

Home Group study: week beginning 18th January 2021

Limitless Joy

Can you relate a time when someone showed you kindness in a difficult time?

In what ways did that kindness help you?

Read: Psalm 35: 9

Then my fears will dissolve into limitless joy;
my whole being will overflow with gladness
because of your mighty deliverance.

Psalm 126: 5

Those who sow their tears as seeds^[a]
will reap a harvest with joyful shouts of glee.

(The Passion Translation)

Discovery

This week Matt preached on the topic of Ruth and urged us to read the entire book.

Can anyone give a synopsis of the story of Ruth?

Key points:

- *Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their sons have gone to Moab to escape famine in their home region of Bethlehem*
- *Their two sons marry Moabite (Gentile) women, Orpah and Ruth. Elimelech dies, followed by their two sons, leaving three widows together.*
- *Famine is eased in Bethlehem; Naomi decides to go back and tries to persuade Orpah and Ruth to remain in their homeland. Orpah does, but Ruth sticks with Naomi and is happy to follow the ways of the God of Israel.*
- *Ruth goes out to 'winnow' (collect up grain left behind during the harvest) to sustain them. The farmer, Boaz, is kind to Ruth and turns out to be a relative, their 'Guardian Redeemer' (or 'Kinsman-Redeemer' in the older version of the NIV), a legal term for one who has the obligation to redeem a relative in serious difficulty.*
- *There turns out to be a Guardian Redeemer who is a closer relative, but he declines to take on the full responsibility, so Boaz buys up Naomi's land and marries Ruth.*
- *Ruth gives birth to a son, Obed, who becomes King David's grandfather, thereby also placing Ruth, the Moabite, into the lineage of Jesus, symbolic that Jesus is for all nations, not just Israel.*

Last week we saw Jeremiah being rescued miraculously by God from a totally desperate situation. This week we see Naomi and Ruth being rescued miraculously by God from another totally desperate situation. However this time it is not solely the goodness of God intervening, but the goodness of the key people in the story plays its part too. What are those elements of goodness and what part do they play?

How might the two verses of Psalms we've read relate to the story of Ruth?

Application

Matt brought a number of points out of this story.

1. God's faithfulness

How does God show his faithfulness in the story of Ruth?

Is God being faithful to the two Psalm references in these difficult times we're in?

2. Ruth found joy amongst strangers and in doing a menial job

Ruth was effectively an exile in a strange land; how do you think she found joy in it?

Can we find joy in the drudgery of everyday life and being separated from our friends and family? If so, how?

3. Unselfishness and virtue are the foundation for true happiness

Do you agree? Have you found this to be true, and in what ways?

4. The role of the Guardian Redeemer

The role of the Guardian Redeemer was to restore a family that was left in grief and despair, transforming death into life. Who might be our Guardian Redeemer?

How does he transform our grief and despair? Do we find it difficult sometimes to hold on to that?

Look at Ruth 2:12 and then 3:9. Boaz' prayer for Ruth is that she find refuge under God's wings, a phrase Ruth's great grandson David would famously quote in Psalm 36: 7 and elsewhere in Psalms too. In Ruth 3: 9, in that passage which seems strange and rather inappropriate to our eyes, where she goes and sleeps across Boaz's feet, the Hebrew word for 'corner' (of his garment) is the same word as 'wings' in 2: 12. Ruth is therefore finding refuge under the wings of her Guardian Redeemer; God is actually using Boaz to answer his own prayer! In what ways does God call on us to bring protection, or perhaps blessing is a better word, to those he wants us to care for?

Why does God use us to bring blessing to others? In what ways might we know blessing in these difficult times by bringing blessing to others?

Matt went on to say that we find joy when we:

1. Keep praying and press into God
2. Share our problems
3. Keep our minds on the pure things of God
4. Support each other
5. Live by biblical principles

What difficulties do we face when we try to keep praying and press into God?

What do you think might be God's answer to our difficulties?

What barriers do we put up when it comes to sharing our problems? How might you encourage someone to share a problem? Does thinking of that encouragement help us to be prepared to share our own problems? *(It is important to share our problems only with someone we trust, and for that person to be discreet about what has been shared.)*

In 'keeping our minds on the pure things of God' (point 3), Matt warned us not to 'self-medicate with ungodly pursuits to plug out the pain'. What do you think he meant by that? What things might we need to avoid and what can we replace them with?

How can we support each other in difficult times like these?

How would you sum up 'living by biblical principles'?

Do you agree that these things will bring us joy?