

Ruth 2

We saw Ruth's character in chapter 1, as she promised lifelong kindness to Naomi and committed herself to God's people, and we will see it again in chapter 2. She has three strikes against her as a foreigner, a woman, and a widow, and yet she shines as a humble, hardworking servant.

Additionally, in chapter 2, however, we begin to see God's kindness lavished on Ruth herself. This is not simply a story of how good Ruth is but of the good she receives—both from man and from God.

It is a straightforward story—displaying the value and dignity of kindness and hard work. Man should work hard and is capable of great kindness. At the same time, however, in this straightforward story with great moral lessons, there is also a powerful picture of the kindness that God has offered to us.

Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

Ruth tells Naomi that she would like to go gleaning. She doesn't sit around waiting for God to provide; she goes to work. Gleaning is an agricultural process and is basically picking up the leftovers. As the laborers harvest the grain in the field, inevitably some falls on the ground, and gleaners come behind to collect what has fallen.

In Leviticus 19:9-10, God makes clear that gleaning is one of His provisions, His kindnesses to the needy. God's law prohibited harvesters from going back and picking up what they dropped. Anything that falls on the ground is to be left there so that anyone in need of food can have something to eat. One must work to get it, but there is food for the taking. In other words, it is a protection against destitute poverty. And Naomi and Ruth are close to destitute poverty.

Ruth heads out to the fields and "she happened" to come to Boaz's field. In Hebrew, the phrase is that "her chance chanced upon" Boaz's field. The author of Ruth is making sure we know that this event is random. Ruth did not set out for Boaz's field with a manipulative scheme; she just ended up there. And it is precisely because it was an accident that the text will push us to recognize that this was no accident. Ruth (who is prayed for in every chapter) is receiving the care of the Almighty. He is directing the coincidences and choices of her life in order to care for her.

God doesn't intervene this tangibly in every situation, but we certainly can't disallow it as a possibility. He is involved in our lives.

Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, "May the Lord be with you." And they said to him, "May the Lord bless you." Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this? The servant in charge of the reapers replied, "She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab." And she said, "Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves." Thus she

came and has remained from the morning until now; she has been sitting in the house for a little while.

Boaz, the landowner, appears and exchanges greetings with his workers. With this greeting, we immediately know that Boaz is a respectable man—he has a good relationship with his workers and he is a man of faith. If you think about it, this is a tremendous blessing. May the Lord be present with you and on your side as you go about your daily life and work. And in response, may the Lord put His favor upon you.

Boaz asks about Ruth and phrases his question in such a way (“*Whose young woman is this?*”) that reminds the reader that women did not have a firm, independent place in society. They were defined by husband, family, clan.

The worker answers and points Boaz to Ruth. It appears that even though Ruth had the right to glean, she waited until Boaz arrived in order to ask permission. (Alternatively, she’s been working all morning—so she’s either humble or hardworking. Or as we’ll find out, both.)

Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Listen carefully, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field; furthermore, do not go on from this one, but stay here with my maids. Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Indeed, I have commanded the servants not to touch you. When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the servants draw.” Then, she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your sight that you would take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?”

Boaz immediately speaks to Ruth with kindness. Don’t leave, he says. You will be safe here and I’ll make sure that you are refreshed. You may have fear because of your foreign status, but I will be kind to you.

Isn’t this the Gospel? Ephesians 3 makes clear that we are foreigners, “without God and without hope in the world.” We desperately need protection and provision. We need protection from the punishment of sin and provision for salvation. We need protection and provision in life here on earth. But it is natural that we would fear—like Ruth, we are foreigners and from a people that have fought against God, the one whose favor we need. Our only hope is that there would be someone who would extend favor to us. “You could even just ignore me,” we cry. “Just forget I’m here.”

But to our eternal gain, we find that there is one who will not only extend favor but delights to do so. There is one who doesn’t simply fulfill the duty of the law but delights to extend the spirit of the law. There is one who has abundant kindness. Our sin made us enemies of God, but in sending Jesus, God delighted to provide for our need. At a high cost to Himself, He placed His favor on us, forgiving our sin and adopting us into his family.

Ruth’s response is like that of so many in Scripture—King David, when God makes a covenant with him; Mary, when she is told that she will bear the Messiah. “This is too much. Why me?” The kindness is shockingly generous and good.

Boaz replied to her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know. May the Lord reward your work and your wages be full from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.” Then she said, “I have found favor in your sight, my

lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants.”

Proverbs 22:1 says “A good name is to be more desired than great wealth.” Ruth is walking proof of this proverb because, though she is forced to eke out a subsistence living via hard work, Boaz, the great landowner is impressed by her character. Ruth’s kindness and commitment to the Lord and His people has become known.

Boaz prays for Ruth, and notes that she has taken refuge under the “wings” of God. This is a common phrase in the Old Testament (cf. Psalm 91:1) and throughout the ancient world—not that God actually has wings but rather using the image of wings to represent coverage and protection.

How do you take refuge under God’s wings? Rather than walking in anxiety, you take concerns to the Lord and walk in obedience to Him and experiences His protection from destruction. By leaving her home and entering into the people of God, she has taken refuge under God Himself. God never turns away those that take refuge in Him—then and now.

As with the other five prayers in Ruth, God will graciously answer this prayer. Interestingly, Boaz prays that God would bless Ruth, and Boaz himself will become the conduit of that blessing. God will care for Ruth through His people; He will answer the prayers of His people through His people.

At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come here, that you may eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.” So she sat beside the reapers and he served her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied and had some left. When she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her. Also you shall purposely pull out for her some grain from the bundles and leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.” So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.

Boaz extends his kindness still further by inviting Ruth to lunch and then ensuring that she has a successful day of work. Normally, she would only receive what the workers drop, but Boaz instructs the workers to pull out extra for her. It is a shocking reversal of roles as his workers—Israelite men—are instructed to serve a foreign woman.

Contrary to stereotype, the Hebrew law is very kind towards foreigners, from welcoming them in to the Hebrew community (Exodus 12:43-50) to instructing Hebrews to love foreigners like they love themselves (Leviticus 19:33-34). By all accounts, Boaz is a joyful law-follower.

God’s character is such that He cares for the voiceless and those who have nothing but Him, and He wants the same of His people. Boaz is a great example of Psalm 41:1, which reads, “How blessed is he who considers the helpless.” He repeatedly re-ups his kindness—“Keep working here...I’ve told everyone not to hurt you...Get water when you’re thirsty...Come, have lunch...Spill extra grain on the ground for her.” He goes above and beyond duty to be kind; reducing his own time and resources to give it to others (how often do you and I do that?)

How do you evaluate a man? One way is by looking at how he treats those who can do nothing for him. The time of the judges was a time of oppression and violent clan leaders, but here you have a singular man showing kindness. To this day, individual believers around the world follow Boaz’s pattern—showing kindness in the most difficult of societies and situations.

By the end of the day, Ruth has an ephah of barley—roughly forty pounds of barley, which was enough to feed a man for up to a month. Instead of just enough for her daily bread, Ruth walks away with a month’s worth of food. God (through Boaz) has been very kind indeed.

She took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took it out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied. Her mother-in-law then said to her, “Where did you glean today and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be blessed.” So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, “The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed of the Lord who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead.” Again Naomi said to her, “The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives.” Then Ruth the Moabitess said, “Furthermore, he said to me, ‘You should stay close to my servants until they have finished all my harvest.’” Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, “It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maids, so that others do not fall upon you in another field.” So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Ruth returns home and (continuing to honor her “parent”) hands her forty pounds of barley to Naomi. Naomi is blown away. Naomi, who was bitter and empty days before, is now joyful and overflowing. Yes, it is circumstantial, but it is the firstfruits of God’s redemption of her tragedy.

Verse 20 is a bit ambiguous in the Hebrew because although Naomi prays a blessing for Boaz, it is unclear who it is that “has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead.” Is it Boaz or is it God? In reality, it is both. God is behind the scenes of this story—directing Ruth to this field—but Boaz is the instrument of God’s kindness to Ruth. God’s people are often evidence of God’s care for us. Despite evidence to the contrary, God has not sought out to destroy Naomi. In fact, His kindness to her and to her family remains.

Naomi also recalls that Boaz is a close relative, literally a “redeemer” of the family. Naomi instructs Ruth, stay near to your redeemer and to his people. There is family that remains. There is, in fact, hope.

The next morning Ruth heads back to work. It only takes a single day for God to turn things around for the two of them but that doesn’t mean you change everything. The text refers to a harvest period lasting 6-7 weeks. Ruth doesn’t receive Boaz’s kindness with “Great! Now I can take it easy!” Rather, she responds with “Great! God has provided for me! I’m going to keep working!”

Put simply, Ruth has had a good day. We have all had good days—days where you go home happier than you woke up, days when things just seemed to break your way.

Ruth and Naomi rejoiced in the day and in the God who would set His kindness on them. God was not as far off as they might have thought and had noticed the faithful labor of His servants. When all seemed wrong and they seemed to have no hope of God’s blessing, God extended lovingkindness. Isn’t that the Gospel?

Suggested Study Outline¹

- I. Pray
- II. Backdrop—What’s come before (recall last week)
- III. Read Passage
- IV. Exploratory Questions
 - a. What do we see of God in this passage?
 - b. What do we see of man in this passage?
 - c. What’s the most important word in the passage?
 - d. How involved do you think God is in this process working behind the scenes? In your life, how involved do you think God is on a daily basis?
 - e. What does it mean to seek refuge under God’s wings? (cf. Psalm 91)
 - f. Boaz followed the Law day in and day out as we can tell. To what extent is following the basic everyday laws of God a joy?
 - g. How difficult is it to relate to this story since it is from another time and culture? “All Scripture is profitable...” but how does that play out with this particular story?
 - h. How does God instruct His people to treat foreigners? (cf. Leviticus 19:33-34...)
 - i. Of the 3 main characters—Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi—which one is the most intriguing to you at this point? Who would you most like to have lunch with?
 - j. Compare Ruth to the woman of Proverbs 31. Does she provide a good example of such a woman? How so?
- V. Application Questions
 - a. Is there anyone in your sphere that you could serve as a refuge to? Who is in need around you and what are you doing about it?
 - b. What could Ruth’s example teach us about honoring our parents?
 - c. How could you take refuge under God’s wings today?
 - d. Would someone describe you as kind? What would it look like for yourself, your church to be known as kind?
 - e. Would someone describe you as hard working? Is there a specific area of your life in which you need to work harder?
 - f. Do you see yourself as an outsider to God’s love and favor? (Or would you err on the other side, assume you’re entitled to God’s love?)
 - g. Who is someone who has been the instrument of God’s goodness to you?
 - h. How does God call you to action through this passage this week?
- VI. Other questions/thoughts
- VII. So what we’ve seen here is that...
 - a. God is at work behind the scenes, caring for those who have taken refuge in him and working through the acts of his people.
 - b. The common values of kindness and hard work are significant marks of character, and character is a big deal.
 - c. Ruth’s status as a foreigner who is brought in receives extravagant kindness and blessing is a powerful picture of what God has done for us in Jesus.
- VIII. Pray

¹ The questions here are suggestions. Pick the questions you want to use or create your own. The goal is to: 1) Get at the true meaning of the text; 2) Engage the student; 3) Push the student to apply the truth of the text. In addition, use sessions like this to ensure the student believes the Gospel and could study Scripture for himself/herself.