

## EPIPHANY – 2009

### Ruth 4: 13 - 17

Dear people blessed greatly by the service of our Lord Jesus on our behalf.

Now, what have these verses to do with the celebration of Epiphany which celebrates the Savior's blessing coming to Gentiles? (A reminder – the Wise Men [Magi] were Gentiles and it was they who were greatly blessed when they came to worship Jesus the Savior of His people.) They received the greatest gift by far that day.

When I saw these verses listed as the Old Testament Scripture reading for Epiphany, they did strike me as a little unusual. But, as I worked with these Words of God, I came to see how they do work very well for celebrating Epiphany (actually Tuesday, January 6). An Epiphany is a revelation, a showing, an appearance. When a person says he/she has had an epiphany, it means that the person has come to see, know, or understand something. During the time of Epiphany, Jesus shows us several truths about Himself, so that you and I can know Jesus, or know Him better, in all His saving glory.

### **God Shows Us Blessing from Christ-like, Selfless Service.**

A severe and on-going famine had forced the little family of Elimelech and Naomi and their two sons out of their ancestral town of Bethlehem, out of their land, into a foreign one, in Moab. They were there long enough for their two sons to get married and sadly, die. Elimelech died, too. So, there were three widows, Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth. Eventually word reached Naomi in Moab that the famine had ended back home. She decided to go back. She imagined she would do so alone. There was no reason in the world for Orpah and Ruth to go to Bethlehem. Their families, their support, their friends, and certainly any good prospect for remarriage were in Moab. Surprisingly, both women said they would go back with Naomi. Naomi cared about them. Naomi was going back with nothing! It would not be easy even for her back in Bethlehem. How on earth would three widows, two of whom were Moabite, survive? Eventually, Orpah was convinced to stay with her family, in her country. Ruth, however, was willing to give up everything to return with her mother-in-law to Bethlehem.

There are especially two reasons why Ruth carried out this act of selfless service. The most important reason was that she had come to faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the LORD of mercy, grace, and forgiveness, her Savior. Boaz, a little later, put it this way, "You have come to take refuge under the wings of the LORD, the God of Israel."

Second, her LORD had given Ruth a new heart, a heart of mercy and love. She was determined to help provide for Naomi's needs. That is obvious from the way in which she worked hard every day to provide them food from the day they arrived in Bethlehem.

Boaz, too, selflessly served. He was especially kind to Ruth and concerned for Naomi. That was immediate. When a nearer relative was unwilling to serve as Naomi and Ruth's so-called kinsman-redeemer, Boaz both redeemed the land of Naomi's husband and sons to return it to their family and married Ruth. That first baby boy they named Obed and he was counted as Naomi's grandson, the son of Naomi's son Mahlon. There certainly was no advantage to Boaz in any of this. He did it all for those two, poor widows. Yet Boaz was blessed, too, with wife and family.

Obed grew up, got married, and had a little boy he named Jesse, who in turn married and was blessed with eight sons, the youngest David, yes, the David.

The attitude of selfless service, out of humble trust in the LORD's goodness, mercy, and love continued in that family to David. David served his king and his country even when

King Saul, filled with paranoia, and even worse, with rejection toward God, chased David all over trying to kill David. David trusted in the LORD, not himself. That is how Goliath fell. The LORD took David from shepherd of Jesse's sheep to shepherd of Israel, its next king.

And, yes, when David wanted to build a temple to the LORD, the LORD turned the tables on David and built a family for David which would culminate in Jesus Christ. That is how it is that Ruth, the Gentile Moabitess, came to be in the family tree of Jesus. Jesus is the perfect example of selfless service for all people. From His birth in the borrowed stable to His resurrection from that borrowed tomb, everything Jesus did served this world, you and me, too.

The world, in a sort of spiritual insanity, struggles against the one true God, questions His every word and wish, scoffs at His every promise, denies who Jesus actually is, the Son of God first and the Son of David, yet David's eternal Lord and King. But Jesus lived every day and died to cure the world of that spiritual insanity brought on by sin and headed for eternal death, the punishment of hell.

God blessed all of that kind service. Through faith Naomi did not need to return home alone. Ruth provided care to Naomi. And God blessed Ruth, too, with a husband and a son, the grandfather of David. Ruth became a direct link in the line that led to the birth of Jesus, the Savior, Christ the Lord.

Israel was blessed through David. David was blessed by the promise of the Savior to be born from David's family. And, finally, through Jesus, God offers the immeasurable blessings of forgiveness, new life, and eternal, glorious, heavenly life to all as they trust in Him through the Gospel. In fact, it is on account of Jesus that every good and perfect gift comes down from our heavenly Father. For Jesus' sake, sinners stand forgiven and are made members of God's family, brothers and sisters with Jesus, now and forever. That is eternal life!

And today, the Holy Spirit, as in the case of Ruth, still gives His people, including you, by faith in Jesus, those new hearts for new living. As God blessed people through Ruth and Boaz and David, so He intends to continue to bless people through us, His believers.

You today are conveyers of God's forgiveness to one another. You bless people as you pray for them, encourage and guide people by sharing God's Word with them. As we warn one another against temptations to sin, as we strengthen each other in bad situations, as we share both material goods and spiritual wisdom with one another, as we have needs, God will continue to bless people through such selfless, humble service, motivated and empowered by Jesus Christ, who always serves us, not to His advantage but always to ours. Extend Jesus to others in your service to them. Amen.