The Loving God through history – Session 6

**First Thoughts**

‘Who was the most influential person in your life?’ Harold Rowdon was asked, Lecturer in Church History at the London School of Theology for nearly forty years. He’d lived on campus pretty much all that time and had known and pastored thousands of men and women. And, of course, he’d read and studied all the ‘great’ figures of Christian history, and, over his lifetime, he’d met scores of globally famous Christian figures. So, when it comes to a question like, ‘Who was the most influential person in your life?’ you’d expect him to have to think about it for a while – so many to choose from. But, quick as a flash, he said, ‘A man called Eric in my church… there was just something holy about him’.

And Eric, by influencing Harold who taught so any people, shaped thousands of lives.

We can never really know how the God of history is working through us to bring about his purposes. Or indeed what aspect of who we are he will work through. Perhaps there are moments you can already look back on – highlights, if you like – where you know God did something. Or perhaps people have come and told you years later – when a colleague leaves, for example – and you don’t even remember the incident. How common that is. How is Christ working through us? We can’t know the hundredth of it. Day by day, on our frontline, we choose to trust.

**Read Matthew 1:1-6**

**Focus on the Theme**

1. What has particularly influenced you as a Christian?

What was it about him or her that had an impact?

**What does the Bible Say?**

1. From Matthew 1:5 we learn that Boaz was a descendant of Rahab, the non-Israelite prostitute. How does that enrich your appreciation of Boaz’s life and character?
2. Boaz, as the guardian-redeemer, is seen by many commentators as a man who prefigures the supreme redeemer Christ. What parallels do you see between Boaz and Christ?
3. What parallels do you see between Ruth’s character and actions and those of Christ? Consider John 13:12-17 and Philippians 2:3-8.
4. As we saw earlier, as Christians we read Old Testament stories with an eye to their significance:
* In their original context
* In the context of the history of God’s people under the old covenant
* In the context of God’s supreme revelation of himself in Christ

Matthew 1:1-17 sets out the genealogy of Christ, including both Ruth and Boaz, as well as Boaz’s mother, Rahab, and Tamar who features in Ruth 4:12. How does this affect how you see the significance of the book of Ruth?

**Going Deeper**

1. How does Ruth’s acceptance into the covenant community connect to God’s wider purposes? See Genesis 12:3; Matthew 28:19-20; Philippians 2:9-10.
2. In what ways has your exploration of Ruth enriched your understanding of God and your place in his purposes?

**God’s name (revisited)**

Following the fall of the people into idolatry and Moses’ pleading with God on their behalf, new stone tablets are formed, the covenant relationship is reaffirmed, and there is a further unfolding of the name of the Lord in Exodus 34:6-7: ‘And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”’

This stands as the Bible’s fullest description of the name and nature of God. Something of its significance is seen in the amount of times it is quoted or alluded to elsewhere in the Old Testament (Numbers 14:18; 2 Chronicles 30:9; Nehemiah 9:17, 31; Psalm 86:15, 103:8, 111:4, 112:4, 116:5, 145:8; Jeremiah 32:18; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nahum 1:3). The statement holds together God’s judgment along with his mercy, already indicated in the commandment about idolatry (Exodus 20:4-6) and demonstrated in the golden calf incident. Again and again, God’s people confirm that the covenant is maintained with them only on the basis of the Lord’s love, ultimately demonstrated in the one who lived amon us ‘full of grace and truth’ (John 1:14).

**Living it Out**

1. Of the Christ-like qualities you’ve seen in Ruth and Boaz, which would you most like to grow in?
2. How does the knowledge that God has all of history in his hands affect your attitude to the challenges and opportunities you’re facing right now?
3. Thinking specifically about your frontline, how has the book of Ruth changed how you think about your role there?

What are the implications of that going forward?

**Epilogue**

At the end of this study of Ruth, try to find a time when can review the whole study prayerfully before God.

What was the most significant insight for you from the book?

What did you learn about reading biblical narrative?

Looking back on what was happening on your frontline when you started, how have you seen God at work?