

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
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Obedience of Ruth

Ruth 2:1-10

1:15 And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

1:16 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

1:17 Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you."

1:18 And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.2:1 Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

2:2 And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."

2:3 So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.

2:4 And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered, "The LORD bless you."

2:5 Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?"

2:6 And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab.

2:7 She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.' So she came, and she has continued from early morning

until now, except for a short rest."

2:8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women.

2:9 Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn."

2:10 Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"

1. God's Guidance

So, Naomi once moved to Moab from Israel where people suffered from famine. She lost her husband and also her two sons, as you know. After that she heard the famine of Israel is no longer there and decided to go back in her home Bethlehem. Then she talked to her Moabite daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, and tried to make them back in their parents' home. Orpah followed Naomi's words, but Ruth no matter what Naomi said; finally Ruth went to Bethlehem with Naomi.

In Bethlehem, Naomi and Ruth didn't have any ways to make some money because her husband Elimelech's properties were taken over by others. So Ruth started to glean. In Leviticus 23:22, there was a law, saying, "And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God." So it was allowed to the poor to gather some gleanings and eat. When Naomi and Ruth arrived

in Bethlehem was exactly the time of harvest of barley, and that's why Ruth go gather the gleanings to prepare their immediate foods.

Moreover, Ruth went to the land belonged to Boaz, one of Elimelech's family. In Ruth 2:3, says, "she happened to come." Ruth would never hear about the clan of Elimelech from Naomi, and never know about Boaz either; because she had just arrived in Bethlehem. Ruth exactly "happened to" come in the land of family to glean and receive kindness from the owner. This was all coincidence for Ruth, yet there was surely the guide of God. Right after she talked to Naomi about Boaz' kindness, she shouted in Ruth 2:20, "May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead! The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers." Naomi awaken that God guided Ruth to glean on the land of Boaz.

We call it "Providence" that God guides the world and our respective lives. Our God of love guides the lives of the believers with His almighty power and profound wisdom. You may remember the happenings to be "planned" after all when you think back. Thomas Aquinas, theologian in middle age, said, "God planned things to occur in happenings." People may realize it's happening, but it is planned in God's eyes. God guides our lives through any small things in our lives. When some good things happened in your life, be thankful for His grace; otherwise, we should remain good and believe in the God of Providence to overcome the problems and troubles since tragedy and suffering are still planned by God for better "result," as Roman 8:28 says, "In all things God works for the good."

2. Man's Faith

God made Ruth encounter Boaz, her relative. It was not coincidence, but it was God's providence. Our life is under guidance of God. But it does not mean that our life is just like a puppet in a so-called "life" theater. God does not do that for sure. He does things by interacting with people and doing it together, not by ignoring one's free will. When He leads history, He sees how each country obeys Him and He determined how things should work. When people of Nineveh repented by Jonas' preaching, God stopped destroying the city. When King Hezekiah was fatally diagnosed with sickness, he prayed hard, and God had allowed him to live 15 additional years. God listens our prayers, respond to our faith and works with us.

Romans 8:28, which I just cited, says as follows "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." The reason why God makes all things work together is because He works together with those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. Although all the version other than the Colloquial Japanese Bible says "for those who are called", it also has the meaning of "together with those who are called". Believers are those whom God had called according to his purpose. If so, do they automatically reach the goal by riding on the belt conveyor named "God's plan"? No, they don't. Believers realize that they are loved by God who saved them from sin and death, and they are changed into "those who love God". Through loving God, they reach the blessing goal according to His plan. God loved us so much that he gave His only Son to take over our sins. Faith is receiving God's love and become to love God. In the

relationship of love, where we are loved by God and we love him, His plans of our lives proceed.

Naomi found God's plan in Ruth's encounter with Boaz. Naomi had faith to God of Providence. But Ruth did not have any insights as Naomi did. However, Ruth had her faith, which made her confessed "your God is my God" to Naomi. She was obedient to her mother-in-law as well as her senior to faith. Ruth had just returned to the true God from the gods of Moabite and she did not have any knowledge about God as Israeli people did. But she had genuine obedience to God as Naomi taught her.

Ruth proved that her obedience made her confess " your God is my God". Boaz came to know Ruth's faith and obedience. Then he said to Ruth, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" (verses 11 and 12) Boaz's kindness to Ruth was not because she was pretty or pity, but because he was impressed by her faith and obedience.

Faith and obedience is integrated to each other and cannot be separated. As Hymn 510 "Trust and Obey" sings "Trust and obey, for there's no other way; To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.", faith is consisted of "trust" and "obedience". You cannot obey God without trusting God, and without obedience, you cannot express your trust to God. Those who trust God do not put themselves in the center or do what they want, but try to listen to God's word and follow His

guidance. Even if they do things according to their habit and without much consideration, they ask God if it is OK and take actions. “Trust” and “Obedience” have to walk together just as right and left foot walk together, and that is a life of faith.

Ruth had this obedience. That is why the encounter to Boaz, which God had planned, brought lots of blessings to her afterward. God works in our daily life and tries to guide us to blessings. I would like to be obedient to God, His words, and plan even if it is a small thing, and I would like to receive God’s blessings in our daily life.

(Prayer)

Lord God, Ruth was able to live with Your guidance and received a lot of blessings because she was obedient. Please help us and guide us so that we can walk in Your blessings through our obedient mind and action. We pray this in the name of Lord Jesus, Amen.