are invited into His inner circle. John puts it so well in his epistle:

"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3)

Jesus even invites the children of a lukewarm, self-satisfied church; with these words:

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door; I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”
(Revelation 3:20)

Beloved reader, open the door and enjoy fellowship with your heavenly ‘Boaz’.

Acceptance:

If there ever was a candidate for rejection it was Ruth. **She was a foreigner.** To God’s people she was someone outside the covenant and the promises. To make matters worse, **she was a Moabitess.** The Mosaic law excluded Moabites unto the tenth generation.

“No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation.”
(Deuteronomy 23:3)

She was also a woman living in a male-dominated society where women were subservient and not valued, in contrast to how the LORD views them. **Lastly, she was a poor widow.** Widows were helpless. Yet in spite of all this, Boaz welcomed her warmly. If anyone else had any other ideas, they would have to reckon with him, “Don’t rebuke her. I have accepted her and so must you.” **She was “accepted in the beloved”,** “to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.” (Ephesians 1:6).

Dear readers, whatever situation you are in, remember you are accepted in the beloved.

- ◆ Are you a housemaid in a foreign land?
- ◆ Are you a refugee in some other nation?
- ◆ Do you come from a despised caste or social group?

- ◆ Are you not well educated in a land where education is worshipped?
- ◆ Do you feel you are not handsome or pretty and are rejected because of that?
- ◆ Are you divorced or from a race you feel has been rejected?
- ◆ Or is there any other situation in your life that makes you feel rejected?

Your heavenly Father accepts you if you come to Him in repentance and humility. And we, the body of Christ, accept you. *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31). Hallelujah!

Satisfaction:

“She ate all she wanted and had some left over.” (Ruth 2:14b). Ruth had never been this satisfied in Moab. Now her past history as a Moabitess was fading. Boaz promised to meet her needs and hope for the future was emerging. This is the same satisfaction that Jesus gave to the women at the well in Samaria:

“ Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. ”
(John 4:13-14)

Boaz saw Ruth’s needs and went beyond all limits to help her. Beloved reader, only Jesus and His grace can satisfy your deepest need. As mentioned earlier, in John 7:37, Jesus, on the last and greatest day of the feast, cried out in a loud voice, *“If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.”* That Voice still rings out but the day of grace may soon be over. Today, then, is the day. As you read these words, come to Jesus and drink to your heart’s contentment.

The story is told of a very poor boy who was sent to live with his wealthy and kind aunt. On his first night she gave him a full glass of

milk. He drank about a quarter and left the rest. The aunt asked him, "Why didn't you finish your milk?" With a trembling voice he asked, "Is it all for me?" "Yes, son," she said, "it's all for you. Drink it all." With deep gratitude he drained the glass. Are you asking the same question? "Is all this for me? Guidance, protection, provision, encouragement, fellowship, acceptance, satisfaction?" Yes, dear friend, it's all for you through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Drink deeply and truly live.

Ruth received all this from Boaz as a result of grace and faith. Ruth was living under the grace of God but she received this grace through faith. This is the only condition to receive the grace of God.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no-one can boast."
(Ephesians 2:8,9)

Don't Glean in Another Field:

Boaz told Ruth, "*Don't glean in another field.*" Why did he say that? He knew the dangers for Ruth in other fields. His fields were the fields of grace. Others were not. Today, our heavenly Father is telling us the same. "Don't glean in another field." It's a sad thing, which must break God's heart to see His children beginning under His grace and faith and then moving to other fields. This was the problem with the Galatian church.

Paul pleads with them, having begun by faith in the grace of God, not to move into legalism. He writes:

"You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"

(Galatians 3:1-3)

Dear readers beware of legalism or the gospel of works; the gospel that says you must do something to deserve God's forgiveness and grace. It is another gospel, another field. It is a deadly poison and will kill the joy of your love relationship with Jesus. In the book of Jeremiah, the Lord pleads with His people through the prophet:

" My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. " (Jeremiah 2:13)

There are many 'isms' that come in the guise of truth. We must reject them and stay in the fields of grace. When Jesus spoke words that were difficult to understand, many left Him. Then Jesus turned to Peter and asked, "*Will you also go away?*" Peter replied:

" Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. " (John 6:68-69)

Perhaps we should stop for a moment and repeat these words to Jesus, our Lord,

Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

Stay Till the Harvest is Finished:

Boaz said to Ruth, "*Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.*" (Ruth 2:21). Boaz assured her of his help till the harvest was finished.

A few years ago a colleague from Pakistan and I were saying good-bye at Lahore airport. We had finished a fruitful time of ministry. Inwardly though, I was struggling with the validity and usefulness of our work. I asked him point-blank, "What is your commitment to God's work through HCF in Pakistan?" He gripped my hand tightly and said with conviction, "Till the harvest is finished." The words of Boaz had spoken to him. It pierced my soul

and his words still ring in my heart. Oh beloved, let us take up our task till the harvest is finished.

When Ruth returned, laden with barley and food, Naomi was surprised. She blessed the man who noticed Ruth and asked what his name was. Ruth said, "*The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,*" (Ruth 2:19b). It was the first time she had spoken the name of Boaz but it would not be the last. In fact, one day that name was going to become her own. As Roy Hession suggests, she may have sung:

How sweet the name of Boaz sounds,
In a poor gleaner's ears.
It soothes her sorrows, heals her wounds
And drives away her fears.

As we grow in grace, the Name of Jesus becomes more and more precious to us. Then we can sing with the hymn writer:

How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds,
In a believer's ear.
It soothes his sorrow, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole,
And calms the troubled breast.
'Tis manna to the hungry soul,
And to the weary, rest.

Dear Name, the Rock on which I build,
My shield and hiding place.
My never failing treasury, filled
With boundless stores of grace.

Jesus! My Shepherd, Brother, Friend,
My Prophet, Priest and King.
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End.
Accept the praise I bring.

Weak is the effort of my heart,
And cold my warmest thought.
But when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise thee as I ought.

Till then I would thy love proclaim,
With every fleeting breath.
And may the music of thy Name,
Refresh my soul in death.

John Newton

Thank you, Jehovah Jesus, our heavenly Boaz, for your amazing grace, lavished on us all.

9

GOD NOTICES, GOD SEES AND GOD REMEMBERS

“At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, ‘Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me - a foreigner?’ Boaz replied, ‘I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband - how you left your father and mother and homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.’ ‘May I continue to find favour in your eyes, my lord,’ she said. ‘You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant - though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls.’ ”
(Ruth 2:10-13)

These are my favourite verses in the Book of Ruth and I have longed to write this chapter. I pray that the Lord will open the eyes of every reader to fully understand the wonderful things in God’s Word. In the previous chapter we saw how Boaz lavished kindness, generosity, acceptance and protection on the poor, lowly gleaner, Ruth. She is overwhelmed and touched by his kindness. His words may well have been the first words of hope and comfort she heard since she lost her husband in Moab. She falls down at his feet, with her face to the ground and exclaims: “Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me, a foreigner?” Notice the humility in Ruth, her attitude of gratitude and amazement at the kindness she

receives. Boaz gives her a wonderful answer. He tells her that he has heard about all that she has done. He had been touched by her sacrifice to leave her homeland and family and to come with Naomi. She came to a people she did not know. Maybe he was reminded of his ancestor, Abraham, who left his homeland and followed the Lord, not knowing where he was going. He also knew she had chosen Yahweh as her God and had trusted Him. His reply is like a prayer:

“ May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge. ” (Ruth 2:12)

Leon Morris, in his book, “Ruth - A Commentary” (Tyndale Press) writes, “The imagery in the Hebrew, ‘under whose wings’ is probably that of a tiny bird snuggling under the wings of a foster mother.” Boaz prays that Yahweh will reward her, or as the Hebrew indicates, ‘give you your full wages.’ She deserved it. Ruth is deeply touched by this reply and speaks out again to thank him:

“ May I continue to have favour in your eyes, my lord. You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant - though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls ” (Ruth 2:13)

The Hebrew text says, ‘You have spoken to my heart.’ His reply comforted her heart. The Hebrew word, which Ruth used for handmaiden, is lower than the usual word used for servant. It shows she was still assuming a lowly place of humility. What a lesson to us today, when all we seem to be concerned with are our rights and our needs.

Like Ruth, we are often surprised that our Lord should notice us. If you feel you are forgotten by the Lord, may this truth deeply bless you. Yes, God notices! He notices every kind deed. Even a cup of cold water given in His Name is noticed and will be rewarded by Him.

A few years ago I was returning home after a time of ministry in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. I was tired and downhearted after two long ministry trips, one after the other. I was again struggling with nagging doubts about my full-time involvement with the ministry. Was I really in the place of God's choosing? Were we accomplishing anything worthwhile? Should I have stayed on as a doctor and combined evangelism ministry with the practice of medicine? I was standing in the doorway of the train when, suddenly, a beautiful rainbow interrupted my thoughts. I was immediately reminded of God's covenant with Noah and the fact that the Lord speaks to us through nature. I prayed, "Lord, if you really want me to continue in this ministry, please show me another rainbow." About ten minutes later there was another rainbow in the sky! Overwhelmed and in tears, I thanked the Lord but I was still harbouring unbelief in my heart, so I prayed, "Lord, please forgive me for asking, but if You really want me to continue, will You show me another rainbow?" To my utter amazement, about ten minutes later there was yet another rainbow in the sky. I was overwhelmed and wept in gratitude. My feelings must have been similar to those experienced by Ruth when she said to Boaz, "*Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me - a foreigner?*" I do not advocate 'proof' prayers like mine. After all, Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" (John 20:29). Yet I want to shout it from the rooftops: "God does notice our prayers, our sighs and our cries". I know, because He said it in His Word and He did it for me.

Another example: our children had never seen a rainbow and so for some time we prayed that they would see one. It can take months to see a rainbow in our country. Time went by and then, one day, on a journey, God showed us not one or two but six rainbows in one hour! He gave us 'handfuls on purpose.' Recently, while returning from Pakistan, I saw a double rainbow through the plane window. It lasted about forty-five minutes. I was amazed and thanked God for noticing me and for speaking so forcefully.

A Word to Missionaries:

In my travels around the world I have met a number of missionaries. People who have sacrificed much and are doing great work. Let me encourage you and tell you that your heavenly Boaz notices you. He knows all you have done and are doing, how you left your father and mother and homeland and came to live with people you did not know. May I pray the prayer of Boaz for you? "May you be richly rewarded by the Lord Jesus under whose wings you have taken refuge."

To those who are single because of their commitment to the Lord, may your heavenly Bridegroom reward you. He does notice you. He knows your sacrifice.

"For your Maker is your husband - the LORD Almighty is his name - the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth."
(Isaiah 54:5)

I believe single people will appreciate the Marriage Supper of the Lamb more than those of us who are married. Do not listen to the devil's lies that you have missed something because you are single. You have lost nothing and will have a great reward. We thank God for each of you who are missionaries.

May I also speak personally to some of you who are reading this book?

- ◆ Dear doctor on the mission field, working long hours with no help. Remember, God notices you!
- ◆ Young widow whose husband has died or has been killed in war. And perhaps your child was born after his death and you often cry yourself to sleep. Remember, God notices you!
- ◆ Christian worker, labouring in the fields without seeing much fruit, often tired and lonely. Remember, Jesus notices you!
- ◆ And you, dear housewife, busy in the never ending tasks of keeping house and raising children. dying to your own interests for the sake of your family. Remember, the Lord notices you!

- ◆ Dear friend, are you praying and hoping for the salvation of a family member, but see no change, only hardening of attitudes? Remember, Jesus notices you!
- ◆ And you, dear brother or sister, in prison or under arrest for the sake of the Gospel, feeling let down, hungry, fearful and in pain. Remember, God notices you!
- ◆ Beloved daughter or son in Christ, are you torn between the quarrels of your parents, their separation or divorce? Remember, God the Father notices you!
- ◆ Dear parents, who have lost your precious son or daughter. Remember, God notices you!
- ◆ My dear friends who are suffering from a painful or terminal disease. Remember, God notices you!
- ◆ Whatever your situation or need, - Remember, God notices you!

This truth is confirmed in many places in the Bible.

Nathanael:

“When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, ‘Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.’ ‘How do you know me?’ Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, ‘I saw you while you were still under the fig-tree before Philip called you.’ Then Nathanael declared, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.’” (John 1:47-49)

Nathanael had previously asked, perhaps rather sarcastically, “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” (John 1:46). When he came to Jesus, he was amazed that the Master noticed him and commended him for his lack of guile.

Some time ago, a medical student was quite antagonistic to all I said at a Bible Study. She then gave us fifteen questions to answer about the Bible. We agreed and made an appointment to see her again. We found we could only answer a few of her questions

but as we prayed for her, the Lord reminded us that she was like Nathanael. When we met her again we said, “Before we answer your questions, can we read a portion in the Bible about someone like you?” She said, “yes” and even volunteered to read it out loud. When she came to the portion quoted above, she broke down and cried. The Lord touched her heart. We were also crying and completed the reading with difficulty. Afterwards, we needed to only answer a few questions and she prayed to receive Christ as her Saviour. She was taken by surprise in the same way as Nathanael. Jesus noticed her.

Let us look at some other Biblical characters who were noticed by God.

Cornelius:

“He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, ‘Cornelius!’ Cornelius stared at him in fear. ‘What is it, Lord?’ he asked. The angel answered, ‘Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God.’” (Acts 10:2-4)

Cornelius was not even a worshiper of Yahweh, the God of Israel, yet the Lord noticed his prayers and alms. God sent an angel to say thank you to Cornelius. Later He sent his apostle Peter to bring the gospel to Cornelius and his household.

Perhaps, dear reader, you are from another faith. You have prayed to God not knowing exactly who He is. You have given alms to the poor. You may be a Buddhist, a Hindu, an agnostic, a Taoist, an atheist or a Christian only in name. Yet, God notices you! He is speaking to you through this book. He wants to reveal Himself to you through Jesus Christ, as He did to Cornelius. While you read, I pray that He will reveal Himself to you.

A verse that has greatly comforted me says:

“Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God’? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary and his understanding no-one can fathom.’ (Isaiah 40:27-28)

Never feel that your cause is disregarded or has gone unnoticed by the LORD.

Hagar:

A servant girl of Abraham and Sarai, Hagar had run away from her mistress and was wondering aimlessly in the desert. The angel of the Lord found her there and said:

“ ‘...where have you come from, and where are you going?’ ...Then the angel of the LORD told her, ‘Go back to your mistress and submit to her.’ ”

Then Hagar said, “You are the God Who sees me.” (Genesis 16:8, 9,13)

What a wonderful name for God and what a way to describe Him, **“I have seen the one Who sees me.”**

Two men were praying. One had an idol in front of him and was praying to his god. The other, a Christian was looking heavenward with outstretched arms, calling on the LORD. The idol worshiper went to the Christian and said, “Why don’t you make an idol? At least I can see my god. You can’t even see yours.” To this the Christian replied, “It’s true my friend, I can’t see my God with my physical eyes but my God can see me. Your idol cannot see you!” What an answer. Praise God, He is the One who sees us.

The Widow Woman:

“As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ‘I tell you the truth,’ he said, ‘this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.’”
(Luke 21:1-4)

Jesus noticed that this poor widow had put in all she had to live on, a great sacrificial love offering. It was noticed even though they were only two small copper coins.

DANIEL

Daniel had started to fast and to seek the Lord. He humbled himself before God to seek understanding about several visions that he had been given. There was a three-week delay in receiving an answer, which was due to a tremendous spiritual battle that was being waged in the heavenlies. Then the angel got through and said:

“ ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.’ ”
(Daniel 10:12)

Doesn't that encourage you? *“For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.”* (II Chronicles 16:9a). God had noticed Daniel's prayer from the very first day that he began to seek God earnestly.

God Sees the Needs of People:

The Lord asks us to see things in the same way that He does and then to do something about it. For example, God told Moses on Mount Horeb:

“ I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering... So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites, out of Egypt. ’ ”
(Exodus 3:7,10)

Our Lord saw the suffering of the Israelites and called Moses to be His instrument of deliverance.

When Jesus saw the crowds, He saw their real needs; He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples:

“ The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field. ’ ”
(Matthew 9:37-38)

We could answer that prayer today by giving our lives for this purpose.

A Warning:

The fact that God sees us is also a warning. In the Book of Revelation we see Jesus as the One with eyes like blazing fire. He sees through our deceit and hypocrisy. Achan (Joshua 7:1-26), Gehazi (2 Kings 5:20-27) and Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:1-11) are examples for us. In all three cases the Lord meted out severe judgement.

As a new Christian I was finding it difficult to break the habit of smoking. So I smoked in secret. One day the Lord revealed two things to me: Firstly, I was not fooling anyone but myself and secondly, He helped me to understand the following Scripture:

“ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from

that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”

(Galatians 6:7-8)

The laws of sowing and reaping would operate in my life. This brought repentance and victory in that area.

May I warn you, dear reader: Are you playing with immorality? Harboring sinful thoughts? Claiming extra overtime at work? Cheating on your income tax? Reading pornography or watching X-rated movies? Are you cheating on your husband or wife or cheating the LORD of his tithes and offerings? You are only fooling yourself. Be sure your sin will find you out. I warn you solemnly, before it is too late: **Repent!**

God Remembers:

Two women, both barren, cried out to the Lord in their distress. One was Rachel, the other Hannah. What happened? *“Then God remembered Rachel; He listened to her and opened her womb.”* (Genesis 30:22) and, *“The LORD remembered her [Hannah].”* (I Samuel 1:19b). Am I speaking through this book to a barren woman? Have you longed for a child but it has not happened? Have you and your husband felt the agony of it? God remembers! He may either surprise you with a child as He has done to many couples or He may give you the grace to be without a child but bless you with an abundance of spiritual children.

Perhaps someone reading these words is experiencing barrenness in ministry. You have cried to God. Take heart dear friend - God remembers. He will turn the barrenness into fruitfulness. Not necessarily in numbers but in true, vibrant spiritual life. Dear son or daughter, Jesus has heard your prayer.

“Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labour; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who

has a husband,' says the LORD. 'Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left.' " (Isaiah 54:1-3a)

Note the beautiful, strong words in this verse - burst into song, shout for joy, enlarge, stretch, strengthen, do not hold back. Hallelujah! He can change barrenness into fruitfulness.

As we return to our discussion of Ruth, we see that she is the one who introduces us to this truth. She was so amazed that Boaz noticed her and was then greatly strengthened by his reply.

Yes, dear friends,

**GOD NOTICES,
GOD SEES,
GOD REMEMBERS,
GOD CARES.**

I sing because I'm happy
I sing because I'm free
For His eye is on the sparrow
And I know He watches me.

10

THE BEGINNING OF BLESSINGS

In the first chapter of Ruth we did not see much hope. There was famine, tears, sorrow and death but now a glimmer of hope emerges as the God of hope and redemption is at work behind the scenes. **He's not only the Redeemer of lost men and women; He's also the Restorer of hopeless situations.** In Chapter Two, Naomi's language begins to change. In Chapter One she said, "*Don't call me Naomi (sweetness), call me Mara (bitter)*" (verse 20) and repeated five times that the hand of Yahweh was against her. Now listen to this change in her speech:

" 'Blessed be the man who took notice of you!' " (Ruth 2:19a). "The LORD bless Him!' Naomi said to her daughter-in-law: 'He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.' She added, 'That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.' " (Ruth 2:20)

Naomi twice blesses Boaz. Hope is beginning to dawn in her and this is reflected in her words. As we begin to realise everything our Heavenly Father has done for us, our speech will change too, from mourning and self-pity to blessing the LORD and blessing others. We see Boaz, a godly man, bless his workers and receive blessings in return. We too, should be blessing others with our words because we are:

"... a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9)

One of the priestly tasks in the Old Testament was to proclaim this special blessing over the Israelites:

“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.” (Numbers 6:24)

There are many other beautiful examples of blessings from the Bible but before we look at these, I would like to present you with a simple outline that I once heard of John 20 and 21. Peter and a number of the disciples had gone fishing in Galilee, following Jesus’ resurrection. They were in the right place but doing the wrong thing. The whole night they caught nothing. **It was a dark night of frustration.** Dear reader, are you in such a state? Early in the morning Jesus appeared on the shore; following His advice the disciples let down their nets one more time, which yielded a great catch of fish. **It was the dawn of fruitfulness.** Then Jesus sat and ate breakfast with them. **It was the daylight of fellowship.**

Beloved readers, the Lord wants to bring us out of the frustration of fruitlessness into fellowship with Him. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. It gives us hope of a good day ahead. Spiritually speaking, the Lord Jesus wants to sit and eat breakfast with us and then give us hope and a new commission as He gave to Peter. So don’t lose heart! The risen Christ is here to bless us.

God’s Blessing to Abraham - (Genesis 12:1-4 and Genesis 17:1-8):

- ◆ I will bless you and make you into a great nation.
- ◆ I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.
- ◆ I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you.
- ◆ All families on earth will be blessed through you.

The blessings were later extended to include fruitfulness, multiplication, possession of the land and descendants like the sand

on the shores and the stars in the sky. What an amazing blessing God gave to Abraham. You may ask, So what? How does that affect me? Let us read on:

“So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”
(Galatians 3:9)

For:

“He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”

(Galatians 3:14)

Thus, God’s blessings to Abraham stretch clear across the centuries to us.

Blessings of the Tribes of Levi and Benjamin:

a) Levi:

When Moses was blessing the tribes of Israel, he asked God to bless the Levites thus, “Bless all his skills, O LORD, and be pleased with the work of his hands.” (Deuteronomy 33:11a). They had worshipped the LORD wholeheartedly and put God’s Word even above family ties. I would like to ask the LORD right now to bless any reader who, like Levi, has put God’s Word and work as a priority in his or her life. “Bless all their skills, O LORD, and bless the work of their hands. Skills of writing, praying, singing, counselling, evangelism, hospitality, teaching or doing good deeds.”

b) Benjamin:

Moses said, “Let the beloved of the LORD rest secure in him, for he shields him all day long, and the one the LORD loves rests between his shoulders.” (Deuteronomy 33:12). Once, as I shared this promise at the conclusion of a meeting, I noticed several mothers in the back of the room with their little ones asleep between

their shoulders. A picture of peace, security and tranquility - a vivid representation of the above promise. The blessings of inward rest, security and a deep love relationship with Jesus, are ours. What a pearl of great price! May God bless you today, dear reader, with this inner rest. As someone has said, "Don't wrestle but nestle in the arms of Jesus."

Deuteronomy 33 records the blessings given to all the tribes of Israel. As spiritual descendants of Abraham, we can claim these blessings. It is worth meditating on them. Let us cry out like Jacob, "*I will not let you go unless you bless me.*" (Genesis 32:26b).

Jabez:

Jabez asked the following of God, "*...Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.' And God granted his request.*" (1 Chronicles 4:10). Why not ask God for these five things on behalf of the ministry that you are involved in:

1. O Lord, bless me.
2. Enlarge my territory.
3. Keep your hand on me.
4. Keep me from evil.
5. May I not suffer pain.

May God grant your request.

In Psalm 67 the Psalmist declares:

"May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the

nations of the earth. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear Him.” (Psalm 67)

What a wonderful Psalm describing God’s missionary purpose for the church.

Jesus Blesses His Disciples:

Jesus, after his resurrection, led his disciples to a place near Bethany, then:

“...he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.” (Luke 24:50, 51)

What a precious blessing He left on them as He ascended back to the Father and to the highest place.

Blessings for Pilgrims:

“Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca (weeping), they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.” (Psalm 84:5-7)

In this passage God blesses those who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. Have we done this? Are we truly pilgrims, like Abraham, content with a tent and an altar and moving as God directs? When such pilgrims pass through the valley of sorrows they make it a place of springs. They bless and refresh. I once heard of a group of Christians who brought refreshing hope and strength to a large number of desperate people in a refugee camp. They were in the same situation themselves, yet made it into a place of springs.

Through Christ, we can claim all these blessings for ourselves. It is a worthwhile study to look at all the ‘blesseds’ in Scripture. What a storehouse of blessings has been promised to His children. However, when describing these spiritual blessings, I am not talking about the so-called ‘prosperity theology’ for Jesus also said:

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you, because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
(Matthew 5:11-12)

Persecution, suffering, pain and hardship may actually be a sign of God’s approval, rather than His disapproval. Jesus also warned that in this world we would have tribulations. We must also be careful not to get so caught up with our blessings that it turns our hearts away from the one who blesses. We need to always remember that our first priority is the Blessor and not the blessings.

Now let us turn our attention back to Ruth. In Chapter Two we begin to see God’s blessings. Even Naomi, who felt downhearted, is beginning to have hope. It all began with two choices: Naomi’s choice to repent and return and Ruth’s choice to choose Naomi’s God and Naomi’s people. This paved the way for God to act on their behalf. Had they stayed in Moab, they would have missed out on all of this.

Where are you, dear reader? Are you in Moab, feeling ashamed to return and to acknowledge guilt and sin? Are you wondering if God will forgive you? May I urge you to return to the Lord and His people! You may lose all that God has for you if you don’t.

Jewish Friends:

I feel constrained to address any Jewish friends reading these pages. How we thank God for what we have received from your People! We love you. Like Ruth, we have come to your Kinsman

Redeemer, Yeshua and found such blessing. May I urge you to also turn to Him, your Kinsman Redeemer and Saviour? Please, study your Scriptures carefully and you will find your Messiah. We do join you in praying for the peace of Jerusalem.

Ruth Chapter 2 ends with this matter-of-fact statement:

"... And she lived with her mother-in-law." (verse 23)

I love this verse and I smile when I read it. Why? Because of the many jokes we have in our world today about mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. Actually, it is not a joking matter because much heartbreak, agony, tears and even marriage break-ups have been the result of difficult relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. Yet Ruth lived with her mother-in-law and I am certain that they were friends and got along well. They cooked and worked together, laughed and cried together and loved each other deeply. Ruth was a submissive, selfless young woman. James 3:17 says, *"But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, impartial and sincere."* Ruth portrayed such characteristics. How about us? Are we easy to live with? Are we living humble lives even in the midst of conflict? Let us remember Ruth's example.

PART III

RUTH - CHAPTER 3 (The Word of God)

“One day, Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, ‘My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for? Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsmen of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing-floor. Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing-floor, but don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.’

“ ‘I will do whatever you say,’ Ruth answered. So she went down to the threshing-floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.

“When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet. ‘Who are you?’ he asked. ‘I am your servant Ruth,’ she said, ‘Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.’

“ ‘The LORD bless you, my daughter,’ he replied. ‘This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character.

Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning.'

"So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognised; and he said, 'Don't let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor.' He also said, 'Bring me the shawl you are wearing, and hold it out.' When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and put it on her. Then he went back to town.

"When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, 'How did it go, my daughter?' Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her and added, 'He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty handed.' Then Naomi said, 'Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.'

11

NAOMI'S PLAN AND RUTH'S SUBMISSION

As we move onto Chapter Three of the Book of Ruth, the fascinating part of the story begins to unfold. The Book of Ruth is a book of romance. It is a touching story that points to an even greater romance. For the whole Bible is the story of this greater romance, the Heavenly Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ and His bride, the church. From all eternity God purposed an eternal companion for His son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is also God. We see this climax in the glorious marriage supper of the Lamb described in Revelation 19, which we will discuss later.

Naomi had a plan. When Ruth tells her that the name of the man who had been so helpful and kind to her was Boaz, suddenly Naomi's mind is alerted. She realises that he is a relative. The Hebrew word used here is "*qarob*". Then in the same breath she is thrilled with another realisation. If he is a "*qarob*", then he can be a "*goel*" - a kinsman redeemer - to them. This distinction is brought out in the New International Version translation.

Qarob is translated close relative.

Goel is translated Kinsman redeemer. (Ruth 2:20)

It is so touching to see Naomi change. A plan forms in her mind. She is concerned for her daughter-in-law. She wants her to have a permanent home. Being a gleaner was a blessing with such a man as Boaz. But more than the blessing she desired a relationship for Ruth with Boaz himself. She was also looking for the restoration of her husband's family line. In Chapter Three, Naomi explains her plan.

“I must find a home for you.” It could also be translated ‘rest’ or ‘husband.’ “And Boaz with whose servants you’ve been is a Goel to us.” Naomi had probably already explained the gracious, kindly law of the Kinsman redeemer to Ruth. With a woman’s intuition, she realised that Boaz felt deeply for Ruth. In addition, she could see that Ruth was deeply touched by the kindness of Boaz. With mounting excitement in her heart, she gives Ruth the following instructions:

- ◆ Wash yourself.
- ◆ Put perfume on yourself.
- ◆ Put on your best clothes.
- ◆ Go to the threshing floor, but secretly, no one must see you, not even Boaz.
- ◆ Note where Boaz sleeps.
- ◆ When he is asleep, go, uncover his feet and lie down at his feet. That is all you need to do; from then onwards, he will take over.

When I first read these words, I was puzzled. This does not sound like godly advice. This almost seems immoral. But it was not so. There was a risk involved but Naomi could trust both Boaz and Ruth. Actually she was asking Ruth to claim what Yahweh the LORD had commanded to be her right. She was claiming the Mosaic Law regarding widows without sons.

It is worth taking a closer look at some of the steps that Naomi asked Ruth to take. We can picture the steps we should take in coming to our Heavenly Boaz, Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. We too need a revelation of the rights vested in us because of our position in the Lord Jesus. We are then able to come boldly to His feet and ask what Ruth asked of Boaz.

Wash, Perfume Thyself:

Naomi wanted Ruth to prepare herself to meet her Goel. She must be clean. Dear friends we too need to repent of sin as we come to Jesus.

Put on Your Best Clothes:

It is possible that up until that point, Ruth wore the characteristic dress of widows. Now Naomi told her to put off the grave clothes and to put on the “grace” clothes. By this she was signifying I am ready for marriage but she must be seen only by Boaz. Oh! How precious. May the Holy Spirit interpret the truth into your hearts. Maybe the Holy Spirit whispered these words to Ruth.

“Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood.”
(Isaiah 54:4)

Uncover His feet and Lie Down at His Feet:

Why did Naomi ask Ruth to uncover Boaz' feet? Naomi knew the best way to wake up a man in the night, without startling him. If his feet are cold, he'll get up! This could be the reason. More importantly, Ruth was to lie at Boaz' feet. In the next chapter we will look at the beautiful significance of coming to the feet of Boaz. Thus, Ruth came with the right purpose, the right preparations and the right attitude, to the right person at the right place.

Submission:

Submissive Attitude of Ruth:

Ruth's attitude was right. It was one of submission to God and to Naomi. This was her third great choice. In Chapter 1, her great choice to commit herself to Naomi, her God and her people. In Chapter 2, to humble herself and be a gleaner. Now she chose to submit to Naomi's plan. She was once again proving that her words in Moab (Ruth 1:16-18) were no idle words. Remember, **WHAT CANNOT BE TESTED, CANNOT BE TRUSTED.**

Her reply to Naomi's plan is a model of submission. "*I will do whatever you say.*" (Ruth 3:5)

She not only agreed to this plan but also went further and said that she was willing to obey whatever Naomi said to her. To say "Yes" to this plan of Naomi was not what she would have said in the flesh. Boaz was a much older man. Ruth was young and attractive. She could have gone after the younger men but she was thinking of Mahlon's family line, Naomi's welfare and her vow to Naomi. Thank you Ruth, for your lovely example.

Dear friends, I feel constrained to say a word to some of you who are, maybe, at a turning point in your life like Ruth. Are you saying no to some glorious plan of God, because of a lack of submission and your own interests? Have you forgotten the vows you made?

Two incidents come to my mind.

- A very close friend of my wife was spending a few days with us. She had told my mother about a marriage proposal for her, to a godly man who was much older than her. She did not want to think of it, due to the age difference. That night she had a dream or a vision and heard a voice say to her, "Samuel, don't say no to him." This spoke so deeply to her. She submitted and married this man and, as far as I know, enjoys a blessed married life.
- My mother used to remind me that my father twice made choices for the sake of his sisters. In Sri Lanka we used to have the custom of inter-marriages. Now it is uncommon. A brother and sister of one family marries a sister and brother of the other family. My father's first marriage was an inter-marriage. After two children, his wife died of typhoid. My father was left a young widower with two small children. Then he married again, another inter-marriage with my mother. God has blessed both marriages and both families. For my mother too it could not have been an easy decision to marry a widower with two children. She too chose

unselfishly. The result in spite of all our failures is much blessing. I take this opportunity to thank my parents for this example.

Ruth's attitude of submission is a beautiful attitude to have in life. The Bible says that the meek shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5). What was the result of Ruth's obedient submission? Boaz was overwhelmed and thanked Ruth for coming. He said that this kindness she showed was even greater than her kindness to Naomi. Then he said these beautiful words, "*And now, my daughter don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask.*" (Ruth 3:11).

The two statements of Ruth and Boaz and the clever word play thrill me. Ruth said to Naomi, "*I will do whatever you say.*" In reply Boaz says to her, "*I will do for you all you ask.*" Hallelujah! When we submit to God's plan and God-given authority and take a low place as Ruth did, then the Lord promises to do for us more than we can ask or think. Today, God is speaking to wives, husbands, children, Christian workers, brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us follow Ruth's example.

I would like to discuss submission under three headings.

1. Submission to God.
2. Submission to God-given authority.
3. When we should not submit to authority.

Submission to God:

James says, "*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*" (James 4:7). There is no other way to know God's favour and blessings than this. Here are two examples from the Bible to encourage us.

Mary the Mother of Jesus:

When the Angel Gabriel came to her with that stupendous message. Mary spoke these beautiful words:

“ ‘I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May it be to me as you have said.’ ”
(Luke 1:38)

Mary knew that in submitting to God’s plan there were many uncertainties. Also there was going to be a personal Calvary for her. A sword would pierce her heart. Yet she submitted to God.

Ananias:

Ananias was a disciple of Jesus, a praying man in Damascus. The Lord spoke to him in a vision and wanted him to go and pray for Saul of Tarsus and restore his sight. First he said, “*No, this man is an enemy.*” But the LORD said he must go and that Paul was a special instrument of His. Then Ananias submitted in three beautiful ways:

- a) He went as directed.
- b) He called him Brother Saul.
- c) He laid hands on him and prayed.

The result: Saul was able to see as the scales fell from his eyes and he was filled with the Spirit.

Sometimes prejudice may keep us from our greatest moments and opportunities in life. Am I speaking to someone like this?

- Is it racial prejudice?
- Is it denominational prejudice?
- Is it national prejudice?
- Is it charismatic/non-charismatic prejudice?
- Is it doctrinal prejudice?
- Is it prejudice related to sex, male or female?
- Is it the past history of the person?
- Is it your own bad experiences with others similar to this?
- Is it class prejudice working both ways:

- Poor respecting rich?
- Rich respecting poor?
- Persons in authority respecting ones in lower positions?
- Persons in lower positions respecting those in authority?

Dear friends, let us submit to God and listen to His voice. Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft. Let us submit to God.

“For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.” (1 Sam. 15:23)

Submission to God-given Authority:

In the Bible we see that God honours authority. For instance:

Saul and David:

David was a man after God's own heart. Once, when he was fleeing from Saul, he had the opportunity to kill Saul. His friends urged him to do it. They even quoted Scripture to support this but he said to his men, *“The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD'S anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD.”* (1 Sam. 24:6). Again, David had another opportunity and again he refused to allow Abishai to kill Saul, *“But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD'S anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go.”* (1 Sam. 26:11).

David recognised Saul's position and left it to God to deal with him.

Joseph:

Joseph played a minor role in the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. I have been amazed that though we sometimes forget Joseph, God did not. He was Mary's husband and therefore God recognised his role as a leader. God had asked him to take Mary as his wife.

- The Lord instructed Joseph to name the child Jesus (Matthew 1:21).
- The Lord instructed Joseph to take Mary and Jesus and flee to Egypt (Matthew 2:13).
- The Lord instructed Joseph he could come back from Egypt (Matthew 2:19, 20).
- The Lord told Joseph to go and live in Nazareth (Matthew 2:22-24).

God honoured Joseph's leadership role and recognised his authority as head of the household.

The Centurion:

The centurion who met Jesus spoke words of faith and wisdom:

"But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go', and he goes; and that one, 'Come', and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this', and he does it." (Luke 7:7b,8)

He was under authority and therefore had authority. He recognised Jesus as being under God's authority and thus having God's authority. May God's Holy Spirit interpret the truth to your heart.

Once in our Fellowship, I experienced this truth in a vivid way. For sometime, we as a staff prayed for a good typewriter. Finally we felt the Lord had provided and we were even looking at different models and so on. I then went to our Treasurer, one of the closest friends I've ever had in life. He had to approve this. After a forty-five minute discussion, he told me that he felt that he could not approve. He felt we should wait and that it was not wise to buy at that time. I was very disappointed but later was able to inwardly submit to this God-given authority. Some of our staff was also upset at first. However we waited and six months later, the same dear brother approved a typewriter. It was a very good model, which

was not available earlier. We got a reduction, as the owner was from a Christian background, together with an excellent after sales service. How happy I was that we waited and saw the value of a submissive attitude.

When We Should Not Submit to Authority:

We have to realise that first and foremost our allegiance is to the Lord. If any authority asks us to do something, which violates our allegiance to God, then we cannot submit. In fact, we must not submit. Of course, we can take our example from Daniel and his friends and refuse and resist but tactfully and with humility. We must never submit to the devil or any of his suggestions from whatever quarter they come. Sometimes it may mean being extremely firm on the issue.

Jesus said to poor Peter, "*Get behind me, Satan!*" (Matthew 16:23). Peter did not realise that his sincere good intentions were actually Satan's suggestions to lead Jesus from the cross. Sometime later it was necessary for Paul to publicly rebuke Peter to challenge his submission to the legalistic demands of the Jewish Christians.

The classic example of not submitting to an authority where this would conflict with God's will is when Peter and John were asked by the Jewish religious authorities not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus. Their reply was:

"Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.'" (Acts 4:18-20)

"Peter and the other apostles replied: 'We must obey God rather than men!'" (Acts 5:29)

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There are many other occasions where such resistance becomes necessary. I will mention two examples.

In our Asian culture, parents often arrange marriages for their children. This can work out well but often believing Christians, especially young women are pressurised to marry either unbelievers or those without a true commitment to Christ. Many young people submit and lose God's best for their lives. Thank God that there are many who stand true and some are paying the price of being single. God will reward them. Here, I believe, is a situation where we should not submit to parental authority. God's authority is supreme. Parents are well meaning, but they do not always realise that they are tools in Satan's hands to spoil God's plan for their children.

We can often find ourselves asked to do things by our superiors, which violate God's standards of ethics or morality. We need discernment in this and should not refuse to do things in which we may differ in judgement. However, if it is a clear case like lying, bribery, consuming alcohol or any dishonest practice, we must resist. Of course, we need to do this tactfully.

The Book of Daniel gives clear guidance on this. And when we do this, we will need to also face the possible consequences. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's words are such a challenge and inspiration to us:

*"Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. **But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.**' "* (Daniel 3:16-18)

Our God is able to deliver us - Yes. Thank God.

But even if not - i.e. if we lose our job, or lose face or face the anger of our employer, or fail an examination as a result, or fail to get a promotion, or get put in prison, or even get killed, we need to say, "We will not bow down to your image, O man or system or organisation".

The Turning Point:

Returning to the story of this precious girl Ruth, we see that her decision to submit to Naomi and to go and lie down at the feet of Boaz, was a vital turning point. By doing this, Ruth opened herself to the greatest blessing of her life. She had already come a long way but she could have held back at this crucial stage. The whole glorious plan of God was now ready to unfold.

There are many such pivotal points in our life. We need to recognise them when they occur and choose God's way. Shakespeare wrote, "*There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken as a flood leads on to fortune, Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries.*" There is some truth in these great words but remember that this is Shakespeare and not God. The difference between philosophy and God's way is that the former is not one hundred percent truth. "Once omitted" does not doom us to a life of shallows and miseries. We have a Redeemer of lost sinners and a Restorer of hopeless situations. In fact this is the theme of this book. Yet it is true that there are pivotal, turning points in life. Are you at such a point? May Ruth's example encourage you. Whilst attending an HCF conference, the LORD urged us to pray that the conference would be a turning point in the lives of many. The concluding message by Mr. Francis Grim, Founder of HCF, was on the Three Wise Men who came to see King Jesus. The Bible says, "*They went back another route.*" (Matthew 2:12). Dear friends, my prayer is that as you read this book, you will worship Jesus and go back another way and that this will prove to be a turning point in your life.

Ruth came in the night, quietly uncovered Boaz' feet and lay down at his feet. The great Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ, must have

watched this scene with deep joy. The same event would be repeated millions of times in the future as sinners in need would come to his feet and say, "*Cover me, cover me, extend the border of thy mantle over me. For you are my nearest Kinsman.*" Let us now move on to the next chapter and see what transpired in this secret encounter between Boaz and Ruth.

12

AT THE FEET OF BOAZ

Boaz, busy winnowing and threshing barley all day, had probably slept out in the open, close to the threshing floor, to guard it. After a day's hard labour he was a contented and tired man and must have fallen into a deep sleep. However, something woke him up in the middle of the night. Perhaps his feet were cold. He was startled to see a woman sleeping at his feet. He then asked her, "*Who are you?*" Then she spoke these precious words:

"I am your servant Ruth," she said, 'spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.' "

(Ruth 3:9)

This was a bold step, yet she took it in obedience, knowing it was a covenant right that the LORD had extended to widows such as her.

It is the same with us, dear friends. Like Ruth, we need a revelation of the privileges we have in Jesus. We, too, can come boldly to the feet of Jesus and ask Him to redeem us. Do we really know Him as our Kinsman Redeemer, the One who forgives sin, overrules and transforms the mess we have made of our lives?

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

(Hebrews 4:16)

Daily, we need to see afresh the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ruth realised it was her need, her poverty, her barrenness, her widowhood and her helplessness which qualified her for Boaz' grace.

Even so our own situations of need and failure qualify us to come to Him. We often think these things disqualify us from approaching the Most High. That is a clever lie from Satan himself. On the contrary, they are the very things that qualify us for His grace, provided we acknowledge our needs and failures.

What was the meaning of Ruth's words, "*Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman redeemer?*" In Asia and some Middle East countries it was customary for a man to throw his mantle over the woman he wants to marry. It dates back to the Old Testament where the LORD, speaking about the budding nation of Israel, said:

" 'Later, I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine. ' " (Ezekiel 16:8)

These were tender words, especially since Israel had become unfaithful and had back-slidden. Despite the fact that Ruth was not a Jew, she dared to make the proposal at Boaz' feet because of Boaz' position and character and since he was a kinsman redeemer. In addition, she had embraced Yahweh as her God and Yahweh's people as her people. Therefore, she now had a right to the blessings available to God's covenant people.

Ruth was not to blame for her situation and she was asking according to God's holy law. Boaz acknowledged, "*All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character.*" (Ruth 3:11). The word for a noble character in Hebrew is the word for excellence or virtue. One translation even renders it thus, "*All the city knows thee for a bride worth winning.*" In this context, Ruth's actions were neither immoral nor wrong.

Dear friends, this is what we should do. Come and lie at Jesus' feet. As we come to His feet we can say, "Lord here I am":

“a failed father or mother!
a failed son or daughter!
a failed doctor or nurse!
a failed Christian worker or Pastor!
a failed disciple!
a failed leader!
a failed...!”

Please:

cover me!
redeem me!
restore the hopeless situation!

At His feet we can say with Ruth, “Spread the corner of Your garment over me, since You are a Kinsman Redeemer.” Jesus is greater than Boaz. There is room for all of us at His feet, the foot of the cross. As the hymn says, “Though millions have come, there’s still room for one. Yes, there is room at the cross for you!”

Boaz’ response is heart-warming. He thanked her for coming, and said, “*The Lord bless you, my daughter.*” (Ruth 3:10). He was delighted that she came and assured her, “...*don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask.*” (Ruth 3:11). He said her kindness was greater than the first kindness. He was referring to her decision to leave her people and stay with Naomi. We assume Boaz was much older than Ruth and so he acknowledged that she could have married one of the younger men. He assured her he would deal with the matter in the morning, acknowledging the fact there was another kinsman redeemer in the family, closer than him. If this man was not willing to marry her, then he promised her he would.

Then he poured out six measures of barley into her shawl and said, “*Don’t go back to your mother-in-law empty handed.*” Did he

remember Naomi's words, "*I went away full but came back empty?*" Why did he give her six measures? Mrs. Grim, the wife of HCF founder Mr. Francis Grim once explained this to me - six is man's number, seven is the perfect number. So Boaz gave her six measures of barley that night and reserved one, the seventh measure, for the next day. This was not a measure of barley. The seventh measure that he reserved was himself. What a beautiful explanation!

Boaz' response is a picture of how Jesus Christ responds to us when we come as needy children to His feet. He has invited us to come at any time, in any place or situation. He, too, will thank us for coming and will make us feel accepted and not fearful. In fact, the words "**Fear not**" appear in the Bible almost four hundred times. However, as long as we cover up our sins or fail to come to Him, our problems are our responsibilities. Once we come to Him, He takes over. He is the Divine Potter and He can remake the marred vessel. He even uses the old clay. Nothing is wasted. The Master Potter even includes our failures into a new and glorious pattern for our life. He will not send us away empty. He will fill us. How many of us regret the past and cry bitter tears over wasted years? Let us come to Him as Ruth came. He will whisper these words:

"I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten - the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm - my great army that I sent among you." (Joel 2:25)

"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." (2 Corinthians 9:8)

Let us go together to:

"...him Who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,"
(Ephesians 3:20)

Are you still hesitating? Come, beloved reader, can I take you with me, and shall we lie down at Jesus' feet - our heavenly Boaz? Why not stop reading and fall down at his feet right now?

“Lord Jesus, please touch every reader who has fallen at your feet in response to this and give them the assurance of your acceptance and love and restoration in Jesus' Name. Amen.”

Secret Transaction:

This part of the story begins in secret. The plans were made quietly and privately. The midnight transaction between Ruth and Boaz was also done secretly. Even though Jesus died for us publicly, there are some things that we need to do alone with God. When we come to Him with our deepest needs and longings, it is good to come in private. After all, Jesus taught us:

“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (Matthew 6:6)

The Bible records many such precious meetings. For instance:

Abraham took Isaac alone to Mount Moriah ready to offer his only son to the Lord as he had been instructed. What an experience he had there after God tested him and then provided an offering Himself (Genesis 22:1-19).

Jacob was left alone. It was then that he had the vital encounter with the LORD at Peniel and received a new name, Israel, Prince with God (Genesis 32:22-32).

Joshua was facing the biggest test of his career, Jericho. He was alone, pondering how to go about it. Alone and away from his army, he met the Great General, the Captain of the Lord's army. Face down and shoes off, he received God's strategy (Joshua 5:13-15). Are you facing something important? Perhaps one of the greatest tests of

your life? Get alone with God, as Joshua did. God will show you the next step.

Jesus went with three of His closest friends to Gethsemane. Then He went a little further, now all alone. There, something precious, and yet stupendous, occurred. The greatest battle in history was won. He won it whilst alone.

King of my life, I crown Thee now, Thine shall the glory be,
 Lest I forget Thy thorn crowned brow, lead me to Calvary.
 Lest I forget Gethsemane, lest I forget thine agony.
 Lest I forget Thy love for me, lead me to Calvary.

Ruth and Boaz made a transaction in secret. It was not immoral or illegal, just too precious for public viewing. Later, the matter was made public when Boaz declared to all, his intention of marrying Ruth.

Jesus taught us about secret prayer, secret fasting and secret giving. In Matthew 6 verses 1-6 and 16-18, Jesus taught us that the hypocrites do things in order to be seen. Then he said they have their reward. He also told us that as we do things secretly unto Him, the Father who sees in secret would reward openly. In the original Greek text of the New Testament the two words for reward are different. The first word gives the idea of a full reward received now. The hypocrites will receive the full reward now, which is the acclaim of men but nothing more. On the other hand, the word reward for those who pray in secret denotes a reward, which accumulates interest and keeps growing. In other words, it is a reward in the future and it grows. Oh! That we will live for that reward from God and not the present temporary reward of the praise of men.

“Right now, we bind this stronghold of pleasing men and the praise of men and we release you dear reader and all of us to live for the glory and praise of God. Amen.”

The Whole Night:

In the middle of the night Boaz woke up and saw Ruth, then told her to stay there till morning. I'm convinced that after the conversation she had with Boaz, she did not get a wink of sleep. May be she was trembling and her heart beat faster and she thanked the Lord for what He was about to do with her life. If Boaz was like most of us, I doubt that he slept much either. He must have been thinking and planning intensely and with great excitement about how he was going to carry out his plans in the morning. Even so, the Lord Jesus is constantly thinking about us, how to help us, bless us and lead us onward. As the Psalmist exclaims in utter wonder:

"How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you."

(Psalm 139:17-18)

As I was preparing to speak at a conference, the Lord brought to my attention the truth of praying alone to Him at night. Today, God is leading many of His children to be available to Him in prayer, even during the night.

- Moses, when dividing the Red Sea, saw the East wind blow the whole night and then make a way through the sea (Exodus 14:21).
- Joshua took an all night march before a surprise attack over the five kings and their armies (Joshua 10:9).
- Samuel cried all night in prayer to God when Saul disobeyed. After this prayer he went to anoint David as future king (1 Samuel 15:11).
- Jesus prayed all night before selecting His disciples (Luke 6:12).
- Peter was in prison and the church prayed all night earnestly for Him (Acts 12:1-18).
- Paul received the Macedonian call at night (Acts 16:9).
- Paul and Silas sang hymns in prison at midnight (Acts 16:25,26).

“The hearts of the people cry out to the Lord. O wall of the Daughter of Zion, let your tears flow like a river day and night; give yourself no relief, your eyes no rest. Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord. Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint from hunger at the head of every street”. (Lamentation 2:18-19)

Perhaps this is a special word to someone reading these words right now. Is God speaking to you? To be available even during the night? To pray or to listen to Him or to just be at His feet and experience His love?

“Lord, release this gift of praying in the night to many readers right now, I pray in your Name! Amen”.

At His Feet:

The phrase at his feet is repeated four times in this chapter of Ruth. It was a key factor in the events that unfolded. This phrase also appears elsewhere in The Bible. By looking at some examples, let us discuss some of the reasons why it is important for us to come to the feet of Jesus.

Mary of Bethany:

The New Testament records three instances when Mary of Bethany sat at the feet of Jesus. **Firstly, her priority was listening to His Word.** She deliberately chose this one thing, this supreme priority (Luke 10:38-42). Through taking time to listen to Jesus, she understood that Jesus had to suffer and die, even more so than the disciples understood. Secondly, in John 11:32 we see that when their brother died, Mary and Martha both said the same words to Jesus “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” But there was a difference. Mary said it while falling at his feet. This evoked a response of tears from Jesus. **She came to His feet with**

her perplexity. Finally, as recorded in John 12:1-11, **Mary came to the feet of Jesus with a one year's wage gift of love.** Her heart was filled with deep gratitude and adoration. The ripples of her action are still felt today. What an amazing influence for one act of adoration.

Oh! May the Lord release one year's wage gifts unto Him in these last days. I have already seen it happen and believe it will happen again and again for His glory. So, let us come to His feet, to listen to Him, to bring our perplexities to Him, to thank Him, adore Him and to pour our treasures out at His feet.

The Grateful Leper:

We are also reminded of the one leper out of ten, a Samaritan, who in gratitude to Jesus for healing him, came back and threw himself at His feet (Luke 17:11-19). How important to come back to His feet to say thank you.

John on the Island of Patmos:

The apostle John was exiled to Patmos because of his stand for Jesus and God's Word. He saw Jesus on the Lord's day, heard His voice and saw the glory and majesty of the risen, enthroned King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ. He immediately fell at His feet as though dead.

"When I saw him, I fell at his feet though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.'"
(Rev 1:17)

At his feet he received a very special responsibility. Earlier, at the cross, he had received the special responsibility to take care of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as his own mother. Later he was asked to write all that he was shown about the Seven Churches in Asia and about the closing events of history

“ Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. ’ ”
(Revelation 1:19)

Dear friends, we too need a fresh revelation of Jesus. As we receive this revelation, we will fall at His feet and receive His specific responsibility for us. Is He asking you to write for Him? To travel? To simply stay where you are? When we come to Him like this, He is delighted because He is a specialist in this area. He loves to redeem, restore, and recreate.

As He said to Jeremiah:

“ I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me? ’ ”
(Jeremiah 32:27)

We can trust Him with our lives because He gave His life for us.

Let us come daily to the feet of Jesus, our Kinsman Redeemer

13

OUR KINSMAN REDEEMER

“The Lord bless him!” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. ‘He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.’ She added, ‘That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.’ ” (Ruth 2:20)

In the previous chapter, we saw Ruth coming to Boaz’ feet and making that earnest plea,

“Spread the corner of your garment over me, ’ ” (Ruth 3:9).

She had come to Boaz, as her *goel*, her kinsman redeemer. He thanked her for coming and promised to deal with her request the very next day. Naomi and Ruth were probably the poorest people in Bethlehem. In contrast, Boaz was probably one of the richest men in Bethlehem. Initially none of them realized the special position they were in - Naomi and Ruth to receive redemption and Boaz to purchase it for them but now the glorious plan of God was unfolding.

Boaz, their *goel*, is a beautiful example of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Kinsman Redeemer. Down through the centuries Jesus has shown Himself as the Redeemer of lost men and the Restorer of hopeless situations. This is the area in which He excels. He came to this world for this very purpose. Let us now look at Jesus as portrayed for us by Boaz. I feel inadequate to write about our wonderful Lord, our Redeemer. I would like to pray before we start to read.

Oh, Lord, please reveal to us the glories of yourself and your glorious redemption. And please open our eyes that we may see Jesus, our great Redeemer! Amen.

The Kinsman Redeemer

A Kinsman Redeemer had to have five qualifications:

- ◆ He must have the right to redeem.
- ◆ He must have the power to redeem.
- ◆ He must be willing to redeem.
- ◆ He must pay the price of redemption
- ◆ He must have the receipt of redemption.

Boaz had all of these qualifications. He was a close relative. He had the financial resources to pay for the redemption. He was more than willing to redeem. He had probably already lost his heart to Ruth by this time. He was genuinely concerned for Naomi and that Elimelech's and Mahlon's names should not become extinct. After paying the price he would have received the receipt of redemption. What a precious, large-hearted *Goel* he was.

Shall we now turn our eyes upon Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Did He have all of these five qualifications? Let us investigate.

Jesus and the Right to Redeem

In the Book of Ruth there are three Hebrew words which are translated either as relative, kinsman or nearest kinsman. The word which is the most important is "*goel*", our nearest kinsman. However, in Chapter 2:1 and again in Chapter 3:2 the Hebrew word "*moda*", meaning relative, is used. In Chapter 2:20 the word "*qarob*" appears, which means practically the same as *moda*:

"Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz."
(Ruth 2:1)

" 'Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor.' "
(Ruth 3: 2)

If a man wanted to act as a “*goel*” he first had to be a *moda* (relative). Jesus had to acquire the right to redeem us by becoming our Brother, our Kinsman. Thank God that one day in heaven, Jesus Christ said to the Father, ‘Yes, I will go’. His incarnation, when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, gives Jesus the right to be our kinsman. This truth is clearly brought out in the Book of Hebrews 2: 10-18.

“For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.” (Hebrews 2:17)

However, the incarnation alone does not bring Him near enough to us. What about our sin? What about the products of sin such as shame and disgrace and loss? We are to blame for our sin. Thus, Jesus went one step further by dying for us on the cross of Calvary. He took our punishment, our shame and our guilt on Himself and died our death for us.

Roy Hession puts it well:

“At the manger the Eternal One was made in the likeness of men. (Philippians 2:7) but at the cross He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh (Romans 8:3) taking on Himself, once and for all God’s judgement on us.” The Book of Hebrews clarifies this point.

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” (Hebrews 2: 14,15)

- ◆ He shared in our humanity.
- ◆ He shared in our death by dying for us.
- ◆ He is our nearest Kinsman.

We may also ask “But what about the shame, disgrace and loss due to my sin? Does Jesus know about this? Was He made like unto

us in all things?" The answer is yes, my friend. He can forgive the sin and also the disgrace. He takes upon Himself the blame and shame of our sin. It was not His sin, it was our sin, our shame, our blame and our disgrace which He bore. In situations where we have only ourselves to blame, we can still come to Him and be redeemed.

Naomi must have been thrilled when she realised that Boaz her *moda* (relative) could also become her *goel*, her nearest kinsman redeemer. Suddenly she saw that her situation was no longer hopeless. Beloved reader, I pray that likewise you will see Jesus as your nearest Kinsman. He has the right to redeem you.

Maybe your life is in a mess right now. Maybe you feel a failure and regret the past. Perhaps your problem is too complicated and insoluble. Do not despair. Jesus is a specialist in such situations. He took upon Himself our shame and blame on the cross. You can come to Him.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

(2 Corinthians 5:21)

Jesus and the Power to Redeem

In the Old Testament the *goel* needed the financial resources to redeem. As we look at Jesus we ask, does He have the power to redeem? Can Jesus forgive all sin? Can He restore hopeless situations? Let us look at this in more detail.

a) The power to forgive sin

Yes, to everyone who reads this book let me shout with John the Baptist, "*Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world.*" (John 1:29, KJV). Only God can forgive sin and Jesus is God. In Mark 2:1-12 we are told of how four men brought a paralyzed man to Jesus. Jesus' first words to him were "*Son, your sins are forgiven.*" The Pharisees grumbled at this, saying, "*Who*

can forgive sins but God alone?’ ”. Jesus then demonstrated the reality of His divinity and His power to forgive sin by healing the man. Everyone was amazed. Jesus is able to forgive sin. Hallelujah! Dear reader, is there some sin you feel He cannot or will not forgive? Are you afraid that you have committed the unpardonable sin? If you are concerned about it, then believe me, you have not committed that sin. The concern that you are experiencing comes from the Holy Spirit.

Is it some deep-rooted sin?

Is it adultery?

Is it lying?

Is it stealing?

Is it murder?

Is it homosexuality?

Is it backsliding?

Is it carelessness and neglect?

Is it gossip?

Is it pride?

Is it envy or jealousy?

Is it involvement in drugs and alcohol?

Is it hurting your family members?

Is it deceit and deception?

Is it apathy?

Is it some secret sin?

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

(1 John 1:9)

Jesus has the power to forgive sin. Like Naaman, the Syrian General whose leprosy was cured as he dipped in the waters of Jordan,

Jordan so the leprosy of your sin can be deeply cleansed as you are immersed in the blood of Jesus Christ.

“So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.”
(2 Kings 5:14)

b) The Power to Restore Hopeless Situations

We may believe that Jesus can forgive sin but can He restore hopeless situations? I say with deep conviction “yes”, a thousand times “yes”. This is the very area in which He excels. Whatever we have brought upon ourselves by our sin does not surprise Him or render Him powerless.

What about the crippling sense of shame and disgrace?

What about the broken relationships?

What about the forfeited happiness?

What about the pain of loss?

What about a broken home and wayward children?

What about the complicated problems and mess we are in?

What about the financial quagmire we are in?

What about your special situation that only you and God know?

Who can reverse these things? Can He? Can Jesus do this? Again we say with all our hearts, **Yes, Yes, Yes! He can!** He specialises in failures and broken things. In the world, broken things are discarded or thrown out but God puts a high value on them. Listen to what God’s Word says;

“For this is what the high and lofty One says - he who lives forever, whose name is holy: I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

(Isaiah 57:15)

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” (Psalm 51:17)

Someone once said, “Whole, unbroken, unbruised men are of little value to God”. Your brokenness is qualifying you for God’s grace and the miracle of restoration. We could go further and state that the fame of our Lord Jesus Christ lies in the glorious recoveries He has brought about and continues to bring about. We read in the Gospels how His fame spread throughout all Syria.

“News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralysed, and he healed them.” (Matthew 4:24)

How did his fame spread? Through the mighty healing of paralytics, epileptics and demonised people. Dear reader, He is more than able to work in, and through, the situation in which you find yourself. Shall we dig a little deeper into this life changing and comforting truth?

The Divine Potter

“This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ‘Go down to the potter’s house, and there I will give you my message.’ So I went down to the potter’s house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.” (Jeremiah 18:1-4)

The vessel was marred in the hand of the Potter but He did not discard it. He broke it, melted it and reshaped it as seemed best to him. His second attempt was second in time but not in quality. It was not second best. Sometimes Satan lies to us that if we return to God after failure and sin, we will only have second best. No, my dear friend, God is able to restore, and from that time onwards He

makes your life the best it could be. Ruth's second marriage was certainly not second best. May I make a prophetic statement over everyone of you who is willing to wholeheartedly come to Jesus' feet as Ruth did?

“The best is yet to come for you”

“The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,” says the LORD Almighty. “And in this place I will grant peace,” declares the LORD Almighty.” (Haggai 2:9)

The latter glory will be greater than the former glory. The most golden chapters of your life, your family, your fellowship and your church are yet to be written. Why? Because there is a Redeemer, who is also El Shaddai, God Almighty. Why did God use the example of a Potter and not a carpenter or a blacksmith? Possibly because the potter does not waste any clay. Nothing is thrown away. If the shape is wrong, he breaks the vessel, softens the clay again and uses it to form the new vessel. God is the Divine Potter who specializes in remaking broken and marred vessels.

I knew a dental surgeon who was an expert in repairing the faces of children with a hare-lip and cleft palate deformity. You may know that children with such deformities present a sorry picture. It must be a shock for mothers and fathers when they first see their newborn baby with such a deformity. Some would even be horrified but my friend is never horrified when he sees such a patient. How do you think he feels? I think he gets excited when he sees such a child. He is probably thinking in his mind “when can I get my hands on this child.” Why? Because he knows he can do a perfect repair. He sees the end result and longs to be able to exercise his skill in effecting a reconstruction of the face. (Fame has come to this doctor through what he does).

In the same way, Jesus is not horrified when He sees our broken, bleeding, bruised and battered lives. He is excited when He thinks

of what he can do in remaking us. Jesus longs to repair our broken lives. He knows He can do a perfect job, if only we will let Him do His work in us.

The Master Craftsman

Another way to look at this same truth is to consider the Master Craftsman. He would make the design for a special carpet and a number of his workers would work on different segments of the carpet. Sometimes one of the workers would come to the Master Craftsman very upset and repentant. He had made a mistake and messed up the design. What would the Master Craftsman do then? He would not undo the mistake, as this would jeopardize the strength and integrity of the carpet. He would draw a new design and in a masterly way incorporate the mistake into it. Some say that the new design is often even better than the original would have been. **JESUS IS OUR MASTER CRAFTSMAN.** He even uses our mistakes and incorporates them into His design to do something beautiful with our lives. Don't waste your sorrows. Bring them all to Jesus. Shall we pause for a moment and consider the words of this song:

*Something beautiful, something good
All my confusion He understood
What have I to offer Him
But brokenness and strife
Yet He made something beautiful of my life.*

Think of what He made of some of the failures in the Bible:-

- ◆ James and John the ones who desired position **became** James the martyr and John the Beloved One, author of the book of Revelation.
- ◆ Mary Magdalene the demon-possessed **became** Mary Magdalene, who loved Jesus and who was the first witness to His resurrection.

- ◆ Thomas the doubter **became** Thomas the Missionary to South Asia.
- ◆ Peter the coward **became** Peter the heroic martyr and leader of the church.
- ◆ Saul the murderer **became** Paul the great missionary.
- ◆ Mark the deserter **became** Mark the evangelist, who wrote one of the four Gospels.

This list could be extended through 2000 years of church history. The truth is clear.

JESUS IS THE MASTER CRAFTSMAN.

God of Restoration

The first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah is a record of God's judgement on Israel for her sin. In these chapters, goel does not appear but from chapters 40-66, which is the Messianic prophecy, goel appears over and over again. Goel is sometimes translated Redeemer. God speaks over and over again of His desire and longing to restore Israel. Israel had sunk to its lowest point. Finally, judgement came through Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem and his exile of many Jews. But even before judgement came, the same prophet Jeremiah who prophesied judgement also prophesied restoration seventy years later. God loves to restore. When man is at his worst God is at His best. Hear what He says to Israel:

"Do I lack the strength to rescue you?" (Isaiah 50:2)

He has power to restore hopeless situations as He did for Israel. The process of restoration in the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah are thrilling to read, as are the restoration passages in Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah.

Over the past sixteen years my country, Sri Lanka, has seen the ravages of a bitter civil war. Everyone has been affected in one way or another. Thousands have been killed. Thousands have been

physically, emotionally and spiritually scarred. Buildings have been destroyed. Many people have emigrated. We have longed for and prayed for the restoration of our land. The Lord has deeply comforted us, rebuked us, challenged us and thrilled us with the story of the exile and restoration of Israel. The Old Testament prophetic books have come alive. We are waiting and longing to see a mighty restoration in our land. Our God is able. We long to see the history of our land changed and the teardrop nation once again become the pearl of the Indian Ocean.

Removing a Curse

Does Jesus have the power to redeem? Can He break the curse and set men free? Again we answer with a resounding YES! As a result of sin, idolatry and other evil things, the curse of sin has come on us but Galatians 3:13-14 says:

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”

God has broken the curse through the cross.

On the cross a wonderful exchange took place.

Jesus took our sin and gave us His righteousness

He took our shame - gave us His honour

He took our death - gave us His life

He took our penalty - gave us His forgiveness

He took our wounds - He gave us His wholeness

He became a curse for us - He gave us His blessing

I know of a family where two generations were deeply affected by alcoholism. Then came earnest repeated prayer that this curse of alcoholism will not go down into the next generation. GOD

gloriously answered this prayer. The next generation does not have a single person affected and many are serving the Lord. The blessing of God is clearly evident in the entire extended family.

Hallelujah!

So we sing at Christmas,

No more let sin and sorrow reign
 Nor thorns infest the ground
 He comes to make His blessing known
 Far as the curse is found.

(To the tune of **Joy to the World**)

Shame and Disgrace

Two of the sad products of sin are shame and disgrace. It is a burden which some of us carry. Can Jesus remove this shame from us? Does He have the power? I say "YES" my dear friend.

In the Book of Joel when God speaks of the process of restoration of Israel after repentance, He talks twice of 'shame' being removed

*" You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you; **never again will my people be shamed.** Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other; **never again will my people be shamed.**"*

(Joel 2: 26,27)

Dear Reader, are you under bondage due to shame or disgrace? Is it due to being:

An alcoholic?

An illegitimate child?

A failure?

Divorced?

Immoral?

Are you a Pastor unable to face others because you fell into sin of adultery or dishonesty?

Or are you a politician facing shame because you were caught in bribery?

A child who was caught cheating?

Are you homosexual and feel the shame and disgrace?

Are you in prison or an ex-prisoner?

Are you ashamed of the behaviour of your spouse, your son, your daughter, your father or your mother?

Whatever the situation, repent and come to Jesus. He has the power to restore you and give you back true dignity as a child of the King. He gave the prodigal son:

A new robe - a sign of restored dignity.

A ring - a sign of restored inheritance.

Shoes - a sign of restored sonship.

He will do the same for you.

Wasted Years

There can also be deep regret for the wasted years in our lives. How we long to go back and start again. Can our God do anything about this? Listen to the comforting words of Scripture.

“ I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten - the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm - my great army that I sent among you. ”

(Joel 2:25)

Yes, **He can restore the wasted years**. Let us go together to His feet and confess our need. Remember it is our need which qualifies us for His grace.

Failure

Failure is another area which can **cripple** us but let us remember that failure is never final with God. Failure can be one of God's best methods of breaking us in order to bless us.

I have emphasized in some detail this glorious truth that Jesus has the power to redeem. I want to say this clear and loud and blow this trumpet of hope to each of you.

Jesus has the power to forgive sin.

Jesus has the power to restore hopeless situations.

Jesus and the Willingness to Redeem

I do not think there is any doubt that Jesus is, was, and ever will be willing to redeem us. Boaz, the man was longing for a bride. Jesus, the Son of God is also longing for His bride - those who have come to Him to be redeemed. The Scripture is full of references to the fact that God loves us and is longing, waiting and desiring to redeem us unto Himself. For instance, Jesus' parable of the prodigal son reveals the Father heart of God. When the wayward son returned, the father ran to receive him. He forgot his dignity, his decorum and his dress and ran with joy to receive his son.

In the book of Hosea, the Spirit reveals to us the yearning heart of God. The longing of God to forgive and restore us. He does not want to give us up.

“ How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over; Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man - the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath. ” (Hosea 11:8,9)

God's inner being goes into spasms because of His compassion to wayward Israel. God is more than willing to redeem us. In his epistle, Peter reminds us that God does not want anyone to perish.

*“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, **not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**”*

(2 Peter 3:9)

I trust that this is sufficient to convince you of this truth. The whole Bible cries out to us that God is willing to redeem. Redemption is His initiative, not ours.

Jesus and the Price of Redemption

God saves us on the grounds of His grace. His grace and His love were willing to pay a price. A high price demanded by the law. Sin caused death. It was only through the shedding of blood that sin could be atoned and pardoned. Further, it had to be the blood from a sinless sacrifice which was shed. The hymn **‘There is a Green Hill Far Away’** puts it clearly for us:

There is a green hill far away,
Without a city wall,
Where the dear Lord was crucified,
Who died to save us all.

Oh, dearly, dearly has He loved,
And we must love Him, too;
And trust in His redeeming blood,
And try His works to do.

We may not know, we cannot tell
What pains He had to bear;
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.

He died that we might be forgiv’n,
He died to make us good.
That we might go at last to heav’n
Saved by His precious blood.

There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
Of heav’n and let us in.

God's Word makes it clear to us:

"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

(1 Peter 1:18,19)

The sacrifice was paid in full.**Paid in Full**

I once read a touching story of a pastor who returned to his home after three weeks to find his home very cold. On investigation he found that the Gas Company had cut off the gas supply and so the heating system was not working. He telephoned the Gas Company and was told by the person on the other end that he had not paid the bills and therefore his gas supply had been cut off. Whilst he was on the phone, he rummaged through the papers on his desk and he found the receipt which clearly stated that he had **paid in full**. Then with a firm voice he demanded that his gas supply be reconnected. Why? Because he had paid in full. Within minutes the gas supply was restored. This story illustrates a vital truth to us. Jesus has paid in full for our redemption. We can, and must, appropriate all of the blessings that flow from this glorious redemptive act of our Lord.

Jesus and the Receipt of Redemption

The receipt of the great act of redemption by Jesus is His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God the Father. He did not stay in the tomb.

"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."

(Romans 4: 25)

The resurrection is the greatest event in history. When He arose, Christ took back the authority from Satan, triumphing over him, sin,

sickness and death. Then forty days later He ascended to the Father. God raised Him up. He ascended to:

- a) take His rightful place by the Father.
- b) to prepare a place for us.
- c) to send the blessed Holy Spirit.
- d) to intercede for us.
- e) and to prepare for His second coming.

Paul asks four important questions in Romans 8:31-39:

- ◆ If God is for us who can be against us?
- ◆ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?
- ◆ Who is he who will condemn us?
- ◆ Who shall separate us from the love of God?

Then he assures us:

....that if God "did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"
(Rom 8: 32)

This "all things" will surely include restoration of all that we have lost. Paul further assures us that:

- ◆ Jesus died for us.
- ◆ He rose for us.
- ◆ He ascended for us.
- ◆ He is interceding for us.

If these statements are true, then why worry about the previous four questions? May this truth bless each one of us.

Before closing this chapter on Jesus our Kinsman Redeemer, allow me to tell you of one of God's great restorations. Handel, the

composer, was fifty-seven years old and suffering from a severe depression. The English nobility had snubbed him and he had stopped writing music. Then a fairly unknown poet wrote a libretto with the story of redemption and sent it to Handel. He wrote *A Sacred Oratorio* and below the words of Psalm 68:11 "*The Lord announced the word,*". Handel listlessly picked up the manuscript and read. He came to the portion where it read: "*He was despised and rejected of men,... He looked for someone to have pity on Him, but there was no man: neither found He any to comfort Him.*"

He identified with Jesus as he read the glorious Scripture portions about Him. The words began to throb in his breast. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Suddenly he grabbed his pen and began to write. In twenty-four days he finished the great composition. He did not leave his house. His servant was amazed as the master's tears blotched the paper he was writing on. At times he dropped his cup and ran to write. At times he was running through his house with his hands raised shouting Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Handel was revived, restored and revitalized. '**HANDEL'S MESSIAH**' is one of the greatest musical compositions ever written. Handel said at one point "I did see heaven opened and the LORD Himself on the throne".

May the Lord revive all of us and may we go forth like Handel to our greatest moments and achievements in life for His glory. He has the power to redeem and restore. Shall we do what Ruth did and come to the feet of our blessed Kinsman Redeemer, singing:

Cover me, cover me
Extend the border of thy mantle over me
For Thou art my nearest kinsman
Cover me, cover me, cover me.

14

Ruth's Third Great Choice

Again we recall the words of Boaz to Ruth as she lay at his feet: *“The Lord bless you, my daughter. This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier. You have not run after the younger men whether rich or poor.”* (3:10). Why did Boaz say this? What made this choice even greater than her earlier choice to leave Moab and come with Naomi? I believe Ruth was showing her true nature, her true unselfishness. She was only thinking of her vow to Naomi, Naomi's needs and Mahlon's family line. She saw she could help in the restoration of all that this family had lost. Of course, she would gain from it herself eventually. She submitted to Naomi's plan. What other responses could she have made?

Ruth could have said, “there's no future for me as a gleaner. I will never be able to rise up even though Boaz is kind to me. It's hard to be living in a rundown farmhouse. It's hard looking after an old mother-in-law. It's very humiliating for a woman with a good background like me to be so dependent. These young men seem interested in me. I am young and attractive. I have talents. I will marry one of them. After all, God should understand. I have kept my vow to come with Naomi and make Yahweh my God. Moreover, if I marry I can help Naomi better. Lord, at least remember me for my partial obedience to my commitment”.

Had she done this, there would have been a number of sad consequences. The family lands would not have been redeemed. Naomi may have been deserted. There would have been no seed in Mahlon's name and Elimelech's family would have become extinct

in Israel. Boaz would have been lonely and Ruth would have missed God's glorious plan for her and gone out of the pages of Biblical redemptive history. What a loss! Thank God she did not do this and abort God's plan. We said earlier that what cannot be tested cannot be trusted. Ruth's commitment to Naomi and her God were tested in the crucible of life. In Chapter two she chose to be a gleaner and took the risk of being ill-treated. Now again by choosing to submit to Naomi's plan, she was proving the reality of her commitment. Surely God's smile and favour were on this lovely young widow. Likewise, He will smile on us as we carry through our commitments to Him whatever the cost.

Risk of Being Misunderstood

I am indebted to Jack Hayford for prompting to me this truth after reading his book "A New Time and Place". In Chapter two, Ruth took the risk of being molested. In Chapter three she takes the risk of being misunderstood. If someone saw her in the night going alone and lying at Boaz' feet, what would they have thought? Of course, as I said earlier, there was nothing immoral in Ruth's action. She was a noble woman. She was a pure woman. But in submitting to Naomi's plan she took the risk of being misunderstood, also by Boaz. As we launch out in our commitments to serve the Lord and in obedience to Him, we too may face similar situations. Let us learn from Ruth's example. If we are obedient to Him, He will look after our reputation. There are two other examples which should help us understand this.

Mary

When Mary the mother of Jesus said to the angel Gabriel, "*Here, I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be to me as you will.*", she was opening herself to great misunderstanding. Her obedience and submission to the Lord would certainly have caused her, her fiancée, her family and her friends much embarrassment. Who would have believed the story that she had conceived through the Holy Spirit and not through another man? This stigma was carried even into the life of Jesus. In John 8:41 the Jews made a subtle

statement to Jesus implying that He was born of fornication. *Jesus said, "You are doing the things your own father does, but they protested saying, We are not illegitimate children. The only Father we have is God himself.*

Mary and Jesus had to live with this shadow of doubt over the actual facts concerning His birth. So what! God honoured them both.

Peter

In Acts 10, Peter chose to break a deep-seated prejudice and a deeply-rooted practice and went to a Gentile home. Of course, God prepared him whilst he was in Joppa by means of a vision. This action was risky and could have jeopardized his leadership in the early Jewish church but Peter submitted and obeyed God and was God's instrument in that first Gentile Pentecost. It is interesting that it was at Joppa that many years earlier Jonah had refused to submit to God's orders to go to the Gentiles. Now years later, whilst in Joppa, Simon, son of Jonas, breaks the prejudice and follows God's orders to go to the Gentiles.

Aborting God's Plan

Today, many of us are grieved and shocked over the number of abortions being performed all over the world. It is the world's greatest mass murder carried out by medical professionals, quacks and criminals. It is a terrible sin against God and against innocent, helpless unborn babies. However, there is another kind of abortion in which we, as God's children, are participating. The abortion of God's glorious plan for our lives - because we want to have it our way. We abort God's plan for the pleasures and conveniences of life. How sad. While the abortionists are guilty of the first kind of murder, we are guilty of the second. However, there is one big difference. Unlike the aborted babies, we can still turn back to God and He will start all over again with us and do something beautiful once again, (although I do expect all these aborted babies to be around the throne of God).

Applications for today

This truth of staying on and helping to revive the old, is a very precious one. Too many of us tend to leave when things get difficult or rough. This can be our church, mission or marriage. Instead of repenting, we choose to opt out. We feel that others are to blame and not us. So we take our leave but often take our problems with us into whatever situation we find ourselves in next. God is waiting for us to repent; He wants to work in and through us for the restoration of the place or situation we are in. Elimelech chose to opt out and he suffered a great loss. Ruth chose to stay and revive a broken family.

This does not mean that we should never move from one church, or mission, or ministry to another. Sometimes God may be calling us into a new field of service. We must be obedient and follow Him but that is then a different situation. It is a move in response to God's call. The Lord may want us to move on if a ministry has lost its call, its stand for God and has moved out of God's purpose. After attempts to correct this have failed, the Lord may lead us out of such a situation. We should then be obedient and not hold fast to our traditions. Paul went to the synagogues and when they rejected the Lord, he left them and went to the Gentiles. Having said this, I would like to repeat that God may want us, like Ruth, to keep to our commitments and work for revival.

God's Promises

"They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations." (Isaiah 61:4)

Once the Lord quickened this promise to us when we prayed for 'sick mission hospitals' that is, mission hospitals that have lost their original vision and are struggling with many problems. Some of these hospitals could almost write above their entrance 'Ichabod': *the Glory Has Departed*. (1 Samuel 4:21). Yet, we do praise God for the many devoted staff members who continue to

serve in these hospitals with deep dedication and fervour, longing for genuine revival. May God bless you dear brothers and sisters, and may the Lord grant you your desire. We believe that in the coming years God will bring a powerful restoration to many Christian health care institutions. Jesus is the Lord of healing and health and - may I ask you to please pray to Him for this restoration.

This principle can also be applied to marriages. How sad that so many fail and end in divorce. May God help us to pray for His help in mending instead of ending marriages. When we choose to mend the old and bring renewal and when we ask the Lord to do it for us, He steps in and does it in a way that often has never even entered our heart or mind.

Mending things, not ending things

by Rev. Alan Thornhill

“Are there any old homes to mend ?

Any old hearts to mend ?

Any father or daughter

Don't get on as they oughter

Any old hurts and hates to mend?

“In a world of smash and grab

Where we're handy at giving each other the jab,

Somebody needs to start and learn the difficult art

Of mending things, mending things

A lot more rewarding than ending 'things;

For a world at war,

Or a mother-in-law,

We need someone for mending things.

“Once on a lonely hill,

They got hold of a Feller they wanted to kill,

They decided to chuck Him out,

'Cos He would keep going about,

Just mending things, mending things,

A lot more rewarding than ending things,

But He's still around.
 Some people have found
 Just going on mending things."

(From Roy Hession's book "Our Nearest Kinsman")

"Half-Built Towers"

Another problem we have in Christendom is the number of "half-built towers" or unfinished projects. Many begin with fanfare and flourish but soon fade away. Great plans are made, great projects envisioned but when the pressure of discipline, sacrifice, commitment, self-denial and perseverance begin to be felt, we give up. It is here that, like Ruth, we must persevere to the end.

Moses provides us with a good example. When Israel sinned, God said, "*Moses, I will put an end to these people and destroy them and build a new nation through you.*" What an offer! Most people would have grabbed it without a second thought, but not Moses. He could not envision a future apart from his people. He began to intercede and plead with God to spare the nation and God changed His mind. "*But Moses sought the favour of the Lord his God. 'O Lord' he said, why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'* Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. (Exodus 32: 11-14) Moses too was interested in mending things rather than ending them.

Let us look at four Scripture portions that have deeply encouraged me to persevere in the ministry of Healthcare Christian Fellowship.

Our goal is to see an army of Christian healthcare workers raised up all over the world and for this army, linked with churches and other Christian ministries, to see a large number of patients come to know Christ and be added to God's Kingdom and the local church. We want to, by His grace, build God's kingdom in the health fields of the world. This is not an easy task but we must persevere. The same is true for any vision or mission in which you are involved.

- ◆ *Then the LORD replied: Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.* (Habakkuk 2:2-3)

Write down the vision. Make it plain. Though it linger, wait for it. If God has spoken, then what God has spoken with His mouth, He will fulfill with His hands. (II Chronicles 6:14)

- ◆ *To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations.* (Revelation 2:26)

As we persevere in doing His will, He will clothe us with more and more authority in prayer and ministry.

- ◆ *Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.* (Revelation 2:10)

The time has come that many of us may have to lay down our lives for Christ. We must not turn back.

- ◆ *Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.* (Psalm 126:5-6)

Beloved, we may now have tears, but do not forget that the 'weepers will be reapers'.

The Omega Anointing

The late Kjell Sjoberg, that beloved intercessory leader from Sweden, used the term “Omega Anointing” to refer to the anointing of God’s Spirit to finish the tasks that He has given to us. As I write, I smile to myself because I have needed this anointing so much to finish this book. Many of us have many unfinished tasks which we know God has given us but we have not completed. Shall we bow before Him right now and ask Him for this anointing, His wisdom, His strength and skill to finish the task? Paul’s words are a challenge to us,

“Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

In conclusion, we return to Ruth. She made a great choice to persevere with her commitment in Moab. We said earlier that decisions determine our destiny. This decision of Ruth opened for her an undreamed of, unbelievable destiny.

Beloved reader, you have only one life to live. Do not lose anything that God has for you because of an unsubmitive will. Let the Book of Ruth speak to you afresh again.

A poem I received some years ago may be appropriate at this time. It was written by a blind missionary, Delores Smeeton.

IF I SHOULD QUIT

If I should quit before my work is done,
The work commissioned by God’s only Son,
How could I stand before Him on that day?
How could I face Him, and what would I say?

If I should quit - just drop out of the race
I wonder if someone would take my place:

And would I *cause* a Christian friend to fall
Or some unsaved friend to reject God's call?

If I should quit, how could I face myself,
And place so many scriptures on the shelf?
A quitter or a conqueror I can be
And God has left the choosing upto me.

(2 Timothy 4:7)

Persevering in Prayer

Perseverance is very much needed in the ministry of intercession. When we know we are praying for something in God's will, we should never quit praying. Jesus taught us two parables to illustrate this point:

a) Luke 11:5-10

In this parable we read of:

- i) a needy friend - those in need.
- ii) a praying friend - we, intercessors.
- iii) a mighty friend - the LORD.

The praying friend finally received all that was required for his needy friend from his mighty friend. He received it because of his shameless persistence and brazen impudence. This is the meaning of the original word which is variously translated. The praying friend was willing to identify with his needy friend and to make sacrifices for him. This gave him a position of authority from which he could ask for what was needed. Let us ask and keep on asking. Let us seek and keep on seeking. Let us knock and keep on knocking. He who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (Paraphrase of Luke 11:9,10)

b) Luke 18:1-8

Here the widow comes to the unjust judge and wears him out until she finally receives justice. Jesus told us that it was her persistence that enabled her to receive an answer. Then Jesus said

“Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” As His children, He expects us to go to Him day and night, He has promised that we will receive an answer. Think of the advantages that we have over this widow, as we come to the Heavenly Father and she went to an unjust judge.

WIDOW

She had no relationship with the judge.

The judge had no personal interest in her, or her case.

She had access to him only during the court hearing.

She had no promises given to her by the judge.

She had no advocate

She came alone

US

We come to our Heavenly Father.

Our Father is personally interested in us and the causes of His kingdom.

We have direct access to Him on any day, at any time.

We have many precious promises in God's Word.

We have an advocate, JESUS CHRIST at the right hand of God.

Our requests are carried by other believers too.

Yet she got her request. How much more should we expect, as we boldly come to Him.

At the end of the parable Jesus asked a sad question, *“When the Son of man comes, will He find faith on earth?”* Shall we jump up and say with burning hearts, “Yes, Lord, in us you will find faith. We will not disappoint you. Together with Him, let us ask and receive:

- 1) Salvation of lost souls.
- 2) Spiritual awakening among God's people.
- 3) Other things on His agenda.

Anna the Prophetess (Luke 2:36-38)

Anna prayed for over fifty years for Jesus the Messiah to come into the world.

She sacrificed sleep.

She sacrificed food.

She sacrificed another marriage.

She sacrificed social fellowship.

She did this for five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, more than fifty years. She never gave up. She continued speaking to the Lord until one day she saw God's answer to her prayer and she spoke of Him to all who were looking for Israel's redemption. What a moment!

Thus, dear brother, dear sister, don't quit praying. The answer may be just around the corner, even as each step Ruth took brought her closer to the glorious ending God had planned for her.

Sir Winston Churchill, then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, was to address the graduates at the passing out ceremony for Army officers. Everyone was eager to hear the great man's advice. He got up and gave a nine-word talk. He said, "Never, never, never, never, never, never, never give up." and then sat down. No one ever forgot that speech!

Ruth chose to go down to the threshing floor that night. It was a night never to be forgotten in God's redemptive history. She made a magnificent choice. Dear Reader, even now as you read, won't you also make a great choice like Ruth and submit to God's plans? Has the wine run out in your life? Then, beloved, whatever He says to you, do it (John 2:5).

15

WAIT MY DAUGHTER

“Then Naomi said, Wait , my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today”
(Ruth 3:18)

Ruth returned to Naomi after her night at the threshing floor, with a heart bursting with excitement and her shawl bursting with barley. The encounter that night was heart-warming, history-changing and heaven-approved.

As I said earlier, it is doubtful whether either Boaz or Ruth slept much following their late-night conversation. It’s highly likely that Naomi did not sleep much either. She was probably longing to find out how it had all turned out. When Ruth returned she told Naomi everything and gave her the six measures of barley. As Boaz said, she wouldn’t go back empty handed. Tears must have filled Naomi’s eyes. After all, she was the one who said, *“I have come back empty handed.”* Boaz must have heard my complaints, she may have thought. “O Lord, You know everything and have filled me with good things.”

Ruth must have had some questions and perhaps a little anxiety. She had lost her heart to Boaz but there were a few matters that were not clear. Who was this other kinsman redeemer? Would he say yes? She probably hoped it would be a no. How long will all this take? Boaz said ‘today’ but can this be done so quickly? Would he keep his word? Would there be a question when they found she was a Moabitess?

Then Naomi gave Ruth some sound advice, words of wisdom that ring down the centuries. *“Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.”* (Ruth 3: 18). What beautiful words of wisdom and comfort.

I still remember the day I proposed to my wife Ranji. I had asked my parents to write to her parents, saying that their son wanted to marry their daughter. Then I had to go back to work in Kandy. My father must have known my anxiety in waiting. A few days later he sent a telegram. I don't recall the exact wording but it was something like, “Praise God! Favorable reply received.” What a joy that was and how thoughtful of my father.

Naomi's words to Ruth contain some vital instructions and encouragement. Wait my daughter. Just let go and relax and let Boaz handle this. Wait and see how it works out. You can rest because he will not rest. She knew Boaz was a man of his word and that he would not rest till he settled the matter. Ruth could rest on that assurance. There was nothing else she could do. “He will settle the matter today.” Ruth was anxious so Naomi assured her that Boaz would act with the dawning of the new day. His word was as good as his deed. What wonderfully comforting and faith filled words!

Beloved friend, this may be a word for you today from the Holy Spirit. If you, like Ruth, have come to the feet of your ‘Boaz’, the Lord Jesus Christ, in true repentance, humility and trust then be sure your cause is in His hands. You can be still, wait, let go and relax and know that He is God (Psalm 46:10). You can rest because He will not rest. He will begin to take up the matter today. I would like to apply this truth to three different areas:

- **Wait for Him to unravel the mess we've made of our lives**

We come to Him saying, “Redeem me, Lord Jesus!” Dear friends, He immediately forgives our sin and accepts us but we may have to

wait as He begins to restore the hopeless situations we are in. He will do it but we have to cooperate in this process of restoration. We need to put right the wrongs we've done, make restitution and open ourselves to His Word, His Spirit and His love. Then we can say with the apostles, "*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*" (2 Corinthians 3:18). Perhaps we are waiting to see Him work out some purpose in our ministry or family. It may take time but if it has been truly entrusted to Him, we can wait in restful expectancy.

● Assurance of salvation

The lack of assurance of salvation is very common among God's people. We feel we cannot say with a clear conscience, "I am a child of God and I am sure that He has forgiven me and accepted me." For this reason many of us are weak in prayer, in witnessing and in spiritual warfare. Of course, our lack of assurance may also be due to the fact that we are not actually saved or to harbouring unconfessed sin or to a lack of knowledge.

Here is a word of encouragement: you don't have to work for your salvation. You will not be saved by reading the Bible more, praying more, giving more or witnessing more. No, dear friends, in contrast to Naomi's words about Boaz, "until he has settled the matter", we can shout with gladness that our Lord Jesus Christ has finished the matter! There is nothing more to be done. You can rest and stop working for your salvation. Just gaze at the cross and the efficacy and the power of the blood of Jesus Christ. I pray that right now, as you read and confess and repent of sin and look on Him that you will receive this deep assurance.

"O Lord, please do this for the one who needs this assurance of salvation. We bind the lies of Satan, the accuser of the brethren and we loose God's truth to bring light into his or her heart. Thank you, Lord. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

● **We can confidently leave our concerns with Him**

*“Why do you say, O Jacob and complain, O Israel: My way is hidden from the Lord, my cause is disregarded by my God?”
(Isaiah 40:27)*

Here the Lord is pleading with His people, “Don’t complain. Your way is not hidden from Me. Your cause is not disregarded by Me.” This is a word from the Lord for some of you, you can wait, you can rest because your cause is in His Hands. Have you brought it to His feet? Then wait with confidence.

What is troubling you?

- ◆ A family problem?
- ◆ A Medical or financial problem?
- ◆ An upcoming examination?
- ◆ Your child’s marriage?
- ◆ A wayward son/daughter?
- ◆ Some false accusation you have to bear?
- ◆ A relationship problem in your church, office or workplace?
- ◆ Some purpose of God which seems to be delayed?

Beloved reader, bring it to Jesus’ feet. Your cause is not disregarded by your God.

DIVINE DELAYS

There is an interesting theme in the Bible. We may call it Divine Delays. It makes a fascinating study. Ruth’s delay was just one day, but others have had to wait years or even generations. However the principle is the same. Let us look at some examples:

Abraham and Sarah

They had to wait twenty- five years before God's promise of providing them with a child was fulfilled. What a long wait! But God had promised and He kept His word.

*Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as **he had said**, and the LORD did for Sarah **what he had promised**. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, **at the very time God had promised him**. (Genesis 21:1-2).*

Jesus and the Disciples

After the feeding of the five thousand Jesus sent His disciples across the sea of Galilee. He went up to pray on a mountain. The whole night they struggled with the boat and fierce winds. Maybe they were tired and maybe they argued with each other. Jesus saw it all, and yet He delayed. Finally, in the fourth watch, between 3 a.m and 6 a.m, He came to them, walking on the water. What was the final result? They worshipped Him and had a fresh revelation of His glory. This was the purpose for the delay.

Mary, Martha and Lazarus

In John 11:5 we read that Jesus loved Martha, her sister Mary and their brother Lazarus. Lazarus was very sick and the sisters sent a message to Jesus,

"Lord, the one you love is sick. When he heard this, Jesus said: This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory, so that God's Son may be glorified through it." (John 11: 3-4)

Then follows the paradoxical words of John 11:5, that Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus. He loved and yet He delayed. No good physician delays to answer a call from a sick patient. Then why this delay by the Great Physician? Because he had a greater

purpose, the glory of God. He even allowed His closest friends to experience the agony of their loved one's death because He had an ultimate higher purpose. As a result many believed on Him.

The Martyrs of Revelation Chapter 6

When he opened the fifth seal I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice: How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until You judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood? (Rev. 6:9-10)

This same question, "How long O Lord?", is also found elsewhere in the Bible. Habakkuk, during the time of apostasy in Israel asked God the same question. The martyrs were told to wait until their number had been completed. Perhaps some of us will be among them.

The Second Coming of Christ

Nearly 2,000 years ago Jesus said, "I am coming soon." He repeated it a number of times. We are still waiting. But be sure, His delay is not an accident. He will definitely come in great glory. He is waiting because of His grace and mercy and his long suffering desire that none should perish.

What We *Should Not* Do During a Divine Delay

a) Take Matters in Our Own Hand

King Saul, poised for battle, was told by Samuel, the priest, to wait seven days until he returned. Saul waited seven days and his men began to scatter. The Philistines were ready to fight. Saul got scared and impatient and acted presumptuously in sacrificing the burnt offering which was the exclusive privilege and responsibility of the priests. As he finished, Samuel arrived. If only he had waited a little longer. For his foolish, presumptuous act, he was told that his kingdom would not endure (1 Samuel 13:5-14).

b) Follow the Customs of the Day

As mentioned above, Abraham and Sarah waited many years for a baby. Finally, Sarah became impatient and followed the custom of the time, giving her maid-servant Hagar, to Abraham. What a grievous mistake. Hagar conceived and gave birth to Ishmael. What trouble this decision caused. They acted on their own initiative, using common sense instead of trusting God's specific promise. Dear friends, we too need to be wary of the customs of our day. Sometime we say, "Well, this is our culture." Have you realized that somethings in our culture are not God's ways? We should never think that just because everybody is doing it, it's alright. Rather, we should agree with Nehemiah who said, "*Everybody has done it, but so did not I, for I feared the Lord.*" (Nehemiah 5:15 paraphrased).

c) Yield to Pressure - Aaron and the Golden Calf

Moses was on the mountain, meeting with God and he was absent for forty days. The people were convinced that he had died and things got out of hand. Sadly, Aaron failed as a leader. He fabricated one of the most unlikely and lamest excuses in the Bible. When Moses returned and questioned Him he said:

They said to me, make us gods who will go before us. So I told them, whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off. Then they gave me the gold and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!
(Exodus 32:23-24).

We sometimes turn to idols when experiencing divine delays. Dear friend, are you disappointed in your ministry, or your walk with God? Have you made an idol? It could be a hobby, television, sports, work or your ministry. You will be disappointed in the end and miss God's glorious plan. Wait, my friend, wait on the Lord.

d) Lighting Our Own Fires

The Lord exhorts us to do two things whilst waiting for a breakthrough: **trust in the Name of the Lord and rely on Him.**

The answer will come even though there is currently a delay. The end result is that we learn to love, depend on, and trust in our God more deeply. He warns us

Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the word of His servant? Let Him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. But now, all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you will receive from My hand: You will lie down in torment. (Isaiah 50:10-11)

What a clear warning. This is a picture of God's child, walking in the dark and God seems silent. There is no clear light on the way. Beware! Be warned! Be careful not to light your own fires or to make your own escape route.

Beloved brother and sister, are you in the dark right now about some situation in your life? Then trust and rely on the Lord and wait for Him. "*Weeping may endure for a night but joy comes in the morning!*" (Psalm 30:5b). Don't light your own torches. Wait on God. He will lead you through to glory.

e) Scoffing at God's Promise of the Second Coming

First of all you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say; 'Where is this 'coming' He promised? Ever since our Fathers died everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.' (2 Peter 3:3-4)

If you are one of those scoffers, please listen: He is delaying His coming for you, my friend. He does not want you to perish. He wants you to come to Him and find salvation and forgiveness and deliverance from the judgement to come. Repent and return to the LORD. He is coming very soon.

What We *Should Do* When Facing Divine Delays

Watch, pray and be prepared. Our Lord gave us the soul searching parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). All ten were invited to the banquet. All had lamps. The bridegroom delays. He arrives at midnight, because the five foolish virgins lacked sufficient oil they were denied admission to the bridal feast, while the five wise virgins were invited in. Beloved, as Jesus said, “*Keep watch, for at an hour you know not, I will come!*” Let us be prepared, watchful and in readiness as we wait for God to fulfill His promises, especially the promise of His return.

After the Delay - What?

Deliverance and glorious answers follow divine delays. God has some great surprise or place around the corner. Whilst waiting in the dark, we can wait with expectation. Look at the barren women in the Bible: Sarah, Rebecca, Rachael, Samson’s mother, Hannah, Elizabeth, the barren woman of Isaiah 54. Then look at the sons born to them: Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist, the Promise of expansion. What a list! All great in God’s sight. All born after a time of deep sorrow, agony, darkness and tears. When finally the trumpet sounds and the Lord Jesus appears it will be the most glorious thing we could ever imagine or dream about.

Perseverance in Prayer

Sometimes a delay leads us to persevere in prayer. Jesus taught us to persevere until He answers. The delay can be due to resistance by the powers of darkness, as Daniel’s answer was delayed by the prince of Persia. In these circumstances, persevering prayer breaks the stronghold of the enemy and releases God’s answer. The Holy Spirit gives us discernment as to the cause of the delay.

Confess Sin and Turn Back to God

Sometimes the delay may be due to our own sin. During such delays it is good to examine ourselves and to see if anything in us is hindering God's answer.

Conclusion

Naomi told Ruth, *"Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens today."* The verses of a catchy song go like this:

We must Wait, Wait, Wait, Wait
Wait on the LORD.
We must Wait, Wait, Wait, Wait
Wait on the LORD.
And learn our lessons well
In His timing He will tell us,
What to do, Where to go, What to say.

As I close this Chapter, I believe the Holy Spirit whispers to each of us, "Wait my son, wait my daughter, for your cause, your problem, your need is in His capable hands."

*For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.
(2 Chronicles 16:9)*

*Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion, for the Lord is a God of justice, blessed are all who wait for Him!
(Isaiah 30:18)*

This last verse teaches us that God rises on tiptoe to be gracious to us. Let us wait with expectation. Jesus, our Heavenly Boaz will not disappoint us.

PART IV

RUTH - CHAPTER 4 (The Word of God)

Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there. When the kinsman-redeemer he had mentioned came along, Boaz said, Come over here, my friend, and sit down. So he went over and sat down.

Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, "Sit here", and they did so. Then he said to the kinsman-redeemer "Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am the next in line".

"I will redeem it", he said. Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property". At this, the kinsman-redeemer said, "Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it".

(Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel).

So the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself". And he removed his sandal. Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought

from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records. Today you are witnesses!"

Then the elders and all those at the gate said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the off-spring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah".

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive and she gave birth to a son.

The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth".

Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. The women living there said, "Naomi has a son". And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

This, then, is the family line of Perez :

*Perez was the father of Hezron,
Hezron was the father of Ram,
Ram the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon,
Salmon the father of Boaz,
Boaz the father of Obed,
Obed the father of Jesse;
and Jesse the father of David.*

16

BOAZ SETTLES THE MATTER

Naomi advised Ruth to, “*Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.*” (emphasis mine). The word **today** is of some significance.

Today

Boaz promised Ruth to deal with the matter in the morning. Twice, Boaz told the elders: “**Today** you are witnesses. I have bought the property and I have acquired Ruth, the Moabitess as my wife.” No procrastination here. The word **today** is of great significance in the Word of God. Jesus said to Zacchaeus, “*Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.*” (Luke 19:5). This is one of the eight times that Jesus says, “I must.” It indicates an urgency and a priority. It had to be **today** and not tomorrow or some other time. Zacchaeus came down at once. After he had confessed his sin and promised to make restitution, Jesus proclaimed, “**Today** salvation has come to this house.” (Luke 19:9a)

Dear friends, the Lord declares: “**Today**, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts! **Today**, is the day of salvation.” If you are reading these words and have not made Jesus your Lord and Saviour, may I ask you to do this **today**? If you have taken up some prayer burden for some matter, be assured that **today** your prayer has reached heaven and He has taken note. Remember Daniel prayed for three weeks before receiving an answer. A divine messenger told him that his prayer had been noted from the very first day that he began to seek God (Daniel 10).

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Today is a very important day. It could be one of the greatest days of your life. Shall we pause in our reading, dear friend. Do you want to receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior **today**? Then please say this prayer to the Lord. Ask and receive salvation **today**:

Lord Jesus, thank you for Your love for me.

I ask You to forgive my sins. You died on the cross for me.

I repent and turn away from my independent life to You.

Please come into my heart and life.

I believe that You are the risen, ascended and soon coming King of kings and Lord of lords. Let your Holy Spirit fill me.

I dedicate my life to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

If you prayed this prayer from your heart, Jesus will surely come into your life for, *"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."*

(John 1:12).

Please tell someone that you have prayed the prayer above and made the decision to follow Christ.

Boaz and the Other Kinsman Redeemer

As he had promised, Boaz went straight to the town gate that morning and waited. The gate was the place where legal transactions were made. When the other kinsman redeemer, who had a prior claim on Naomi's property, came along, Boaz warmly invited him to sit with him. Then Boaz asked ten of the village elders to join them. This transaction, unlike the one that happened the night before, was going to be made in public. In the presence of the witnesses, Boaz offered to redeem the land belonging to Elimelech. He added that if the next of kin was not willing to do this, he would. The other kinsman redeemer said, "I will do it!" Then, with his heart beating faster, Boaz brought up the other crucial issue. With the land comes Ruth, the Moabitess to maintain the name of Elimelech, Mahlon and their property.

There may have been a hush. I can imagine the man, shifting his feet, looking around, a battle raging in his heart. He was like most of

us, self-centered and inward-looking. After what must have seemed an eternity to Boaz, he finally made up his mind and said honestly, *“Then I cannot redeem it because I may endanger my own estate. You can redeem it yourself. I cannot do it”* (Ruth 4:6) I can just picture Boaz at that moment. He had probably expected this, having carefully planned his strategy the night before but he could not have been sure of the outcome. Boaz was overjoyed. This was the moment he had waited for. The other man sealed the deal by removing his sandal and giving it to Boaz. He thereby relinquished his claim and Boaz grabbed the opportunity. With a heart bursting with emotion and joy he made the proclamation:

“Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon’s widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records. Today you are witnesses! So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.
(Ruth 4: 9, 10, 13)

What a fascinating story. This is a picture of what the Lord Jesus does for us. He publicly triumphed over the enemy and now asks us to come to Him and be redeemed. He has paid the price. As Boaz took Ruth as His wife, Jesus will take us as His Bride and His sons and daughters.

The Kind Act of Boaz

The other kinsman redeemer had lost a golden opportunity of being a vital part of God’s redemptive history. He refused because he was not willing to risk his reputation nor his resources. Boaz is such a contrast! He wanted to be the Goel, the kinsman redeemer for Naomi and Ruth. So he takes the risk. His reputation could have gone down as people wondered why he married such a young woman, a widow, a Moabite. In addition, it is most likely that Boaz had to pay a tidy sum to redeem both the property and Ruth but he

never gave this a second thought. He was thrilled to be able to do this for Naomi and Ruth. Truly he was Mr Great Heart. What a reward he had in the end!

In the same way, Jesus, our *goel*, gave up all His rights, His royalty, His reputation, and His resources in order to redeem us, lost men and women. In Philippians 2:5-11 we read of the seven steps downward that Jesus took in order to redeem us:

made Himself nothing and no reputation.

taking the very nature of a servant.

made in human likeness.

found in appearance as a man.

humbled Himself.

became obedient to death.

even death on a cross.

Praise God! Because of this God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him a Name above every name, that at the mention of the Name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

*My Lord has garments so wondrous fine,
And myrrh their texture fills;
Its fragrance reached to this heart of mine,
With joy my being thrills.*

Chorus *Out of the ivory palaces
Into a world of woe,
Only His great eternal love.
Made my Saviour go.*

*His life had also its sorrows sore,
For aloes had a part;
And when I think of the cross He bore,
My eyes with tear-drops start.*

His garments too were in cassia dipped,
 With healing in a touch;
 Each time my feet in some sin have slipped,
 He took me from its clutch.

In garments glorious He will come,
 To open wide the door;
 And I shall enter my heavenly home.
 To dwell for ever more.

He became man and triumphed over Satan, sin and death, as a true man filled with the Holy Spirit. Words fail to describe this wonderful act of redemption through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Law and Grace

The Book of Ruth is an epic on the subject of “redemption by grace”. In the light of this we can surmise the significance of the other kinsman redeemer. If Boaz is obviously a picture of Christ and His redeeming grace, then the other kinsman redeemer is a picture to us of the law, the ten commandments, given by God through Moses. The Law was good. But the law cannot save.

The Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians tells us very clearly the purpose of the law.

“So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.”
(Galatians 3v.24)

The law was a tutor or a guardian to lead us to Christ.

So, this kinsman redeemer faced with the issue of a Moabitess being included among God’s people backed out of the transaction. Thank God that grace (Boaz) found a way to include this precious Moabite woman.

About nine months ago I heard a few messages on the Book of Romans by Rev. John Piper of the Bethlehem Baptist church in Minneapolis, USA. These messages deeply stirred me and the light of the Holy Spirit shone clearly on the passage; Romans 3v.21-28. John Piper called it the “Acropolis of the Bible”. I felt as if I had been converted afresh and since then have used Romans 3v.24 as a vital

verse in sharing the Gospel. I think the Lord has graciously helped me to personally lead more people to Christ in these last nine months than perhaps in the last three to five years. The theme of this brilliant passage of Scripture is GRACE as opposed to LAW and the REDEMPTION that is ours in Christ Jesus. So what I write in the next few pages is what I learned from the Holy Spirit through John Piper.

Romans 3 v 21-23

“But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is now no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

From Romans 1 v. 18 to Romans 3 v. 20, it is indictment after indictment on the human race. The human race has a massive problem. The problem of sin. It is great guilt. And no one is excluded. So this introductory portion ends with the following solemn words.

“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.” Romans 3 v. 19

All are guilty!

And then follows this great passage of Scripture which opens with these words.

“BUT NOW” Romans 3 v. 21.

A great turn appears in the letter. Thank God for this, “But now”. And Paul tells us that, a righteousness from God, apart from law has been revealed. This was not a sudden thought on God’s part but was what the Law and Prophets also spoke about. Even Abraham was declared righteous by faith and not by the keeping of the law.

This righteousness is through faith in Jesus and what He did on the cross. And it is received by faith. And it is to all and all who believe.

Then Paul adds in verse 23 that “all have sinned and fall short or lack the glory of God”. God created this universe to display His glory. And we lack this glory because we have substituted something else in place of God as our greatest joy and satisfaction. This is a very great guilt.

Romans 3 v. 24

Then follows this glorious verse. “*And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*” Let us look at it in four parts.

i. Being justified (are justified)

Firstly this verb is in the passive voice. So we are being justified and God is the one doing it. It is something outside of us. Also the verb really means, “we are declared righteous. (not made righteous. This is a different word - sanctification) So it relates to our standing with God. What Paul is saying is that we stand before God at the bench of Divine Justice and hear Him say to us “not guilty”! How wonderful to hear such a verdict from the Judge of the universe. But how can He do this to me a sinner? Paul describes how this can happen to us in this verse.

ii. “Freely”

This second word is so precious to us. It means He gives it to us as a gift. We can’t pay for a gift. We don’t need to beg for it or wait for it. We can only take it or refuse it. Praise God, this offer of God’s Righteousness and Salvation is a gift. IT IS FREE.

iii. By His grace

Grace means, “we receive something from someone who is not obliged to us at all”. The very nature of Grace means that **we cannot work for it**. Paul explains this further in Romans 4 v. 4 “*Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation*”

If we work, we receive wages as an obligation or a debt. For example if we put in eight hours of work we receive wages. That is not grace. It is debt.

John Piper makes a startling statement in one of his messages. “Don’t work for God to be justified! Don’t try to put God under obligation to give you His righteousness. By doing this you nullify grace. If we get wages from God then we should get death, eternal death, for we are all sinners”.

“for the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 6 v. 23

We have to find another way of relating to God. And this is by faith through grace. So we receive this wonderful gift of God’s righteousness as a gift. We can’t pay for it. We also receive it by grace, so we can’t work for it. But then we can ask; “How can a righteous God do that to us sinners?” This brings us to the most precious truth in this verse.

iv. Through the Redemption that is ours in Christ Jesus.

God is able to do all this through the Redemption in Christ Jesus. Redemption means. “a ransom has been paid to release a person.” “Deliverance at a cost!” God can do all this because our Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed us with His precious blood.

“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ a lamb without blemish or defect.”

1 Peter 1 v. 18 and 19

So to every Christian, the centre of his life must always be, “the redemption that is ours in Christ Jesus.” Place this glorious truth outside the centre and our lives will become unstable and devoid of poise, peace and power. This truth should be the “sun” in the solar system of our lives.

Here then in a nutshell is the glorious truth of redemption by grace through Christ Jesus. The question is, "How do we receive it?" By FAITH and faith alone.

"However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness."

Romans 4 v. 5

As we repent of our sin and lean on and believe in what Christ has done for us, we are justified, accepted, forgiven, included, adopted into God's family and declared righteous.

The thief on the cross experienced this. He kept on saying, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Then Jesus answered him,

"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

Luke 23 v. 43.

This must rank as one of the greatest gospel stories. When Jesus returned to the portals of heaven His companion was this penitent thief!

This was also the truth that transformed John Wesley the clergyman. He suddenly saw it was through Christ and Christ alone that he could be justified. His heart was strangely warmed by the fire of The Holy Spirit and a flame was kindled that burned all over England and the world.

Legalism

So beloved reader, let us not go back into legalism. Having begun by faith let us not go back to keeping the law to be justified. This was the error of the Galatian church. Having launched on their Christian voyage by faith they were veering away into a new course based on works. Paul, in his letter to them, vigorously attacked this false and dangerous detour and made a strong defense of the gospel of faith. "The law declares men guilty and imprisons them. Faith sets men free to enjoy liberty in Christ." (From the New King James version introduction to Epistle to the Galatians.)

So Paul says to us all;

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5 v. 1

“You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.” Galatian 5 v. 4

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing it self through love.” Galatian 5 v. 6

Come dear reader let us go together and drink from the fountain of grace!

Thus far and no further

The other kinsman redeemer in the Book of Ruth portrays the law but we can also learn something else from this man. He was willing to buy Naomi's land but as soon as he was asked to make the commitment to marry Ruth and to continue Elimelech's family line, he said that he was not able to do so. At least he was honest about the reason. He was thinking about his own interests. Maybe the cost was a factor but it is more likely that he did not want a Moabite woman in his family, fearing problems with other family members or with his business associates. Whatever the reason, he was not prepared to take the risk. My wife and I call this the "Thus Far and No Further" policy.

Aren't many of us like this? When it comes to the key issues of life and when following Christ costs something or entails a sacrifice, we shrink back. But in the end, like this man, we are the losers. We do not want the offense of the cross to interfere with our comfort zone or lifestyle. We love the praises of men more than the praises of God. We are concerned about our security and our future. Paul talks about such people with tears:

“Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.”
(Philippians 3:17-19)

He calls them enemies of the cross. Their minds are set on earthly things. Then he contrasts them with those who know they are but pilgrims on earth with an eternal citizenship in heaven and a glorious hope in the future. Paul’s life motto shames those of us who, like the other kinsman redeemer, draw back. We do not always shout with Paul:

“However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”
(Acts 20:24).

If we take this principle to its logical conclusion, we come back to the three keys by which the overcomers of Revelation triumphed over Satan. The blood of the Lamb; the word of their testimony and not loving their lives unto death. How far should we then go? To the point of death, is God’s clear answer. This principle of being willing to risk one’s life is highlighted in the Bible. “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

Risking our lives for God

David’s Mighty Men

Once David longed for a drink from the well of Bethlehem and three of his mighty men risked their lives and broke through the Philistine ranks and brought the water to him. David did not drink it, but poured it out before the Lord as an act of worship.

“Far be it from me, O LORD, to do this! he said. Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives? And David would not drink it.”
(2 Samuel 23:17)

Can we hear the longings and sighs of our Captain, the Lord Jesus Christ and respond as David's mighty men?

Paul & Barnabas

These two beloved missionaries had a very important credential. When the apostles and elders wrote to the Antioch church, they referred to them as *...men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 15:26).*

Aquila & Priscilla

This wonderful New Testament couple were willing even to risk their lives for the apostle Paul. (Romans 16:3-4).

Epaphroditus

Paul sent him back to the Philippian church with these words:

"Welcome him in the Lord with great joy and honour men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me."
(Philippians 2:29-30)

Church of Smyrna

Jesus urged the suffering church in Smyrna:

"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10)

Are we willing to risk our life for Jesus? We need to face this issue. Many of our brothers and sisters in countries where Christians are persecuted are already being martyred, or face the possibility daily. Once we face it and settle it in our hearts, we are free for God and He can lead us on in triumph. Boaz settled the matter and with great joy announces his marriage to Ruth. Let us move on and enjoy the happy ending of this history-making marriage.

17

HERE COMES THE BRIDE

What a glorious climax to this story. It's not just a novel. It actually happened. The famine, the tears and the deaths are all forgotten as the wedding celebrations take place. Boaz announces that he is acquiring Ruth as his wife. What rejoicing that brought to Bethlehem. The Bible records this in a matter-of-fact way so we need to use our imagination to see this happy celebration.

"So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son."
(Ruth 4:13)

The wedding, the honeymoon, the nine months of pregnancy and the birth of a son, all in one verse! A great example of brevity of speech!

One reason that we attend weddings is to be witnesses of the event and share in the joy. So we have witnesses of this blessed marriage between Boaz and Ruth.

Witnesses

Boaz said to the elders, *"Today you are witnesses."* To this they replied, *"We are witnesses."* Actually, in the original Hebrew, the words "we are" are not there. They just shouted, "Witnesses!" They were witnesses of a glorious redemptive act of God. Today, an even more glorious redemptive act of God's grace continues on and on. It was finished on Calvary and its effects extend daily all over the world in, and through, many witnesses.

Witnesses to our Lord Jesus Christ

The Prophets

All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his Name. (Acts 10:43). Especially prophets like Isaiah are great witnesses to our great 'goel', the Lord Jesus Christ.

God the Father

Three times the Father spoke from heaven confirming and affirming Jesus as His beloved Son.

John the Baptist

John, pointing to Jesus, declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world." What a witness! The greatest and shortest sermon ever preached!

All believers

We are all witnesses and can add story after story of God's redeeming power in our lives and in the lives of others. We can proclaim with Paul:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:1-2)

The House of Rachel and Leah

Having declared themselves as witnesses, the elders then utter a prophetic wish for Ruth, "May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up

the house of Israel." After this moment she is no longer called a Moabitess. She is now a blessed Israelite woman. Her past history is forgotten. Not only that, they wish that she would be like Rachel and Leah, the two foundational mothers of the twelve tribes of Israel. Their wish came to pass; she became a princess, a royal mother - the great-grandmother of King David. God does the same today. He takes us - beggars, slaves, failures and nobodies - and makes us princes and princesses in His Kingdom. This is the amazing grace of God.

Fame for Boaz

Then the elders added a wish for Boaz, "*May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem.*" An excellent wish. Fame, not in the world, but in Bethlehem, among God's people. Today, many are concerned about fame in the world. But the elders and later on, the women, wished for Boaz and his son Obed, fame in Israel and in Bethlehem. Jeremiah said to Baruch, "*Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not.*" (Jeremiah 45:5a). Perhaps this speaks to someone reading these pages. Let us not seek for fame or to make a name for ourselves. Remember the way the demons spoke to the sons of Sceva: *Jesus I know and Paul I know but who are you?*" Paul was known in heaven and even among the demons. They shuddered as he stood in the grace of God and challenged their strongholds. Are we known this way?

How did fame come to Jesus? Through the changed lives of people in desperate need: the blind could see, the cripples walked, the deaf could hear, the poor and lepers were comforted, the dead were raised to life again, sinners were forgiven, children were received, women were treated with respect and prostitutes were changed. This is how the fame of Jesus spread. Praise Him for His amazing acts of grace.

The Family of Perez and Tamar

Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah. (Ruth 4:12)

The history of Tamar is not one we would normally think of as important but she claimed her rights to have a 'goel', much like Ruth though she did it through her father-in-law and went about it in a deceptive way. God's grace overruled and her and Judah's child was Perez. (Genesis 38). It was from this line that King David and Jesus came. Thus Perez' family was blessed.

Second Best

God was gracious to Tamar and Ruth. It was Tamar's second marriage. It was also Ruth's second marriage. Their first husbands had died. But it was not second best. The Redeemer made it the best. Second in time, but not second best. Some of us, when we have strayed from God and then come back to Him, feel that we now have to be satisfied with God's second best plan for our lives. No dear friends, don't let that thought discourage you. When we, like Ruth, lie at Jesus' feet and give ourselves to Him, He starts a fresh new chapter. And it will be His best from then onwards. Hallelujah!

I Will Betroth You to Myself

Boaz' marriage to Ruth is a portrayal of a much more precious marriage. It is the love relationship between Jesus Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom and we, His church - the Bride of Christ. As we said in the beginning, the Bible is the book of The Great Romance. Right now we are at the stage of being betrothed unto Him. Soon, together with all the redeemed, we will enjoy the Marriage Supper of the Lamb as His bride.

There is a Christian hospital in Pakistan which has a chapel called the Esther Memorial Chapel. It was built in memory of a Moslem girl who came to Christ. She was baptized with the name Esther. The missionary wanted to get Esther married but nothing seemed to work out. Then, at her confirmation, she was given a wonderful promise by God through her pastor:

“I will betroth you to Me forever. I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness and you will acknowledge the Lord.”
(Hosea 2:9-10)

This was a prophetic word. She was indeed betrothed to the Lord. A short time later Esther was helping in a Pastors' Conference in one of the centres. In the morning when the missionary went to call her from her room there was no answer. As they forced open the door, to their horror and amazement they found her dead with her head battered by some strong object. To this day they do not know who did it. The missionary who told me the story said how significant were the words of the Pastor with regard to her being betrothed to the Lord. She went straight to be with her heavenly bridegroom, the Lord Jesus. I have stood under her picture in this hospital chapel and been deeply moved by the life of this young martyr who was Tamil-speaking, as I am. She was faithful unto death and is now enjoying her reward.

I Will Go

Beloved reader, I want to write something very precious to you. In 1990 GOD led me to make a promise to the Lord, to be like Eliezer and call especially health workers to come and to be joined in a spiritual union with our Lord Jesus Christ our Bridegroom. I once again discharge this vow with the following words.

The story is told in Genesis Chapter 24, of how Eliezer, Abraham's trusted servant travels under oath to find a bride for Issac, Abraham's beloved son.

This story is a picture to us of a much more precious truth. Abraham is a type of God the Father and Isaac of Jesus Christ. Eliezer portrays the Holy Spirit. He goes forth to bring back a bride for Jesus, the Father's beloved Son. You and I are like Rebekah, being wooed by the Holy Spirit for Jesus.

Eliezer travels four hundred miles back to Abraham's home town. He goes with the camels loaded with presents. He soaks his journey in prayer asking God to lead him. He also asks God for a sign. He asked that the right girl for Isaac would not only offer to give him water but offer to water the camels. This was a difficult sign as each camel would need thirty gallons! So it meant she had to draw three hundred gallons! Then he meets her and she passes the test. He is amazed that she is Abraham's relative. Her mother and brother offer him lodging and food. Then he tells his story. He boasts about his master Abraham. They are amazed and say this is of God.

The next day he is eager to take Rebekah back. But his brother and mother say, 'Nō, let her wait for ten days' But he insists he must go now. So they ask her a very vital question. "Will you go with this man?" And she answers, with three glorious words. "**I will go**". Then they prophesy some wonderful thing over her. "Our sister may you become the mother of thousands and ten thousands....."

So Eliezer very gently takes her back 400 miles. At last they come to Caanan. Rebekah and Isaac's eyes meet. Eliezer introduces them and quietly leaves. Father Abraham rejoices. And God's glorious redemptive plan goes on. Eliezer is also happy just like The Holy Spirit who always exalts the Father and the Son. What a heart warming story! Dear Reader, as you read I want to be like Eliezer to you and through the Holy Spirit to issue this Divine summons to you. "Will you go with this man?" Many voices will say to you "not now, wait ten days" But the time is NOW. Will you say "Yes, I will go". Then the blessed Holy Spirit will take you to Jesus and unite you with HIM. You are invited to a royal wedding. A glorious future awaits you even better than Ruth's future. How can you refuse Him now? Dont hesitate. Like Eliezer I too want to boast about our LORD. He is altogether lovely, the fairest of ten thousand, the Lily of the valley, the Bright and Morning Star!

So come dear friend, shall we respond together? Don't let anything keep you back. Will you say "I will go?" He our Lord is waiting for you.

He is the fairest of ten thousand
 He is the Rose of Sharon
 He is the Lily of the Valley
 He is the Bright and Morning Star
 He is the Lamb of God who takes away
 the sins of this world.
 He is the Word of God
 He is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.
 He is the Alpha and Omega
 He is the Resurrection and the Life.
 He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.
 He is the Water of Life.
 He is the Light of this world.
 He is the Bread of Life.
 He is a Man of Sorrows
 He is our Surety and Guarantor of a better covenant.
 He is our faithful High Priest.
 He is the KING of Kings and LORD of Lords.
 He is coming soon.

A Wedding Psalm

Let's turn to Psalm 45, The Wedding Psalm, "*My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king; my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.*" Why does the psalmist say this? Because he is going to write about a glorious King, the great and loving Bridegroom. When you are in love, your words flow and so it was for this psalmist. He praises the King, Jesus, His grace, His might, His splendour, His majesty, His truthfulness, His humility, His Holiness, His victories, His power, His eternal throne, His justice, His love of righteousness and hatred of wickedness and His joy, anointing and exaltation by the Father. Hallelujah! This is our God, our Lord, our Saviour Jesus Christ. In Ephesians, the Holy Spirit says through Paul that He is exalted not simply **above** but **far above** all other thrones and kingdoms.

The Psalmist continues, *“All Your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad.”*

He spoke of the Bridegroom’s robes on our King and the fragrance of these robes are that of myrrh, aloes and cassia. But these are burial perfumes! Why burial perfumes for a Bridegroom? Because beloved, this is how our Bridegroom won His bride. He did it through His death and the shedding of His innocent blood. So the Bridegroom is ready and the place is also ready in the ivory palaces of the KING of Kings and LORD of Lords. What more is left? The Bride must respond to the invitation. So the Holy Spirit speaks to us through verse ten:

“Listen, O daughter, consider and give ear. Forget your people and your father’s house. The king is enthralled by your beauty, honour Him for He is your Lord.”

Will you come? Brother, sister, father, mother, child, senior citizen - the invitation is to you. Forget every other tie, the King, Jesus, desires your beauty. Honour Him, He is your Lord. I want to specially address those who feel they have no beauty. Perhaps you are unhappy with your looks or feel ugly inside. You wonder: Can anyone see any good in me? Beloved, He - Jesus - desires you! Come to Him. He says to you,

“My dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet and your face is lovely.”

(Song of Solomon 2:14)

Song of Solomon

Words of the Lord, the Bridegroom

The entire Song of Solomon speaks of the love the Lord has for us and our response. Let us read a few words that the Lover, our Lord, speaks to us in this book:

“How beautiful you are, my darling! O how beautiful. You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride, you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride. How much more pleasing is your love than wine and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice. You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride, you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain. I slept but my heart was awake. Listen! My lover is knocking: Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one. My head is drenched with dew, my hair with the dampness of the night.”
(Songs of Solomon - portions of Chapters 4 & 5)

This is how our Lord longs for us. He considers us as a garden locked up, as a sealed fountain, for His exclusive use and purpose. How wonderful to be thus set apart, consecrated to Him. He is Jehovah M’Kaddesh, the God Who sanctifies us and sets us apart for His exclusive purpose. He is jealous over us, with a Godly jealousy. He not only wants us to fellowship with Him but also to share in the fellowship of His sufferings. Lovers share both joys and burdens.

Words of the Beloved

How does the beloved respond? We, His bride, are like the beloved. She longs for Him. Though at times she falters, yet she comes back to Him. She grows in her understanding of His love and in the giving of herself. First she says, *“My lover is mine and I am His.”* Later, she says, *“I am my lover’s and my lover is mine.”* (Songs of Solomon 2:6 & 6:3). In the beginning she is more concerned about what she gets out of the relationship than what she gives. Later, she puts the giving of her love first. Finally she says, *“I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me.”* (Song of Solomon 7:10). Oh dear reader! May we grow in like manner in our relationship with Him.

In chapter 5:9, the daughters of Jerusalem ask her, *“How is your beloved better than others, most beautiful of women? How is your*

beloved better than others, that you charge us so?" She had hesitated to respond to His invitation to share in the fellowship of His sufferings. She lost Him and then desperately searched for Him. Bruised and beaten she asked about her beloved and they asked her the above question. To this she gives a glowing reply, singing the praises of her beloved. We, too, can sing the praises of our Great Redeemer this way, *"My lover is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand,* and she ends with: *This is my lover, this my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem."* This is our Lord and this Bridegroom invites us to be His bride. How can we refuse Him? We lose much more in refusing Him than following Him. The devil has lied to our hearts that we will lose much when we follow Him.

"Right now we bind the lie of the devil and we loose a Spirit of Revelation to see Jesus, our Heavenly Bridegroom. Thank you, Lord, for doing this and helping us to come wholly to You and be Your own."

Let us examine the climax of this truth.

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

There are three great suppers in the Bible:

- **The Passover** was instituted when God delivered the people of Israel from Egypt. The lamb's blood painted onto the door-posts saved them. The Passover celebration looked forward to the coming of the Lamb of God, who would become the Passover Lamb.
- **The Lord's Supper** - on the night Jesus was betrayed He celebrated the Passover with His disciples and He instituted this new celebration in place of the Jewish Passover. He, Himself, was the Lamb and His blood was given for the redemption of the whole world. The Lord's Supper has many aspects. It looks back to the first Passover but it also looks forward to the next great event, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. It is a:

- thanksgiving service for all He has done.
- a memorial service commemorating His death.
- a covenant service, remembering His new covenant.
- a proclamation service, proclaiming His death.
- an anticipatory service, looking forward to a greater event the second coming of the Lord Jesus and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

● **The Marriage Supper of the Lamb**

“Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:” Hallelujah, for our Lord Almighty reigns! Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him the glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean was given her to wear. Then the angel said to me, write: “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb”. And he added: “These are the true words of God.”
(Revelation 19:6-9)

We are all invited but have we responded to His invitation? Are we getting ourselves ready? Are we doing righteous acts to be worn that day? The Marriage Supper is not far away. Jesus is coming soon! A doctor from England told me something that touched me deeply. He said it only took God seven days to create this wonderful world. In John 14 He told His disciples that He is going to heaven to prepare a place, a mansion for us. It has already taken our Heavenly Bridegroom almost two thousand years to get it ready and it is not yet finished! Can you imagine how wonderful heaven will be! It will be finished soon. So let's get ready for this great event. Everything else in life will pale into utter insignificance.

Cost of not following Jesus

If we refuse this offer then I must warn you, *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”* (Hebrews 10:31). There will

be no hope for you. You will have to face eternal judgement. Why not accept God's gracious, loving offer of salvation now? If we look at this carefully, the cost of not following Jesus is much higher than the cost of following Him. Yet, there is also a cost of following Jesus. *"Then He said to them all: If anyone would come after me, he must deny Himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever loses his life for Me will save it."* (Luke 9:23-24)

Jesus asks a second vital question, *"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit his very self?"* (Luke 9:25). What is the cost of not following Jesus? It is, I'm afraid, a very great loss.

The cost of losing real peace.

The cost of losing true joy.

The cost of losing true hope.

The cost of losing the most precious relationship we can ever have.

The cost of losing the meaning and purpose of life.

The cost of losing God's blessings.

The cost of losing salvation and living under the eternal judgement of God. This is HELL and is too fearful to even think about.

One of the most terrible things of hell will be the regret. If only I had responded when He called me. At that time it will not be possible to reverse the situation but now, as you read these pages, the situation *can* be reversed. So please, don't wait for tomorrow. Receive Jesus now, I plead with you. Receive Him today!

This truth came to me vividly when, as a young doctor, I sat for the Diploma in Child Health Examination. I knew the material and was anxious to do well. However, I misunderstood one question and left out a part I was thoroughly familiar with. That night I kept tossing and turning with an unbearable regret. I could not go into my professor's office and say, "I knew the answer. Can I do it over again?" No, the exam was over. There was absolutely nothing I could do. The wife of the couple I stayed with had also taken the exam.

They both slept soundly. About two in the morning I got up and read an old magazine. It had an article by Oswald Smith about a man who almost slipped into hell. Suddenly, I saw how terrible it will be for people when they realise it is too late. If I could feel so bad about missing an examination question, imagine the eternal regret that people will have for missing salvation. This thought released my tension. I thanked the Lord that He had saved me. Peace came to me as well as a concern to share God's message with those who are lost.

So let us come to Jesus. The Bridegroom is ready. The wedding chapel is ready. Let us join with the heavenly throng and sing: *"Hallelujah"!*

"Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: 'Hallelujah! for our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready.'"
(Revelation 19:6)

Jubilee

Boaz' proclamation of his marriage to Ruth reminds us of the proclamation of the Jubilee year in Israel. It is mentioned in Leviticus Chapter Twenty Five, the same chapter which deals with the kinsman redeemer. Once in every fifty years a Jubilee was proclaimed in Israel. It was heralded with the blowing of trumpets. This was done on the Day of Atonement, the Yom Kippur Day.

In this Jubilee year a number of significant things happened:

Slaves were released.

Captives set free.

Everyone went back to his inheritance and his family.

Debts were cancelled.

God gave abundant provision.

This Old Testament concept was a foreshadowing of the glorious freedom Christ would bring to us through His death, resurrection, ascension and return to earth. How wonderful that our Greater Boaz, Jesus Christ, died on the cross, a perfect sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. From the day of His death and resurrection, the Jubilee Gospel is proclaimed. We don't need to wait fifty years. It is now, today! "There is a Redeemer, Jesus, God's own Son."

Praise God that through Christ we can proclaim this Jubilee. Jesus came to set the captives free and to give us back the riches of His glorious inheritance; to take us back home to the Father. He has made a full provision for all our needs, ***"He Who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also along with Him, graciously give us all things?"*** (Romans 8:32). **Let us blow the Jubilee trumpet loud and clear:**

"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Isaiah 61:1-4)

Thus, the story comes to its climax with the wedding of Boaz and Ruth. Only the God of Happy Endings could have engineered such a restoration and reversal of tragedy, tears and turmoil.

18

THE GOD OF HAPPY ENDINGS

“So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.”
(Ruth 4:13)

“Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. The women living there said, “Naomi has a son”. And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.”
(Ruth 4:16-17)

What a happy ending to this beautiful story. Perhaps there is no happier ending found anywhere else, not even in novels or secular literature. The Book of Ruth started with famine, tears and death, three widows with two wrong decisions and a decline among God’s people. It ends with the barley harvest, joy, a wedding celebration, a new couple, a baby and new hope for God’s people. Truly a happy ending. It’s a wonderful thing to call our God a “God of happy endings”. If we do as Ruth and Naomi did, we can also be assured of happy endings. He has great surprises in store for us. Let us look at some of the characters in this book and see what God did for them:

Boaz

It was a happy ending for Boaz. He was a good man, a godly man and probably longed for a bride. What a joyful ending for him. Yes, he had to pay a price but in the end he was blessed and he, too, became part of the line of the future Messiah. If we consider Jesus, we see that His suffering had a truly happy ending, *“After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied. By*

his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.” (Isaiah 53:11). To create, Jesus had to speak; but to redeem, He had to bleed but He now rejoices over every sinner who accepts His redemptive offer.

Ruth

For Ruth it was also an amazing ending. In Moab she was in a helpless state, a gentile, a widow, no children and no home, but what an ending for her.

She was no longer a stranger to God’s covenant; the title of Moabitess was gone and the curse was broken. This is our experience too. As Corrie ten Boom said, “When God forgives us, he puts our sins in the depths of the sea and puts up a notice, ‘No fishing allowed.’”

She became a princess, the great-grandmother of King David and her line was the royal line leading to the Messiah, Jesus. Her name was added to the genealogy of Jesus. Most of all, she had a beloved husband, Boaz, her redeemer.

She bore a son, her barrenness was turned to fruitfulness. She was accepted by Boaz and his people. Though it was her second marriage, it was not her second best. God had wiped the slate clean and done something beautiful.

If we take the same steps we too can experience everything Ruth experienced.

Naomi

It was a happy ending for Naomi too. She moved from total despair to unbelievable joy. In the beginning of the story she was bitter and downhearted. She acknowledged that even God’s hand was against her. Thank God, she took that one vital step and became a returning prodigal daughter of the Old Testament. In the end the women who had said, “*Can this be Naomi?*” now said, “*Naomi has a son!*”

Ruth gladly allowed her mother-in-law to share in the joy of caring for Obed. We must realise that Obed had no blood relationship with Naomi. Neither Ruth nor Boaz were her children. Yet the people said, "*Naomi has a son.*" Obed was her son in the Lord. I can imagine Naomi sitting in the garden with little Obed on her lap, listening to those lovely baby noises, hearing Boaz and Ruth talking in the kitchen, a prayer of thanksgiving in her heart and a tear in her eye, "O God, thank you for this happy, happy ending!" Her life was sweetness once again.

The Extended Family

I am convinced that the extended family is close to God's heart. In Genesis 12:3 the Lord said to Abraham, "*In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*" The word used for families in the Hebrew text is not the usual word for a nuclear family (i.e. father, mother and children) nor is it the word for a tribe. It is somewhere in between. Therefore, we can paraphrase Genesis 12:3 thus: "In you shall all the **extended families** of the world be blessed." Perhaps this is why Mary and Joseph did not immediately miss Jesus on the way back from Jerusalem. They had a large and strong extended family and assumed He was with the others. How we can thank God for all family members, cousins, aunts and uncles, grandparents and others. We can also claim salvation for all our extended family members. We are seeing this happening in our own extended family in a wonderful way, both from my father's and mother's side. The circle is not quite complete but we trust the Lord that it soon will be.

Bethlehem and the Elders

It was a happy ending for Bethlehem and its elders. They had gone through a famine and much sorrow, but some of the elders had stayed and repented and led God's people back to Him. They must have rejoiced to see once again a barley harvest, followed by an unexpected royal wedding. Because of it, Bethlehem became known all over the world as eventually Jesus, the Saviour of the world, was born there. Years before, the prophet Micah proclaimed, "*But you,*

Bethlehem Ephratah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be Ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. (Micah 5:2). I'm sure many of us have sung the Christmas carol, written in 1868, by Phillips Brooks and Lewis Redner:

O little town of Bethlehem,
 How still we see thee lie;
 Above thy deep and dreamless sleep,
 The silent stars go by.
 Yet in thy dark street shineth,
 The everlasting Light,
 The hopes and fears of all the years
 Are met in thee tonight.

God takes insignificant people and insignificant places and uses them greatly for His glory. As the Apostle Paul said, "*He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.*" (1 Corinthians 1:28-29). What a glorious, blessed ending for Bethlehem, an unknown, unheard of little town!

Ruth had become a blessing much like her spiritual ancestor Abraham. They both launched out, not knowing where they were going. In both their lives all the families of the earth were blessed. In a way, Ruth opened the door for the Saviour to be born. She never realised that her action would result in such a blessing but the fragrance of her love for Yahweh and His people, her submission, loyalty, gentleness and purity are still felt by us all. Little acts can have amazing but far-reaching results and consequences.

Unhappy Endings

Unfortunately, there were some unhappy endings in the Book of Ruth. The Bible does not paint unrealistic pictures. For Elimelech, Mahlon, Kilion, Orpah and the other kinsman redeemer, it was a sad ending. They all had opportunities to turn and some like Orpah, were

very close but they missed them. Later, they would regret their choices. Yet, the Bible is not a fatalistic book. We do have a choice, either to choose God and have a happy ending or to reject God and have a tragic ending. God wants us all to have a happy ending but He leaves the choice up to us.

I would like to confirm this statement by looking at some other examples of happy and sad endings:

Tragic Endings

There is a long list of such people in the Bible. We need to think and ponder over these lives and take these lessons into our hearts and wills.

Esau

Esau, the older son of Isaac, did not value the things of God. The Bible says in Genesis 25:34b,

“So Esau despised his birthright.”

He chose to throw away the most precious spiritual inheritance for a pot of stew! He could never recover this and his descendants became the Amalekites and Edomites, the enemies of God’s people. Some of the saddest words in the Bible are recorded about Esau:

*“See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. **He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.**”*

(Hebrews 12:16-17)

Dear reader, please take a warning from Esau’s life. Dear young man, don’t let the pleasures of this life rob you of God’s eternal blessing.

Achan

He was part of God's victorious army that was going to take the Promised Land. Under the leadership of Joshua, the glorious inheritance was just around the corner but after the capture of Jericho, when Israel was commanded not to touch anything, he coveted, took and hid a beautiful Babylonian robe together with some silver and gold. He and the members of his family who connived with him in this despicable act were stoned to death and then burned. Ironically, in the very next battle with Ai, God gave them permission to take the plunder. Oh! If he had only waited. What a loss he suffered! What a sad ending.

Gehazi

Gehazi was Elisha's servant. There was a wonderful future in store for him but he desired the material more than the spiritual. When Elisha refused Naaman's gifts he thought his master was a fool. He then lied to Naaman and took two talents of silver in two bags and two sets of clothing. He hid these away and then stood before his master Elisha. Enabled by the Spirit, Elisha was able to discern Gehazi's deception. And so in the same chapter of the Bible we see an Assyrian General healed of leprosy but this servant of the man of God received leprosy on him and his descendants forever (2 Kings Chapter 5). What a tragedy! Oh! Lord, save all who read this book from such a sad ending.

Rich Young Ruler

Then there was the rich young ruler. He came to the right person - Jesus. He had the right attitude - humility. He asked the right question - regarding eternal life. He had the right background - a religious life. He was loved by Jesus. In fact, he was probably an example to all his contemporaries. Parents of young girls probably longed to have their daughters married to him. Everything was just right except for one thing - his riches. Jesus loved him and yet he went away sad. Jesus never ran after him to bring him back.

I once read about a boy whose hand was stuck in a very expensive vase which belonged to his parents. All efforts to get his hand freed had failed. Finally, the doctor said, "Let's break the vase." The parents consented. As the vase was about to be smashed, the boy motioned them to wait. Then he opened his clenched fist in which he held a small coin and out came his hand. We smile at this story but the laugh is on us. Satan laughs at us. Because of some insignificant matter we allow God's glorious plan for our lives to be smashed by Satan. It may be riches, a person, a hobby, a house, a profession, a sin, a habit or something else. May God keep us from the mistake that the rich young ruler made. Had he known all that God had planned for him, he would have thrown away his riches and followed Jesus. What is the one thing keeping you from following Jesus? Dear reader, throw it away. Let the nails pierce your hand as it did Jesus on the cross. Loosen your grasp and let go and let God have His way in your life.

Pilate

He was so near and yet so far. Three times he said, "*I find no fault in this man.*" He wanted to release Jesus. His wife urged him not to do anything to Jesus but like Orpah, desire alone was not enough. He did not want to endanger his future like the other kinsman redeemer and the violent voices of the mob prevailed. In a pathetic gesture he washed his hands as if he could be free from the guilt of refusing to enact justice. He gave Jesus to be crucified. It is true that even if he had refused to hand Him over, Jesus still would have been crucified but then perhaps there would have been four crosses on Golgotha, with Pilate's being the fourth! For eternity he would have been God's hero. He missed his chance and had a tragic ending. We still mention him in our creed, "Jesus Christ, buried under Pontius Pilate." He is still remembered for his cruel lack of courage and integrity. But please, don't be too hard on Pilate. Many of us, in much easier circumstances, do the same thing and deny our Lord. Be warned, dear reader.

Mark

A story with a sad beginning but a good ending is Mark, the cousin of Barnabas; cause of a division between Barnabas and Paul. He deserted the team on the first missionary journey. Maybe he was homesick or could not keep up with the pace. Thank God, he had a good ending. Paul, who was opposed to taking him along on the second journey, later acknowledged that he needed him and that he was helpful to the ministry. He stayed and persevered to the end. What precious lessons we can learn from all of these lives. May God help us to learn them. If you have been a deserter like Mark, take heart my friend. You can still end well. Mark wrote one of the four Gospels and millions of lives have been influenced by it. God can use you too in the future, however far you have failed, fallen or fumbled in life.

Demas

Demas was on the apostolic team. He travelled with Paul and the others. When Paul wrote to the Colossians, he added Demas' greeting. Dr. Luke and Demas were together but later, at the end of Paul's life, he wrote these sad words:

“For Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.”
(2 Timothy 4:10-11)

In the end Demas chose this world. What a sad ending. He started well but finished badly. Paul said that only Dr. Luke was with him. Thank God for Luke! He stayed with Paul until the end.

Medical profession

May I address my Christian brothers and sisters in the medical profession for a moment? I feel a part of you as I am a doctor myself. The combination of men like Paul and Luke was powerful - preaching and healing. The devil has lied to many doctors that they cannot lay

all on the altar to serve and follow Jesus. Let us bind that lie and prove by our lives that this is not true. Let us doctors be there to the very end, holding hands with others to complete the task of building God's Kingdom. Let us lay aside our pride and our love for position and fame and let Dr. Luke be our example.

These stories are recorded as examples to us. Let us not make the same mistakes. As we read of these sad endings we realise that one reason they ended up like this was because that they did not see the end result, the reality of the unseen world. In contrast, Jesus saw this so clearly. He was a man of sorrows. He suffered so much for us. Yet the writer to the Hebrews says of Him:

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."
(Hebrews 12:2)

He saw the future joy and so he endured. So let us live with eternity and eternities values in view.

The situation today

The tragedy of sad endings is happening daily. The god of this world, Satan, is blinding the eyes of many from seeing things from a divine perspective. He is a liar, a deceiver and one who traps us.

Father, we pray right now in Jesus' Name, we bind the lies of Satan which he is whispering to those reading these words. We take away the scales from their eyes. Lord Jesus, we loose the Spirit of revelation into their hearts so that they can gladly leave all and follow You. Lord, open our eyes to see the vanity of this world and the deceptions of the devil and the glorious things you have for your people. Amen.

Contrast Between Happy and Sad Endings

Let us look at two people in the Bible, King Saul in the Old Testament and Saul of Tarsus in the New Testament. They had the

same name and were both from the tribe of Benjamin. King Saul had a good beginning. He was handsome, tall, humble and anointed by God. He even prophesied. But he made a series of wrong choices, turned away from God and had a tragic ending. He lost his kingdom and his crown to an Amalekite whose king he earlier spared, his descendants suffered a terrible loss, and in the end he committed suicide (1 Samuel 31 & 2 Samuel 1).

Saul of Tarsus on the other hand, had a poor beginning. Although an educated man, he was a persecutor of the church, one who assisted in the murder of Stephen. But then, on the road to Damascus, he met Jesus. He declared his commitment to God in many strong words which were backed by his deeds:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."
(Galatians 2:20)

"However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."
(Acts 20:24)

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."
(Romans 1:16)

Paul, as he became known, suffered terribly and died a martyr but see how he describes his life just before his death:

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."
(2 Timothy 4:7-8)

What a contrast between these two Sauls. Both had many opportunities. One lost them, one embraced them. May God's Holy Spirit enable us to apply this truth to our lives.

Happy Endings

“For His anger lasts only a moment, but His favour lasts a lifetime. Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.” (Psalm 30:5)

“I say to God my Rock, ‘Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’ Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.” (Psalm 42:9-11)

Joseph

Joseph went through a twelve year period of deep pain and sorrow. All the dreams of his youth seemed shattered. Yet God was with him and he made great choices in trusting Him. His end was glorious. Joseph was not only delivered from prison, he was made Prime Minister of Egypt, married Pharaoh’s daughter and had two blessed children. Manasseh, his oldest son, means **‘God has made me forget all my troubles.’** and Ephraim, his second son, means **‘God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.’** (see Genesis 41:51-52). He received a double portion. Instead of there being the tribe of Joseph, his tribe was made into two - Ephraim and Manasseh. He also had the joy of forgiving his brothers, saw his aged father and received his blessings for his children. Later he saw all the world come to him for food and, finally, four hundreds years later, his bones were buried in the Promised Land. What a glorious ending! Listen to Joseph’s words to his brothers, *“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now been done, the saving of many lives.”* (Genesis 50:20). God’s Word proved true for Joseph. We, too, can experience this same truth.

Job

Few people have suffered as Job did. He went through great loss and agony. He lost all, apart from his wife and his life. Yet, he was a

righteous man. He spoke those great words of faith, *“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. I know that my Redeemer lives.”* We all know that God gave Him a glorious recovery and a very happy ending. His anger lasts for a moment, His favour a lifetime! We know that Job’s sorrow was not from God but from Satan. He was a test case as it were in spiritual warfare. In fact the real question in the Book of Job is not, “Why do the righteous suffer? The real question is, **“Is God worth worshipping even though things don’t go the way we want it.”** Isn’t God a good God? Job’s resounding answer to this was YES!

Satan made a powerful statement in Job 2:4, *“ ‘Skin for skin!’ ... ‘A man will give all he has for his own life.’ ”*

Is this true? Unfortunately we often find that this is true in practice. But Satan is a LIAR. We bind the lies of Satan. As Christians we must disprove this lie of Satan by remaining true to the Lord at all times and under all circumstances.

Later after suffering and after he had prayed for his friends, the Lord blessed Job’s latter days twice as much as before. Everything was doubled.

Before he had 7,000 sheep - afterwards he had 14,000 sheep.

Before he had 3,000 camels - afterwards he had 6,000 camels.

Before he had 500 yoke of oxen - afterwards he had 1,000 yoke of oxen.

Before he had 500 donkeys - afterwards he had 1,000 donkeys.

Before he had 7 Sons and 3 daughters - afterwards he had 14 Sons and 6 daughters.

“But Lord, wait a minute, did you make a mistake with your arithmetic? All are doubled except the sons and daughters”. We may well ask this question. After all God is a God of perfect order. He makes no mistakes. The wonderful answer to this question is: No, God did not make a mistake. God did double even his sons and daughters! For he had seven sons and three daughters in heaven and again seven sons and three daughters on earth. Hallelujah! He never

lost his earlier sons and daughters who died. What a powerful truth! Job had prayed for them, offered sacrifices on their behalf. They were under the covenant and were God's children. If there be any parents who have lost children and you are still grieving over this, I trust this comforts you. His three new daughters were part of this wonderful ending. Nowhere in all the land were there found daughters as beautiful as them. Their names are of significance:

Jemimah - radiant beauty - shining from inward purity.

Keziah - fragrance.

Keren - Happuch - strength and stability.

May God give to all of us, both in our families and ministries, sons and daughters full of these qualities.

Thus his last 140 years were the best years of Job's life. Hallelujah! God you really are a God of happy endings!

Stephen

In Acts Chapter 6 we read of Stephen, one of the deacons appointed by the apostles to help with a food distribution program. He was full of the Holy Spirit and faith and full of God's grace and power. Opposition arose from the synagogue and from his own people. After a dispute, during which Stephen gave a powerful message, they stoned him to death, reminding us of Paul's sober words, "*Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*" (2 Timothy 3:12). A happy ending does not necessarily mean the absence of persecution. Brother Andrew of Open Doors states that it's the devil's lie that says we are meant to be happy. We are not called to be happy, we are called to be obedient to God's will. In doing His will, we are bound to suffer but in the end there will be victory. When Stephen was dying he saw an amazing sight. His face shone like an angel and he looked up and saw the glory of God. He exclaimed, "*Look, I see heaven open and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.*" We know that after His resurrection Jesus sat down at the right hand of God but now Stephen sees Him standing! Oh, the glory of it! Perhaps Jesus Himself stood

up to give His faithful son and martyr a royal welcome and a standing ovation into the portals of heaven. Isn't that a happy ending? Paul understood this when he wrote: *"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."*

(2 Corinthians 4:17,18)

Others

Ask the barren women of the Bible - Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Hannah, Samson's mother, Elizabeth. They will confirm that God is a God of happy endings. Ask the great intercessors; Daniel, Nehemiah or Anna, the Prophetess who prayed over fifty years, and they will tell you that God is a God of happy endings. Ask Moses, who was not allowed to go into the Promised Land. He had dishonoured God by striking the rock in anger, to get water. God allowed him to see the land from the top of Mount Pisgah and then he was buried there. Wasn't that sad? I used to feel sorry for Moses. After all he had done and endured, why did God treat him so harshly? But the story does not end there. One day, many years later, Jesus went up the Mount of Transfiguration and who met Him there? Moses and Elijah. Thus, Moses did put his feet on the Promised Land and he had the wonderful privilege of talking to and encouraging Jesus as He prepared for His approaching sufferings on the cross. This was better than a trip to the Promised Land earlier. Remember, second time is not second best.

We thank God for the happy endings in the Book of Ruth. If we follow the Lord wholeheartedly, we too, can be assured of such a Happy Ending.

The Master of Breakthroughs

God is not only the God of Happy Endings, He is the Master of Breakthroughs. In 2 Samuel Chapter 5:17-21 we read of one of David's battles with the Philistines, which he had won. David named the site of the victory "Baal Perazim" meaning "the Master of

Breakthroughs” or “The Lord who breaks out.” Boaz’ marriage to Ruth was also a breakthrough. What a surprise for a wealthy farmer to marry a widowed Moabitess, a poverty-stricken gleaner.

The elders and all at the town gates pronounced a number of blessings on Boaz and Ruth, including the following verse, *“Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young man, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.”* (Ruth 4:12). They blessed Boaz that he would have offspring like the family of Perez. Who was Perez? His story is found in Genesis Chapter 38. Through her father-in-law Judah, Tamar was pregnant with twins; as she was giving birth, the midwife did not want to mix up who was the eldest child. When one hand came out she put a scarlet thread around the hand but then the hand was pulled back and when the first of twins was born she was surprised that he did not have the thread. He had broken through and therefore was called Perez. It was through Perez’ descendants that Jesus finally came into this world. Though Joseph was such a godly man, Jesus was born into the tribe of Judah. This was one of God’s breakthroughs. The underdog, the despised, the unknown, the second, the last, became the favoured one.

In Sri Lanka we have had a tragic civil war for over fourteen years. Once, as I was travelling in the north of the country, I was encouraged to believe that the Lord will breakthrough and suddenly bring the war to an end. How we long for this. It has not yet happened but we do look to Him for a breakthrough. Dear reader, take heart. You may be in a pit. You may be in a totally defeated, impossible slough of despair. You may think there is no way out but remember our God is a Master of Breakthroughs. He specialises in hopeless situations. He is the God of Happy Endings.

The God of Great Reversals

Our God is not only the God of Happy Endings and the Master of Breakthroughs, He is the God of Great Reversals. In the Book of

Ruth we see a wonderful reversal of events. From famine, death and hopelessness to joy, celebration, life and glorious hope. The Bible is full of such reversals and today we can also see the Lord reversing many impossible situations. Some of God's great reversals are described below.

Reversal One - The Book of Esther

What an amazing turn of events we see in this book. God's unseen hand is at work, changing everything around. The Name of God does not appear in the Book of Esther but God works in His own special way. As I said earlier, the Providence of God is where He does extraordinary things through the ordinary events of life. In Chapter 3 of the Book of Esther, all is gloom. Haman the wicked Agagite has the signet ring of the king on his hand. He was in control. An unchangeable edict to massacre the entire Jewish race from India to Ethiopia had been issued. Nothing could change the situation. There was gloom, sorrow, tears and weeping for the Jews. God's plan of redemption seemed to be in jeopardy but **God** had **His Man** and **His Woman** in place Responding to Mordecai's challenge, Esther and the Jews fasted and prayed for three days. Then Esther acted, risking her life in the process and God turned the situation around. Chapters 7, 8 and 9 give us a vivid portrayal of this amazing turn of events. Listen to these words from Esther, Chapter 9:1:

*“On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, **but now the tables were turned** and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them.”*

The tables were turned. Hallelujah!

- ◆ Haman was hanged on the gallows that he had built for God's man Mordecai.
- ◆ Queen Esther received the estate of Haman the enemy of the Jews.

- ◆ The signet ring was presented to Mordecai.
- ◆ A counter edict to the destructive edict was issued.
- ◆ There was joy, gladness, honour, feasting and celebration for the Jews.
- ◆ People of other nationalities were converted.

God had done it again, and will do it again as we walk in His footsteps. **God is a God of great reversals.**

Reversal Two - Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 12

The Chapter begins with:

- ◆ James the Apostle dead.
- ◆ Peter in prison;
- ◆ King Herod, the wicked ruler, triumphing.

In addition, sixteen soldiers were put in charge of guarding Peter. There was no way out for him except execution the next morning. But the church prayed. They prayed all night. They prayed with great earnestness. And God acted. And again we see a great reversal:

- ◆ God sent an angel to Peter.
- ◆ Peter was set free.
- ◆ He meets the believers.
- ◆ The guards are executed.
- ◆ Herod is struck by the angel of the Lord, is eaten up by worms and dies.
- ◆ The Word of God triumphs.
- ◆ The Word of God spreads. Hallelujah!

God is a God of Great Reversals!

Reversal Three - Death to Life

Death is one of the most irreversible situations we face. One feels helpless in the face of death and yet our God can reverse even this greatest of all enemies, bringing life out of death. Jesus demonstrated this so clearly in His earthly ministry. Three times Jesus met death during his earthly ministry: Jairus' daughter, the son of the widow of Nain and Lazarus. In all three cases he raised them from the dead and in Lazarus' case said these great words:

"I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies."
(John 11:25)

Through His servants, the LORD has done this miracle many times. I feel that this will happen more and more frequently as the second coming of Christ approaches.

Reversal Four - The Resurrection of Jesus.

All the demons under Satan were celebrating with glee following the death of Jesus but God raised Him up and their celebrations turned to horror and fear as the Lord of Glory conquered death and rose triumphantly.

Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes;
He arose a victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever with the saints to reign!
He arose! He arose!
Hallelujah! Christ arose.

R. Lowry

What a reversal.

"So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit."
(1 Cor 15:45)

“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”
(1 Cor 15:55)

What glorious truths Paul brings out. The second Adam, Jesus, is a life-giving spirit. We too can cry out with conviction, “Where, O death, is thy sting? Where, O grave, thy victory?”

A few years ago I had to speak at the funeral service of a dear friend, colleague and brother in Christ, who had died suddenly. The day before the funeral, I sat for hours beside his wife and children and felt and sensed their deep deep sorrow and grief. That night God’s Spirit burned and quickened some truths into my heart. One was the verse above. Death shall not triumph. God will reverse what appears to be a tragedy. Yes, we will grieve but not as those without hope (I Thess 4:13). At the funeral service I shouted out these words with a conviction I had never had before. *“Where, O death, is thy sting? Where O grave is thy victory?”*

Reversal Five - The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11:7-13

Here we see God’s two witnesses killed and the whole world gazing on their dead bodies, refusing them burial and celebrating their death by sending gifts to each other. But after three and a half days God suddenly raised them up and reversed the situation. The celebrations turned to fear and terror and seven thousand died in a massive earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Our God has conquered death.

We have taken a long detour as we have looked at the God of Happy Endings. This is the title which I have chosen for this book. I got the idea from Roy Hessian’s book “Our Kinsman Redeemer.” Dear reader, do you long for a happy ending? Then wholeheartedly follow Jehovah Jesus.

Let us now move on and see God’s Hall of Heroes as portrayed to us in this precious Book of the Old Testament.

19

GOD'S HALL OF HEROES

"This then is the family line of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David."

(Ruth 4:18)

The Book of Ruth concludes with a genealogical record. Genealogies are of great importance in the Bible. There are many precious lessons we can learn from them. In this one, we see how Boaz and Ruth's son, Obed, came into the line of King David. David was a man after God's own heart and it was in David's line that Jesus Christ would come. God even made a covenant with David regarding his family.

The lowly Gentile widow now becomes a princess. Would she ever have dreamed this would be possible? Remember the verse:

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."

(1 Corinthians 2:9)

God has done it again! He is a Redeemer. He keeps on redeeming. He takes beggars and transforms them into princes and princesses. Let us exalt His name and His grace together. As Hannah sang:

“He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honour. For the foundations of the earth are the LORD’S; upon them he has set the world.” (1 Samuel 2: 8)

Mary sang in a similar vein:

“He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.” (Luke 1:52)

They both began by magnifying and praising God. Even so, He has been mindful of me and you and He has been mighty to all of us! Ruth was raised to a place she never imagined possible. Beloved, this is exactly what our Lord Jesus has done for us. Listen to the words of the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” (Ephesians 1:3)

“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:6-8)

He has made us alive in Christ!

He has raised us up with Christ!

He has seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus!

Paul also wrote:

“For we are God’s workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10)

Hallelujah! Do you believe this? It is the objective, unchanging, reliable Word of God! Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, reveals to us our glorious position in Christ. Like Ruth, we are also made heirs to the throne and have been given a stupendous position in Christ.

Ruth in Matthew's Genealogy of Christ

Ruth, the Moabitess, ends up in God's Hall of Heroes. Her name appears in Matthew's genealogy of Christ. What an amazing ending for this girl - she came back to Bethlehem expecting nothing except to be with her mother-in-law and worship Yahweh but God noticed her and raised her up to such a place of honour.

Matthew gives the genealogy of Christ in detail starting with Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. This genealogy traces the descent of Christ from the human side. It was very important to the Hebrew Christians as it validated Christ's claim to be the Messiah. Normally, and especially in Hebrew genealogy, only the father's name is mentioned. However, as we follow this amazing genealogy, we are struck by the fact that four women are mentioned: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba, Uriah's wife. At first this seems a strange list. All these women had major disqualifications:

- ◆ Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and seduced her own father-in-law, Judah.
- ◆ Rahab was a Gentile prostitute.
- ◆ Ruth, a Moabitess, whose people were excluded from God's covenant for ten generations.
- ◆ Bathsheba, a married woman, had an adulterous relationship with King David.

Why do these women get such honoured places? There are two possible reasons:

Firstly it shows us the amazing grace of God. Our God is not the good person's God. He is the sinner's God. He specialises in raising

the lowest and weakest and worst to a position they never dreamed possible. Paul realised this. He first calls himself the **least of the apostles**. A few years later he refers to himself as the **least of all saints** and towards the end of his life, after all his great experiences with God, he calls himself the **chief of all sinners**. The more he grew in Christ, the more he appreciated and magnified the grace of God.

The second possibility was once shared by a friend, Mrs. Mohini Gunaselvam, during a prayer meeting. I immediately felt a witness in my spirit to her words: "All these women had one thing in common - they valued the Lord God and His inheritance and they claimed their right for a place in His Kingdom". They were in a way aggressive in asking God to give them what He had promised. God loves this. He hates the careless, luke-warm, easy going attitude which does not lay hold on His word, His covenants, His promises and His inheritance. Esau is a good example. He sold his inheritance for some hot soup! Later, even when he sought it with tears, he could not get it back.

C. S. Lewis wrote, "God is not interested in nice men but in new men." God spoke to me deeply through this statement. One of my cousins once wrote to me, "We, Anketells, are nice people but we have been careless to lay hold of God and be bold for Him. We must go forward with Him." I could identify with her. I, too, wanted to be nice and pleasant but did not have that hunger and thirst for righteousness and boldness that God wanted. Jesus said:

"From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it."
(Matthew 11:12)

Forceful men and women lay hold of God's Kingdom. In some way, these four women had this characteristic.

Tamar

Judah and his sons were trying to avoid their God-given responsibility of being a *goel* to Tamar. She laid hold of her right forcefully, though she did it in a deceptive way.

Rahab

Though she was a Gentile, when she heard about the Lord's mighty acts on behalf of Israel, she acknowledged Him as the true God and said these amazing words:

"When we heard of it, our hearts melted and every one's courage failed because of you [Israelites], for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below." (Joshua 2:11)

She was convinced that in spite of the impregnable walls of Jericho the city would fall to the Israelites. Therefore, she claimed protection for herself and her family when the Lord gave them the land. To this end she risked her life to hide the Israeli spies. Thus she claimed her inheritance with Yahweh and His people and she got it. And thus Boaz became her great-grandson or at least in her family line.

Ruth

As we have already seen, Ruth took the great step of choosing Naomi and her God and her people. Later, she took that second important step of laying at Boaz' feet and invoking the law of the *goel*. It was bold, showing that she too, was claiming her rightful inheritance according to Yahweh's laws and promises.

Bathsheba

We read this story in the first book of Kings chapter one. King David was old and weak and had failed in one important duty. He had not appointed a successor. The result was confusion and

Adonijah, one of his sons, set himself up as the new king. He had not been disciplined by his father David. The true leaders, Zadok, Nathan the prophet and others, did not join him. Then Nathan went to Bathsheba and alerted her to the dangerous situation. He urged her to act, and reminded her of David's earlier promise that her son Solomon would be his successor. Bathsheba went to David and reminded him of his commitment. David realised his mistake and appointed Solomon as King. Soon, sanity and stability were restored to Israel. Bathsheba too, claimed her rights. Dear friends, let us also lay hold of God and say with Jacob, "*I will not let you go unless you bless me.*" (Genesis 32:26).

We thank God for these four women, Heroes of the Faith - Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. How clearly they speak to us and rebuke our apathetic, easy-going, half-hearted Christianity.

One other precious woman is mentioned in Matthew's genealogy. She is Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is surely one of God's special heroes. She was chosen for the special task of carrying the Messiah in her body. Her powerful words of submission to God are still a challenge to us, " 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said.' "

God's Hall of Heroes

Hebrews chapter eleven speaks of God's hall of heroes - people who by faith did mighty things. Brother Andrew once said that God has still not completed one chapter in the Bible. Surprised, I wondered which one it was. Then he said that Hebrews chapter eleven is still being extended in heaven today. We, too, like Ruth, can get our name in this chapter. This is of far more honour and value than getting our name on any earthly honour roll. As we read in chapter eleven of Hebrews, the foundational truth is that all these heroes are included because of their faith in the Lord. The Bible declares that, "*Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him, must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who*

earnestly seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6). May I suggest that you study this chapter and every character in detail. Shall we glance at a few of them?

Abraham

God’s friend, Abraham, and the father of the faithful, received the longest commendation. There’s one fact that I would like to mention about Abraham. Yes, he left without knowing where he was going. Yes, he lived as a pilgrim, content with a tent and an altar and a temporary abode. Yes, he had a child well past his and his wife’s child-bearing age. Yes, he offered his only son willingly as a sacrifice, a supreme test from which God spared him. But there is something else which has blessed me immensely. It is regarding Abraham’s faith and especially God’s faithfulness.

“Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”
(Romans 4:20-21)

We could ask, did he not waver? What about Hagar and the birth of Ishmael? Have you forgotten that Lord?” “Are you trying to gloss over your friend’s mistakes Lord?” But I can hear God say, “No, my son. You know my character never changes. You have heard it said of Me that ‘God forgives and forgets’. When I wrote about Abraham, my friend, in the New Testament, the things he had confessed and repented of have been forgiven and forgotten. My blood was shed for this.” O blessed truth! He forgives and forgets.

Joseph

“By faith, Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.”
(Hebrews 11:22)

When I first read this I was puzzled. Joseph did so many wonderful things, yet why should this matter concerning the disposal of his bones be given pre-eminence? Later, the blessed truth dawned on me. God had told Abraham, Joseph's great-grandfather that his people will be in slavery for four hundred years but then be delivered and come out with great possession (Genesis 15:13-16).

Joseph must have heard about this word from his father, Jacob. He believed it and gave instructions concerning his bones. Then for four hundred years, each generation remembered Joseph's instructions. It gave them hope during the years of slavery. Joseph's descendants must have kept his bones in some sort of a box. Joseph's bones have an interesting history. For four hundred years they were kept in Egypt. Then, when Moses set out with his people during the exodus, Joseph's bones were carefully carried out of Egypt. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, "*God will surely come to your aid and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place.*"

Those bones came out of Egypt. Then they crossed the Red Sea. For forty years they carried the bones around in the wilderness. Some of the younger ones may have wondered why this was at all necessary. Then when they crossed the Jordan, the bones went with them. Finally we read these words, "*And Joseph's bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. This became the inheritance of Joseph's descendants.*" (Joshua 24:32). In Egypt, for hundreds of years, then through the Red Sea, the wilderness and the river Jordan into the Promised Land. What an amazing history! The story of Joseph's bones shows a faith in a God who is utterly reliable, trustworthy and faithful. However long it may take, God's Word and His promises will come to pass. The Holy Spirit kept for us a faithful record of Joseph's bones. God had not forgotten his bones. Why, my dear friend? Because they tell the story of one man's

confident faith in the faithfulness of God. Oh! That we too may trust and rely on His proven Word. Heaven and earth will pass away but God's Word will never fail (Mark 13:31).

David

How can we leave out David, Ruth's great grandson? Remember his fight with Goliath? An incredibly unfair situation but David trusted God and won the battle against the giant. Today, we may often feel as David must have felt when facing this huge giant. Religious systems, hierarchies and governments are often threatening us like Goliath. Satan often uses words to intimidate us. As in David's days, everyone was fearful. Then little David appeared, trusting the Lord, and everything changes. There were some qualities in David which distinguished him from the rest of Saul's army.

i) He accepted the responsibility

He had already done this when a lion and a bear had attacked his father's sheep. The responsibility to his flock was greater than the possibility of losing his life and so he took the risk of saving the sheep.

ii) He saw things from a different perspective

Others saw a giant but David saw an uncircumcised Philistine. He fought from victory and not for victory.

iii) He had a zeal for God's honour

Goliath had dared to defy God's army. God's honour was at stake and David could not remain silent. He had to act. He faced the enemy and did not turn his back on the enemy.

iv) He spoke words of faith

Goliath had used words to intimidate and frighten Israel. David countered with wonderful words of faith. His words are worth memorising:

“David said to the Philistine, ‘You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD’S, and he will give all of you into our hands.’”

(1 Samuel 17:45-47)

v) He used God’s anointed weapon - he used the sling and refused Saul’s armour because his trust was in the LORD.

Beloved reader, we too face many “Goliaths” - shall we follow David’s example, accepting the responsibility and launch into battle. There are so many areas where Satan and his emissaries are going uncontested. Where are the Davids who will challenge the status quo? Where are the heroes in God’s church?

The Voice of God almighty Warrior
 Declaring war hear His command
 You are a chosen generation
 A mighty force in the land.
 All of creation now is waiting
 To see the righteous take their stand
 Moving out in His anointing
 Fulfilling God’s eternal plan.

Chorus: Arise! This is the final hour
 Arise! You soldiers of the King
 Arise! Put on your holy armour
 No the gates of hell will not prevail
 So arise the Spirit says, “ARISE.”

*Army of God is now assembled
A people filled with power and might
Now is the time no hesitation
Take up your sword stand up and fight.
Chorus*

Those Who Suffered for Their Faith

There is a sudden change of gear in Hebrews eleven. Up to a certain point we read of great victories by faith. Then, suddenly, the writer talks about those who suffered for their faith. They were flogged, jeered, imprisoned, chained, stoned, sawed in two, killed by the sword. They lived in poverty, they were persecuted and rejected. They lived in deserts, caves and holes in the ground. They were not celebrities and yet they were God's heroes. Today there are many heroes of the faith who are suffering for Him. Let us pray for them. If you are going through such times, be encouraged; you are qualifying for a special place in Hebrews eleven! Suffering for Him is a badge of honour that God gives to you.

Unsung Heroes

Many people in Hebrews eleven do not have their names mentioned. Nevertheless, they were heroes. Today, God may have called you to work behind the scenes. You, too, have a place on God's honour roll! I believe that when the roll is called up yonder, there will be many unsung heroes who will receive acclaim and awards from the Lord. The intercessors, the weepers, the crippled who bravely lived for Jesus. They will all be honoured. The givers, those who stuck faithfully to tasks behind the scenes, secretaries, cooks, housewives, cleaners, administrators, they will all be remembered. Those who, under great pressure, stood firm. Those who opened their home for Jesus and took in strangers. Those who translated the Scriptures and those who left all to follow Him. Those who worked faithfully though they did not see much fruit. As the Scripture states, even a cup of water given in His Name will not be forgotten.

Mothers

I feel constrained to add a note about mothers. I believe they are some of God's greatest unsung heroes. Mothers who have sacrificed their lives for their families, their churches and their nations. Those who have prayed with faith and seen wayward children brought back to God. Those who have cared for their sick husbands without a thought for their own interests. Those who have upheld their church and pastor and have been used of God to prevent great calamities to their churches. A number of great mothers come to my mind as I write. We say thank you to all of you. Your reward will be great in heaven.

Servant Heroes

Another category of unsung heroes are the true servants of our Servant Lord. When the servant-hood awards are given in heaven, we will rise to applaud you. Thank you too for your example.

Dear brother and sister in Christ, are you being tested in the crucible of life? Stay true to Jesus. God will give you grace to overcome.

Conclusion

Many years ago, C.T. Studd said, "Heroism is the lost chord of Christianity today." This is even more applicable in our day. Ruth was surely one of God's heroes. His grace saw her through. May God help us to follow Him in like manner.

Rise up, O Men of God!

*Rise up, O men (and women) of God!
Have done with lesser things;
Give heart and soul and mind and strength
To serve the King of kings.*

Rise up, O men of God!
His Kingdom tarries long;
Bring in the day of brotherhood
And end the night of wrong.

Rise up, O men of God!
The Church for you doth wiat,
Her strength unequal to her task;
Rise up, and make her great!

Lift high the cross of Christ!
Tread where His feet have trod;
As brothers of the Son of Man,
Rise up, O men of God!

WILLIAM H. WALTER

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CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to review seven major points:

1. Salvation

The whole Bible proclaims the message of salvation and the book of Ruth is a beautiful example of this truth. Ruth was a stranger, excluded from God's salvation and covenant. All of us Gentiles are in the same position. *"Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world."* (Ephesians 2:12).

We, like Ruth, were without hope and without God. Rev. John Stott puts it well in his book on Ephesians. He quotes from another source saying that Paul describes our pre-conversion state as:

Christ-less

Stateless

Friendless

Hopeless

Godless.

Although Ruth was humble, of good character, honest and hard-working, the sad fact was that she was a Moabitess and thus excluded

from the congregation of the Lord up to the tenth generation (Deuteronomy 23:3). This tells us that our good works can never get us salvation for:

“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

(Romans 3:23)

“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.” (Isaiah 64:6)

When we repent and turn our lives over to the Lord, our names are written in the Lamb’s Book of life. Then, just as Boaz gave Ruth six bushels of barley as a down payment of good things to come, the Lord will give us His Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts. For this to happen, we need to simply pray along these lines:

Lord Jesus, I thank you for dying for me. I acknowledge you as my LORD and my REDEEMER. I also acknowledge my need of You. Today, I come like Ruth to Your feet and ask You to cover me, to extend the border of Your mantle over me. Clothe me with Your garment of salvation. Thank you for forgiving my sins and including me in God’s family. Thank you for writing my name in the Lamb’s Book of Life. I dedicate my life to you. Please help me to continue to live my life as pleasing to You. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

For the second time in this book, may I lovingly urge you to receive Him, the Lord Jesus Christ, as your Saviour and Lord.

2. Service

Now, from salvation we move to serving God. The Book of Ruth is set in the harvest field. We are in His harvest fields. Boaz was a good master and kind to his workers. He greeted them and they greeted him. It was a joy to work in the fields for such a master.

Boaz' instructions to Ruth were to "*watch the field,*" and to "*not go to another field.*" He also said to "*stay with the workers till the harvest is finished.*" When we labour in God's field we are told the same. As our relationship with Christ grows, we will enjoy His presence more and more and serve Him with gladness. Jesus said, "*The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.*" (Matthew 9:37).

In his book "A New Time and Place", Jack Hayford puts this so beautifully:

"I can't help but notice that Ruth found her way and her future in a harvest field. That's where things happen. That's where relationships develop and deepen and where destinies are revealed. True, none of us can earn a relationship with God by working for Him, but we can certainly learn the depths of such a relationship when we busy ourselves with what concerns Him most...the harvest.

"To think of the biblical term harvest is to think of people helping people, touching people, serving people, and winning people into the love of God. On the other hand, to misplace or lose our perspective on the harvest - on serving people with life - is the surest way to short-circuit the promised possibilities of our lives.

"I've found a common element in every individual who grows bitter, misses fulfillment, becomes sour, complains about God, falls into self-pity, or wonders why nothing ever happens to me. That common denominator is a lost sense of ministry ... of serving, loving, helping, and reaching out to men, women, and children in the Saviour's name.

"Ruth's life says to you and me: Get out into the harvest. Get out of yourself - touch lives for Jesus' sake. As you do, things will begin to happen. Without even being aware of it, you'll be edging ever nearer to that new time and place in your life."

There are many sheep without a shepherd, harassed and helpless. They are found all over the world as well as close to us, perhaps next door or at our place of work. The good Shepherd, the Lord of the harvest, is looking for workers. Are you available? Will you say with the songwriter:

*Saviour, while my heart is tender,
I would yield that heart to thee.
All my powers to Thee surrender,
Thine and Thine alone to be.*

*Take me now, Lord Jesus, take me;
Let my youthful heart be Thine;
Thy devoted servant make me;
Fill my soul with love divine.*

*Send me, Lord, where Thou wilt send me,
Only do Thou guide my way;
May Thy grace through life attend me,
Gladly then shall I obey*

*Let me do Thy will or bear it;
I would know no will but Thine:
Shouldst Thou take my life or spare it,
I that life to Thee resign.*

*Thine I am, O Lord, for ever,
To Thy service set apart;
Suffer me to leave Thee never;
Seal Thine image on my heart.*

John Burton

The Fellowship of His Suffering

Dear reader, is He calling you to join Him in this great service of redemption. Yes, we have to share in the suffering but we will also

share in the joys of one sinner who repents. Jesus is calling you and me to go out into the highways and byways and compel them to come to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Let us joyfully serve Him.

Serving from a platform of rest

“One day, Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, ‘My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for?’ ”
(Ruth 3:1)

The word home in the Hebrew means a place of rest. Yes, Ruth served Yahweh, but she served Him from a place of rest. This is another glorious truth in the Word of God. God’s rhythm is from rest to service and not from service to rest. When God counts a day he starts with the evening (night) and then the day. This is seen in two clear instances in Scripture:

- ◆ In creation, it was always the evening and the morning, the first or second or third day etc. God called the light “day” and the darkness he called “night.” *“And there was evening, and there was morning - the first day.”* (Genesis 1:5).
- ◆ When God counted the Sabbath Day, it was from Friday evening to Saturday evening.

This principle is also seen in the functioning of the human body:

The heart beats (systole) from a position of rest (diastole).

The impulse along a nerve is sent by an action potential that sparks off from an already resting potential in the nerve.

In Hebrews 4:9 and 10, the writer explains to us the spiritual aspect of the Sabbath rest:

“There remains then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.”

Let us serve Him not in the energy of our flesh but in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not restless activity that God is looking for.

He is looking for restful availability. Such service is productive and brings glory to God.

3. God Works in Mysterious Ways

When we first looked at the Book of Ruth, we read that the judges ruled in the land. As the story concluded, the judges were still ruling the land but even at this time of apostasy and anarchy in the little town of Bethlehem, God was carrying out His great plan of redemption for the whole world. Take heart, dear friend. You may live in a difficult country under difficult circumstances but God is not limited. When the darkness is deeper, His light shines brighter. He is not limited by circumstances and can carry out His redemptive purpose in and through your life, your family, your fellowship, your church and your land.

Jesus addressed a suffering church as follows, *"I know where you live - where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my Name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city - where Satan lives."* (Revelation 2:13). The city of Pergamum was small and in a area where wickedness prevailed. Yet, they had remained true and steadfast.

In the case of Joseph and Mary, we see that a decree by Caesar Augustus to take a census resulted in their travels to Bethlehem where Jesus was born. God used the commands of men to further His purpose. God's purposes can never be thwarted by human kings or human systems. Remember the Word of God that came to John the Baptist:

*"In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar - when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene - during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, **the word of God** came to John son of Zechariah in the desert."* (Luke 3:1-2)

Under the very noses of oppressive political regimes and corrupt religious hierarchies, God spoke to John. It wasn't reported in any newspaper but it happened. In God's history book the word that came to John was of far greater significance than all of the great names mentioned. John the Baptist's message, "*Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world,*" (John 1:29, KJV) is still the most relevant and necessary message for this wounded, sin-sick world.

Once, when speaking to a leadership core group at a weekend conference in Sri Lanka, I paraphrased Luke 3:1-2 as follows,

"In the year that Rajiv Ghandi died and the Iron Curtain melted and the Gulf War ended, the Word of God came to a group of workers at a small retreat centre in Kandy, Sri Lanka."

I encouraged that small group by saying that the Word coming to them was of more significance than the other great events mentioned!

4. The Lord lifts up the humble

"He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble."
(Luke 1:52)

Mary sang these words in her Magnificat, that burst of praise that came from her after she met Elizabeth. In the Book of Ruth we see this truth portrayed so vividly. The widowed Moabitess became a Princess of God. Wealthy land owners like Boaz don't normally marry foreign widows like Ruth but God had done it again. He lifts the underdog, the destitute, the helpless and seated them with princes. It is His way and it is in His Gospel. Let us give a shout of praise to our Redeemer.

Hannah

How many years of suffering and shame and sorrow she endured but God remembered her! She says these prophetic words:

“He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honour. For the foundations of the earth are the LORD’S; upon them he has set the world.” (1 Samuel 2:8)

David

When Samuel went to Jesse’s house the Lord again illustrated this principle for us. It was not the eldest son but the despised, youngest, shepherd boy who was anointed the future King of Israel.

“When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, Surely the LORD’S anointed stands here before the LORD. But the LORD said to Samuel, do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Sam 16:6,7)

Paul

The Apostle Paul brings this out so clearly in his first Epistle to the Corinthians:

“Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.” (1 Corinthians 1: 26-29)

The Bible abounds with such examples. Think about Joseph, his two sons, the twelve apostles, Gideon and many others.

Take heart dear friend, God does not look on your pedigree, your position, or your possessions. His Word says:

“For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war.”
(2 Chronicles 16:9a)

He can lift you up and bless and use you.

5. Behold I Make All Things New

Jack Hayford has titled his book on Ruth, “A New Time and Place.” Ruth and Naomi were led from sorrow, obscurity and poverty to a place of unbelievable blessing. God had led them to a New Time and a New Place. For each of us reading this book, God longs to do a New Thing. Your age does not matter. You may be ten or thirty or fifty or seventy or even ninety years old. If we follow Yahweh as Ruth did, the best is yet to come and you can look forward to a new thing.

“Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD’S great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, ‘The LORD is my portion; Therefore I will wait for him.’ The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him.”
(Lamentations 3: 21-25)

Do you know the song:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases
 His mercies never come to an end
 They are new every morning, new every morning
 Great is Thy faithfulness O Lord,
 Great is Thy faithfulness.

Then, why not stop reading for a moment and join me in praising Him, by singing “The Steadfast Love...”.

God made a lot of new beginnings in the Bible:

- a) with Adam and Eve.
- b) With Seth.
- c) With Noah.
- d) With Abram.
- e) With Jesus.
- f) At Pentecost.

He loves new beginnings and new things.

At the beginning of this book we mentioned that the Book of Ruth is an epic on the grand theme of Redemption. There are a whole list of English words with the Latin prefix **Re** which are related:

Restoration

Revival

Renewal

Rebuilding

Reconstruction

Re-enactment

Rekindling

Re-surrender

Reversal

Recovery

Reformation

Resurrection

Re means again. The Lord wants to do something new, something beautiful after we have messed up things. Beloved, look through this list and receive newness in all these areas of your life, your family, your church, your ministry and your nation. He is longing to pour out new wine into His Church.

I am expecting something new in the history of Sri Lanka.

I am expecting something new in the mission hospitals around the world.

I am expecting something new in the history of the church in Sri Lanka.

I am expecting something new in Healthcare Christian Fellowship and the health fields of Sri Lanka, Asia and the world.

I am expecting something new in my family and extended family.

I am expecting something new in my life.

Are you expecting something new?

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20)

6. The Influence of a Godly Life

Ruth was a godly woman. God made the influence of her life go way beyond her wildest dreams. As we think of her great-grandson David, we see how God must have used Ruth. Some think that she may have been alive when Samuel came to anoint David as King. How her heart must have swelled with deep emotion as she remembered the blessings pronounced on her and Boaz on her wedding day. She had prayed for, perhaps prayed with and influenced, David.

David wrote much about the love of God.

David was a man after God's heart.

David loved to worship God.

David loved the Word of God.

David was willing to take risks for God.

David trusted God.

David was willing to wait for God's time.

From where did all this come?

I suspect it was the influence of his godly great grandmother, the beloved and precious Ruth. Her first son Obed had a prophetic name. His name means "a servant who worships." So generation after generation of worshippers came from this godly woman. Shall we too bow down for a moment and worship Him?

Other examples:

◆ **Mordecai**

This godly Jewish man lived in Persia in the Capital City of Susa. He never compromised his stand for God. Ultimately he influenced the entire Kingdom of Persia extending from India to Ethiopia but how did this happen? God did it through -

- His godly uncompromising life.
- His awareness of the situation.
- His tears and prayers.
- One disciple he trained to be willing to even risk her life (Esther).
- His letters sent with the king's authority.
- His concern for the welfare of His people.

You can read all about this in the Book of Esther.

◆ Elisha

Such was the reality of God's presence in Elisha that even after his death his influence was felt. When a dead man was thrown into Elisha's tomb, his body revived and came to life as it touched the bones of Elisha (2 Kings 13:21).

There are many more examples of this in the Bible. I close with one example from Church history.

◆ The Moravians

In August 1727, the Moravians, under the leadership of Count van Zinzendorf, experienced a very special visitation from God. It became known as the Moravian Pentecost. From here they launched a mighty missionary movement which sparked off many others. John and Charles Wesley were converted through their ministry. William Booth was influenced by them. They also began a twenty-four hour prayer chain which lasted one hundred years!

What an influence they had. May the Lord grant us all another authentic and true Pentecost. He has already begun to pour out His Spirit in many places around the world.

Thus, Ruth and the others show us the tremendous influence of a godly life.

7. The God of Redemption - The God of Happy Endings

As this story passes from view, let us focus on one supreme priority: Jesus, our great Kinsman Redeemer, God our Father and the blessed Holy Spirit. We see the God of happy endings, the God of grace, the God of redemption. We also see the God of history and providence who is sovereign over all. We see El-Shaddai and Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. We see the revelation that Moses received from God:

“And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.” (Exodus 34:6).

Shall we fall at His feet and join the crescendo in heaven, singing:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour, glory and power, for ever and ever!”

(Revelation 5:13b)

All hail the power of Jesus' name!

Let angels prostrate fall;

Bring forth the royal diadem,

And crown Him Lord of all;

Bring forth the royal diadem,

And crown Him Lord of all.

Ye chosen seed of Israel's race,

Ye ransomed from the fall,

Hail Him who saves you by His grace,

And crown Him Lord of all;

Hail Him who saves you by His grace,

And crown Him Lord of all.

Sinners, whose love can ne'er forget

The worm-wood and the gall,

Go, spread your trophies at His feet,

And crown Him Lord of all;

Go, spread your trophies at His feet,

And crown Him Lord of all.

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O Lord Jesus, we bow at your throne and worship You. Thank You for your glorious plan of redemption. May this message ring out into every corner of this world. One day we will stand with the redeemed of every tribe and tongue and people and nation and fall at Your feet, saying, Worthy is the Lamb!

And thank You Holy Spirit for coming alongside to help us!

We, Your children, bow down and thank You Heavenly Father for Your great love in sending Jesus into the world.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God our Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.



The Book of Ruth starts with failure, death and tears. It ends with a wedding celebration, a newborn baby and tears of joy. It begins with three marriages, which end in sorrow. It ends with a fruitful marriage and points to the glorious marriage supper of the Lamb. Truly God is a God of Happy Endings to those who will come to Him and entrust their lives to Him.

So be of good cheer. Please read through carefully. Not only can Jesus Christ redeem you as a lost sinner, but HE can also restore your hopeless situation.

With God failure is never final.

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