

## Christianity Needs More of This

### *When You Think of a Good Christian, What Comes to Mind?*

I mentioned before my lack of confidence in raising the funds necessary to teach in Russia. When God provided far more than I needed, I decided to take a large portion of the extra funds and use it to buy clothes for children at a Russian orphanage. It was only towards the end of my stay in Moscow that God opened the way for me to visit an orphanage there. Buying clothes for the children was no small conundrum. I certainly was not going to give the money to the orphanage to pick out clothes themselves because I was afraid the money would never be given to the children. I presented to my college class what I was wanting to do and one of the students who knew English well volunteered to go with me to a huge open air market where Russians shopped for clothes and food and other items. She spent the entire day with me, going from stall to stall picking out clothes and bargaining for the best prices. Anya helped me carry all the clothes for the thirty orphans to the apartment where I was staying and then went with me and some other students to the orphanage to distribute the clothes. I will never forget her kindness. Because of her, thirty children lit up with joy when they received their new clothes. Today we are going to take a deep look at a hero from the Bible who exhibited one of the loveliest of all qualities and although we would not classify him as a Christian, he sure was a man of God. Our big idea for today is simple. Be kind and live like God.

He was the great-grandfather of David, not a man of renown but a hero of mine. Maybe you would say he was a great romantic, but I would simply refer to him as a man of God. His name is Boaz and when we meet him in the book of Ruth, he was a middle-aged bachelor who also was rather wealthy. More precisely, Boaz was a farmer who had a number of employees and servants and was prosperous. Ruth, the young widow from Moab, moved to Israel with her Hebrew mother-in-law Naomi to start over. Because neither Ruth nor Naomi had marketable skills, Ruth decided to participate in the generous opportunity the people who loved the Lord in Israel provided. The law of God stipulated that when a farmer harvested his field, he was not to go back and re-pick what was missed or grew later in the season. It was the means God provided for the poor to have noble work to do to get food. **"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. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God."** (Leviticus 23: 22 NIV) Ruth didn't know anyone in Bethlehem so she randomly wound up in the field of a particular farmer and immediately followed behind the harvesters, picking whatever grain they didn't get.

Later, Boaz, who had been in Bethlehem earlier in the day, got back to his farm and greeted his harvesters in this way. **Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, "The Lord be with you!" "The Lord bless you!" they called back.** (Ruth 2: 4 NIV) I realize this may just have been a cliched way of acknowledging people who were close to you. But it sounds awfully spiritual to me. I have not seen any greeting like that anywhere else in the Bible although there are hundreds of examples of various Jewish men and women saying "hi" to each other in one way or another. The quotation of his precise greeting is intentional! It is meant to convey to us the depths of Boaz's love for God and the way he expressed it to others. This was a time of great upheaval in Israel. Strong national leadership was non-existent and there certainly was not then universal faith in God. Idolatry was prevalent throughout the country and true devotion to the Lord was not widespread. It was a bit like living in Fremont or the Bay Area. Such deep devotion to the Lord was rare. The exact word used that is translated Lord, "The Lord be with you!" is the personal name for God He shared with Moses. YHWH. Boaz was a real man of faith it seems, devoted to the true God.

As Boaz spoke to his workers, he noticed a young woman out in his field picking up grain. He asked the harvesters in an interesting choice of words who she was. **Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, "Whose young woman is that?"** (Ruth 2: 5 NIV) It sounds to me like he had interest in her beyond just her name. Who is connected to her he wanted to know. Was there a romantic interest? Boaz was unmarried. The foreman told Boaz about Ruth and Boaz immediately went to Ruth and encouraged her to keep picking the grain in his field. He promised to protect her from any of his male employees who might harass her and to make sure there was plenty of water for her when she got thirsty. I do not believe at this point Boaz thought he had a shot at Ruth being interested in him based on his reaction later to something Ruth did. I think he was just kind. He knew what Ruth had been up against, the death of her husband, the relocation to a foreign country, the poverty she and Naomi faced. Boaz even ordered his harvesters to pick out of their bundles some of the grain they gathered and throw it on the ground for Ruth to collect. Boaz, while he invited Ruth to keep collecting grain told her how great her reputation was in town and what a wonderful person she was. Boaz even called on the Lord to bless her and Ruth was uplifted by his prayer and kind words.

Naomii, Ruth's mother-in-law was so impressed by Boaz and his character that she came up with a plan for Ruth to let Boaz know she wanted him to marry her. She was to put on her best clothes, wear perfume and hide in the barn where Boaz's grain was stored for sale. Naomi knew that in the night Boaz would go in there and sleep beside the piles of barley grain to keep it safe from burglars. It certainly was a strange custom but when Boaz fell asleep, unaware that Ruth was hiding nearby, Ruth slipped off Boaz's shoes and waited for him to wake up. That was a way for Ruth to let him know that she wanted Boaz to take her as his wife. Boaz was shocked, first by Ruth even being there and second that Ruth would have any interest in him as her husband. He was older and he did not understand what Ruth saw in him. They wound up getting married and had a son who became the grandfather of David.

What is most striking about Boaz is his kindness. It was even shocking to Naomi how kind Boaz was, even though he was a close relative of her deceased husband. Take a moment and consider how many people you know who are genuinely kind. I mean those whose chief characteristic is kindness. They make it a habit to see that others are helped, encouraged, and blessed. There aren't many around. If it weren't for Boaz's kindness, Naomi might never have considered her plan to bring Ruth and Boaz together. If they were never married, we would not have had David and Jesus was in that very line from Boaz and Ruth. One of the greatest characteristics of a Christian who walks with God is kindness. **Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.** (Colossians 3: 12 NIV) It isn't great preaching skills, Bible knowledge or charisma; in the top five of qualities God wants in you is kindness. This should not be surprising as kindness is part of what describes God. **But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.** (Titus 3: 4-8 NIV)

What was it that appeared when Christ came? The kindness and love of God. Salvation is how God's kindness to us looks. The new life we have from Christ accepting the outcome of crucifixion is due to the kindness of God. We could not have our sins cleansed from us and the presence of the Holy Spirit living within us if not for the kindness of God. There are plenty of qualities people think of when asked to describe God but way up there on the list is kindness. We live in a broken, sin wrecked world where evil continues to thrive. Kindness is not something we see often exhibited. God has already shown us His kindness. When you put your hope in Him for your salvation, you experience first-hand the kindness of God. He begins to rework you and give you those qualities He possesses, including kindness. In the famous statement about how God works Himself in you, the Apostle Paul reminds you that integral to having the Holy Spirit living in you is that kindness. **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness...** (Galatians 5: 22 NIV) If you have the Holy Spirit within you, then kindness is part of what makes you good and when you are at full strength spiritually, kindness flows from you.

In 2012, Kenyan runner Abel Mutai took a big lead over Ivan Fernandez. Towards the end of the race, Mutai thought he had come to the finish line, but he was thirty feet away from it. Rather than take advantage of Mutai's mistake, Fernandez, when he caught up with Mutai, stayed behind him but motioned to him where the finish line actually was. Opportunities to be kind come to us every day. Sometimes kindness is costly like when the good Samaritan paid for the medical care of the Jew who was beaten and left to die. Sometimes it is just as easy as a kind word like when Jonathan the son of King Saul told David to trust in God, that one day he would be king. If you want to be like God, perhaps the easiest thing you can do is be kind. That is our Big Idea. Be kind and live like God. I read that after the meltdown of the nuclear power plant in Fukushima, two hundred engineers over the age of sixty volunteered to go into the plant and do the repairs and clean up to protect the people in the region from further radiation contamination. These two hundred by doing so exposed themselves to radiation poisoning because they knew at their age, they probably would pass away before the radiation brought on cancer in them. You don't have to do something courageous like that to be kind. Use your words to build up others, lend a hand when you don't have to do it, lift someone's burden, take time to listen to someone and hear her story. Here is our Big Idea: be kind and live like God. Perhaps the greatest witness you can give of the goodness of Christ and the immensity of His salvation is by being kind...today.