

Sacrifices Pleasing to God: Brotherly Love, Part 3 (Hebrews 13:1–3)

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Introduction

Those who claim to be born of God must live in accordance with God's nature and desires (1 John 5:1, 2; 1 Corinthians 13:4–6). "*Pursue love*" (1 Corinthians 14:1).

In this message, we want to examine *hesed* in the life of Ruth. Ruth illustrates the *philadelphia* kind of love that Jesus demands of His followers.

One sad aspect of the church in this day in its emphasis on love is that it fails by embracing something that is not really love at all. Much of what passes for love is no more than an expression of emotionally sympathetic interest. Real love is a selfless sacrificial choice that puts the good of another first, even if that choice is expensive and dangerous. *Hesed* love is dangerous.

I. Necessary Background

A. The setting

1. The need for a righteous king—three very disturbing tales ending the book of Judges (chapters 18-21) and Ruth, showing the need for a true king
2. A famine to demonstrate the true condition of a professing saint—a famine in Bethlehem Ephrata and the family of Elimelech seeking refuge in neighboring Moab
3. A tragedy and suffering for three helpless widows—a reasonable choice but a stubborn daughter-in-law (Ruth 1:16, 17)

B. Hope and the Human cycle of suffering (Ecclesiastes 1:5, 8)

1. Naomi's heart and *hesed* hope for her daughters-in-law (Ruth 1:8, 9: "*May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me*")

The term translated *kindly* is the Hebrew term, *hesed*. Naomi is asking that Yahweh deal with the young women in covenant love. The *hesed* that Naomi desired for them was that they would find *rest* (v. 9).

2. Ruth's refusal and selfless devotion—the parallelism in the three stanzas of Ruth response radiates *hesed*-love (Ruth 1:16, 17)

II. Yahweh's Unfailing Faithfulness

God's kindness came to Naomi unrecognized and unexpected in the person of Ruth. Ruth heard Naomi's lament and entered it. She quietly bore Naomi's brokenness as her own and endured by dying to herself.

A. Naomi's distrusting lament and God's grace—two dangers in our suffering

The first is not lamenting in our grief, which can lead to unbelief. The second is over lamenting, which can lead to bitterness. That is what Naomi did.

1. The mystery of providence: Concern for Naomi took Ruth into unfamiliar and unpredictable circumstances with no promise of reward for her sacrifices.

Naomi did not understand how God worked His *hesed* kindness in those whom He desired to give rest.

2. The way up is down: *Hesed* hope is a line that curves upward—a *J*-curve.

Hesed does not lock us into a cycle of despair but takes us on a journey of hope, even when it does not at first appear so. Our God is a God who acts for those who wait for Him (Isaiah 64:4).

B. Catching the eye of Boaz (“*in him is strength*”), a *gibbor chayil*—a mighty man

Boaz (Ruth 2:1) is a picture of the Savior. He is introduced when death has robbed Naomi of all hope humanly possible. All the pieces are in now in place.

1. Ruth’s testimony of a true saint—reflecting the Father’s unfailing love

Ruth behaved as such a saint, showing dignity in the midst of indignity. Her only option for survival was to glean, a menial and degrading work that took away her pride and dignity. *Hesed* replaced these human crutches with real spiritual dignity, which caught the eye of a worthy champion.

2. Ruth’s apparent danger and her trust in Israel’s God—an outcast trusting Israel’s God

Ruth was a woman and a Moabite foreigner, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and a stranger to the covenant promises, but trusting Israel’s God as her protector. Boaz discovered Ruth’s courage and trust in “*the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings [she] had come to take refuge!*” (Ruth 2:12). Providence then assigned Boaz as her human protector.

3. Ruth’s rest brought about through Naomi’s hope revived—*hesed*’s power to raise the dead

The book of Ruth is really about Naomi. When she realized what God was doing for her through Ruth, she worshiped: “*“May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness [hesed] has not forsaken the living or the dead!”* The plan worked and the response of Boaz was “*May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter. You have made this last kindness [hesed] greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich*” (v. 10). God had lovingly and faithfully brought salvation rest to both Naomi and Ruth in His providence to bring in the King of kings, the greater Son of Ruth’s great grandson, David (Ruth 4:18–22).

What can we take away?

In our deepest despair and hopelessness, God is at work unseen and faithful. In that work, he uses the most unlikely people and circumstances to advance His glorious purpose and our peace and rest.

1. The example of Ruth’s selfless commitment ought to push us out of our own comfort zones, trusting His *hesed* and risking all for His kingdom (Matthew 6:33).
2. *Hesed* love teaches us to realize that God’s ways are not our ways, but His ways are designed to the greater good of His children (Isaiah 55:8, 9).
3. God’s plans include our greatest good, although we may not recognize it in our present circumstances. Life is hard, full of disappointment and suffering. Christianity is a religion of hope, not platitudes of comfort and techniques of adjustment to make life more comfortable.