

Ruth 2:1-16
November 27, 2016

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Is there anyone in our class who grew up on a farm? If yes, help us understand what it is like to not only prepare for harvest, but what it's like to go through harvest?

Q: Is there a practice today to allow others to glean from your field? If not, do farmers make a special effort to glean the fields and share it with those in need?

The Lord deeply cares about the poor. Throughout Scripture we see the Lord caring for the poor, the fatherless, and the widows through commands He gave the Israelites(us):

Lev 19:9-10, "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. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God."

Lev 23:22, "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."

Deut 24:19-21, "When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow. When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow."

Transition: As we continue the story of Ruth, let's embrace that all of us CAN be a channel of the Lord's favor to those who are poor, widowed, or distressed BY emulating the acts of KINDNESSES shown by Boaz to Ruth. Consider that the Lord wants to use each of us as His instrument of grace and mercy to those who hurt. So as we go through today's text, I invite you to look for the acts of KINDNESSES displayed by Boaz. Let's pick up the story again. Someone read v.1-16.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Ruth 2:1-16]

V.1:

- Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz.

V.2:

- And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter."

V.3:

- So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech.

V.4:

- Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, “The LORD be with you!” “The LORD bless you!” they called back.

V.5:

- Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, “Whose young woman is that?”

V.6:

- The foreman replied, “She is the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi.

V.7:

- She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.’ She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.”

V.8:

- So Boaz said to Ruth, “My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls.

V.9:

- Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.”

V.10:

- At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?”

V.11:

- Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before.

V.12:

- May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

V.13:

- “May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord,” she said. “You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls.”

V.14:

- At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.” When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over.

V.15:

- As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, “Even if she gathers among the sheaves, don’t embarrass her.

V.16:

- Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don’t rebuke her.”

Transition: I'd like to process this section by making sure we understand some important details in the first three verses. Then we'll process the interaction between Boaz and his harvesters and foreman. Then we'll process the interaction between Boaz and Ruth.

Process Questions:

Q V.1: The author of Ruth gives us an important detail. What do we learn? [Naomi has a relative from the clan of Elimelech, and he is a man of "standing."]

Q: What is meant by being a "man of standing?" [The Hebrew word behind it translates as "a mighty man of valor." These same words are used of Gideon and Jephthah, each of whom was called a "mighty warrior" (Jud. 6:12; 11:1). They were men of valor—capable, efficient, and worthy in battle. Boaz was a mighty man of valor, capable in his community, and lived an exemplary lifestyle. Boaz was a man with outstanding qualities.]

Q V.2: Ruth gets permission from Naomi to "pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor." Her request reflects a practice shared by many harvesters in that day. What was it? [She was alluding to the rights of the poor in Israel to gather grain in a field after the harvesters had passed through. The corners of the field were to be left for the poor to reap (Lev. 19:9–10; 23:22). Some generous landowners were known to have left as much as one-fourth of their crop for the needy and aliens.]

Q V.3: So the first field Ruth goes to "happens" to belong to Boaz. Really?! Is Ruth just one lucky lady? [God's providence!]

Q V.4-7: How would you describe Boaz based on his interaction with his harvesters and his foreman? [Spiritually warm, someone respected by his harvesters, sets a positive tone]

Q V.8-14: I suggested at the beginning of our time that all of us CAN be a channel of the Lord's favor to those who are distressed and in need BY emulating the act of KINDNESSES shown by Boaz to Ruth.

Let's tag the acts of kindnesses shown by Boaz to Ruth:

- He was welcoming and hospitable. When he called her "daughter," he was not treating her as a "foreigner."
- He was sensitive to her need to glean fields. He gave her a continued invitation to glean in his field without her going to other fields.
- Ruth was invited to glean with the servant girls instead of having to wait for all of them to leave before she could glean whatever was left over.
- He protected her by telling the men not to touch her.
- He invited her to drink water out of the jars the men have filled.
- He affirmed her love for Naomi and her willingness to leave her own parents and homeland to stay with Naomi.
- He asked God to repay her for her care of Naomi and to richly reward her.
- He gave Ruth comfort and spoke kindly to her.
- Boaz invited her to have lunch with him, including wine vinegar and roasted grain.

Q V.15-16: Boaz gives order to his men to show more kindnesses to Ruth. What do you see?

- He was generous. He wanted the men to gather some stalks for her that she could easily pick up when she was in the field.
- He was sensitive to not embarrass her. He asked them to get the stalks discreetly.

LOOK:

We may not all be farmers, but we are all called to be intentional in providing for the poor, the needy, the fatherless, or the widowed. Boaz went out of his way showing acts of kindnesses to Ruth, and I invite us to do the same for anyone in need.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 421-423). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

III. Seeking Provisions Responsibly (chap. 2)

Ruth was now a believer (cf. v. 12). She was in the land of Israel. How would she act? Since Moabites were excluded from the congregation of Israel (Deut. 23:3), she was there by grace. The events in Ruth 2 show how she was received. In this chapter another person, Boaz, a wealthy farmer, is introduced. Would he be a responsible member of the godly congregation of Israel? Naomi was home. Would her grief assuage and her depression heal? By their words and their actions these three persons revealed their true characters.

A. *A God-guided happening (2:1–3)*

2:1. The female dominance in the story now was modified by reference to an important male. **Boaz** was a near **relative** of **Elimelech**, Naomi's deceased husband (1:2–3; cf. 2:3). Boaz was a man of outstanding qualities. The Hebrew words *'iš gibbôr hayil*, translated **man of standing**, are literally, "a mighty man of valor." These same words are used of Gideon and Jephthah, each of whom was called a "mighty warrior" (Jud. 6:12; 11:1). They were men of valor—capable, efficient, and worthy in battle. Boaz was a mighty man of valor, capable in his community, and lived an exemplary lifestyle (cf. *hayil*, used of Ruth, in Ruth 3:11).

2:2. The author again reminded the readers that **Ruth** was a **Moabite** (cf. 1:22), perhaps to highlight the favorable treatment she was to receive from Boaz. Ruth understood the rights of the poor in Israel to gather grain in a field after the harvesters had passed through. The corners of the field were to be left for the poor to reap (Lev. 19:9–10; 23:22). Some generous landowners were known to have left as much as one-fourth of their crop for the needy and aliens. Ruth did not wait for **Naomi** to serve her; she took the initiative. **Naomi** encouraged Ruth to **go**.

2:3. Because **Boaz** was already introduced into the plot (v. 1), it is clear that Ruth was not in Boaz's **field** by mere chance. She had moved forward in obedience to her rights in the Law of God and was guided by grace into the place God provided. The same providence that later led the Magi to Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1–8) directed Ruth to the appropriate Bethlehem field. Again the author stated that Boaz **was from the clan of Elimelech** (cf. Ruth 2:1). This fact is important to the unfolding of events.

B. *A well-deserved kindness (2:4–16)*

2:4. The spiritual tone of **Boaz** and his workers was warm and vigorous. When he **greeted** them with the blessing, **The LORD be with you**, they responded similarly, **The LORD bless you**. Faith in the Lord was active in their lives. Boaz spoke the language of faith. Would his actions also fit his words?

2:5–6. When **Boaz** noted a new **young woman** in his field among the gleaners, his interest was stirred. When he asked who she was, **the foreman** identified the new gleaner as **the Moabite** who had returned **from Moab with Naomi**. Some have felt that the foreman's reference to Moab was intended as a derogatory statement, but the text does not indicate this.

2:7. The foreman added that Ruth had asked permission to **glean ... among the sheaves** (i.e., bundles of barley grain). He said she had **worked steadily from** the time she came in the **morning ... except for a short rest in the shelter** that apparently was provided for the workers. He noticed that she was a diligent worker.

2:8–9. **Boaz** addressed **Ruth** as **my daughter** (cf. 3:10–11) in reference to the age difference between them. He was closer to the age of Naomi (cf. “younger men,” 3:10). Boaz not only spoke of his faith in the Lord (2:4); his life corresponded with his words. When he told Ruth to continue gleaning in his field, he apparently meant that she should glean there throughout the several weeks of harvesting (cf. v. 23) barley (March–April) and wheat (June–July). Normally the gleaners would move in after the harvesters had left an area. But Ruth was invited to **follow along** with the **servant girls** as they worked in the reaping. Boaz assured Ruth that she would be protected from any remarks or other embarrassing incidents that might have come from the male workers (cf. v. 15). When she got **thirsty**, she need not be concerned about drawing water. She could **drink from** that provided for the workers. In these several ways Boaz was providing for Ruth beyond what was required by the Law (cf. v. 16).

2:10. Ruth responded with utter humility. **She bowed down with her face to the ground**, a gesture common in the ancient Near East, mentioned frequently in the Bible (cf., e.g., Gen. 19:1; 42:6; 43:26; 48:12; Josh. 5:14; 2 Sam. 1:2). She was surprised by the **favor** (cf. Ruth 2:2, 13) she received from this important man. The word “favor” (*hēn*, “grace, favor, acceptance”) is used often in the Old Testament (e.g., Gen. 6:8; 18:3; 30:27; Ps. 84:11; Prov. 3:4, 34 [“grace”]). Ruth had expected the opposite of the treatment she received. She was a recipient of grace and was grateful. Yet she was eager to find out **why** she had been singled out for such unusual treatment since she was **a foreigner** and a stranger.

2:11. **Boaz** knew much **about** Ruth. News about her had traveled rapidly throughout the small town. Boaz, deeply moved by what Ruth had **done for** Naomi, spoke to Ruth in words of high affirmation. His words about her leaving her parents and her **homeland ... to live with a people** she had not met are reminiscent of God’s words when He called Abram (Gen. 12:1).

2:12. Boaz prayed that God would reward Ruth as repayment for the kindness she had displayed to her mother-in-law. He strengthened his request by asking that she be **richly rewarded by ... the God** she had **come to** trust. He used a figure of speech known as a zoomorphism, comparing part of God to some aspect of an animal. He said she had taken **refuge** under God’s **wings**, like a chick under the wings of its mother hen (cf. Pss. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4; Matt. 23:37). She was trusting in God’s protection. Soon Boaz would be used by God to answer his own prayer.

2:13. Though Boaz’s words could have stirred her to pride, Ruth continued to respond in humility. Naomi had given no words of encouragement to Ruth, but this man spoke comforting words that warmed her soul. She mentioned her gratitude for his **favor** (cf. vv. 2, 10), **comfort**, and kind words, and hoped they would **continue**. She felt she was less important than Boaz’s **servant girls**.

2:14. **Boaz** continued his kindness to Ruth. He invited her to eat the good food provided for himself and his **harvesters**. She was not left to fend for herself as gleaners usually were. He provided for her more than she could eat, either to show his genuine concern for and interest in her, or to allow her to have some to take home to her mother-in-law (cf. v. 18). The **wine vinegar** was apparently a delicacy that enhanced the meal. **Roasted grain** was a staple food in that day. It consisted of barley roasted on an iron plate over an open fire.

2:15–16. Ruth did not linger at the meal. After she returned to gleaning, **Boaz** ordered his workers to do more than let her glean among them. In addition they were deliberately to drop handfuls of **stalks** of barley in her path so that she would have abundant provision. This too was beyond what Boaz was required by the Law to do (cf. v. 9). Nor were his men to **rebuke her** or hinder her in any way.

Prime, J. (2007). Opening up Ruth (pp. 53-60). Leominster: Day One Publications.

Ruth 2 should make us smile. But as Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem from Moab, they had little to smile about.

Widowed, destitute, poor, vulnerable, they had no option but to rely on the laws of Israel that allowed the alien and widow, the poor and disadvantaged, to pick up the leftovers after the harvesters had reaped the crops. Ruth's request 'Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favour' (v. 2), was a wise suggestion. Naomi's answer, 'Go ahead, my daughter', has the sense of, 'You had better. It is the only option. Otherwise the cupboard will stay bare.'

But as we fast-forward to the end of the chapter, the situation has been transformed. Verses 2 to 22 cover one day. And at the end of that day we can sense the unexpected smile its events must have brought to Naomi and Ruth's faces. Having left with nothing in the morning, hoping that someone might show her favour, Ruth returned, not with a few leftovers, but weighed down with an abundance of barley! An ephah (v. 17) is 3/5ths of a bushel, 22 litres or 5 gallons. An ephah was also a large container big enough to hold a person. The value of an ephah of barley was about half a month's wages. Imagine Ruth's tired but contented smile as she staggered home with her load. Imagine what her mother-in-law *saw* (v. 18). Imagine the smile on Naomi's face as she asked, 'Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!' (v. 19). Imagine the even bigger smile on Naomi's face as Ruth told her the identity of the man who had shown her such favour, resulting in the declaration about the Lord, 'he has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead' (v. 20).

The word 'favour' (v. 2) conveys the idea of kindness beyond what is due or usual. That was what Ruth and Naomi experienced that smile-producing day, and Naomi recognized it to be the lavish favour of the Lord himself. The Bible makes clear that, while in his righteousness the Lord does show anger in response to human arrogance and rebellion, he also delights to show favour and kindness. In particular, he delights to show lavish favour to those who take refuge in him (v. 12). When, ten years earlier, Elimelech and Naomi had left Bethlehem for Moab, doing what they thought was right, they were, in effect, removing themselves from the refuge of the wings of the God of Israel. Returning to Bethlehem, Naomi had returned to the shadow of his wings, where she and Ruth started to experience the favour he promises to those who take refuge there.

The description of that day of smile-producing kindness can be summarized under three headings:

The Lord's lavish favour is meticulously planned (vv. 1–4)

Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the human author of Ruth provides an important piece of background information. 'Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz' (v. 1) Verses 2–3 then record the decision of Ruth to go off to the fields in the hope of picking up leftover grain behind 'anyone' in whose eyes she might find favour. Naomi agrees, without any direction as to where Ruth should go. 'So

she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters' (v. 3). Ruth was a foreigner. It would seem that she knew nothing about whose field was whose, and that she knew nothing about Boaz and his relationship to Elimelech.

'As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech' (v. 3). The Authorized Version translates it '*her hap* was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.' We might say, 'As luck would have it.' But the Lord does not do luck! His work is never haphazard and scatty. He plans and pre-arranges. The field Ruth 'just so happened' to light upon was the very field the Lord had planned. There is a mystery here beyond our full comprehension. The Bible teaches that the Lord's sovereign plan incorporates the willing choices of men and women for which they are accountable. This is most clearly illustrated by the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the early church prayed in Acts 4:27–28, 'Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.' Ruth chose to go to that particular field, but she was doing what the Lord in his power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

This is reinforced by the start of verse 4, 'Just then Boaz arrived.' 'Just then', or 'Behold'. The idea is, 'Would you believe it!' Remember, the narrator has given us advance notice of the existence of Boaz. Now he turns up! And this is all designed to reveal that the Lord meticulously planned this apparent coincidence, which would result in an experience of his lavish favour. It was true then. It is true now. The Lord's plan to lavish favour on Ruth and Naomi was part of his even greater plan of lavishing favour upon men and women of future generations through our Lord Jesus Christ. No part of his meticulous plan was left to chance. Nothing the Lord ever does is down to luck. It was the Lord who, without her knowing it, caused Ruth to pick Boaz's field in which to seek favour in the eyes of 'someone'!

The Lord's lavish favour is channelled through 'Mr Right' (vv. 4–16)

The middle section of the chapter introduces us to Boaz. He is 'Mr Right', in the sense that he was the ideal man for the Lord to use as his channel of lavish favour to the women. His qualifications were as follows:

HE WAS A RELATIVE (V. 1)—the significance of this will become clear in Ruth 3. As a relative of Naomi he had responsibility to care for needy members of the family.

HE WAS A MAN OF STANDING (V. 1)—a man of resources able to meet the needs of the two women.

HE WAS GODLY (V. 4)—to refer to the Lord was the normal thing for Boaz to do, even in the way he conversed with his employees. With Boaz there was no gap between the spiritual and the material, the secular and the sacred. His men knew that the Lord was at the centre of his thinking. By implication he was a good employer who wanted his men to know the Lord was with them. It seems clear that Boaz had stayed in Bethlehem during the time of famine, while others, like Elimelech, left. Staying in the place the Lord had given, Boaz then experienced the Lord coming to the aid of his people.

HE WAS OBEDIENT (VV. 6–7)—obedient to the law of the Lord, which said, 'When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands' (Deut. 24:19). Knowing their boss, Boaz's men knew that he would agree to an alien and widow like Ruth gleaning in his field. They had not chased her away.

HE WAS WELCOMING (VV. 8, 14)—hospitable to an alien. Not treating Ruth as a foreigner, Boaz called her ‘My daughter’, a warm term. Then, at mealtime, he invited her to eat with him, sharing his food with her.

HE WAS SENSITIVE (VV. 8–9)—considerate of Ruth’s needs, he told her to stay with his servant girls.

HE PROVIDED FOR RUTH (VV. 9–10)—giving her protection, by telling his men not to touch her. He supplied refreshment, telling her she could drink from the water jars his men had filled.

HE WAS GENEROUS (VV. 14–16)—to the point of overload. When it came to lunchtime he asked Ruth to eat with him and his men. He shared bread and wine with her. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. Then Boaz gave instructions that exceeded what the law required, telling his men to pull out stalks for her to pick up (v. 16). No wonder she went home with so much.

Boaz was ‘Mr Right’ for Ruth and Naomi. He was ideally suited and perfectly prepared by the Lord to be the channel of his lavish kindness to them. As such he prefigured the ‘Mr Right’ through whom the Lord’s lavish kindness comes to all who take refuge in him today. In John 5:39 the Lord Jesus said of the Old Testament Scriptures, ‘These are the Scriptures that testify about me.’ That includes Ruth 2. As Boaz is described we are given a description of the Lord Jesus, who came as the perfectly prepared and perfectly suited channel of the Lord’s favour to sinners.

Consider the Lord Jesus:

HE LEFT HEAVEN and became our *relative*, as he took on human flesh.

AS THE GOD-MAN he was and is a man of standing, worthy and with all the resources of God at his disposal. In our destitute state, we need these resources.

IN HIS HUMANITY, he was the most godly man that has ever lived. With Jesus there was no division between the sacred and the secular, the spiritual and the material.

HE WAS OBEDIENT. In his humanity, he lived in perfect submission to the law of the Lord, in a way no one has before or since.

HE WAS WELCOMING of all who took refuge in him. Wherever they were from, whatever their background, he welcomed all who came to him. He was criticized for welcoming and eating with ‘sinners’. The invitation to Ruth to have some bread and wine points us to the Last Supper, with the bread and wine providing a picture of the provision the Lord Jesus was going to make on the cross, and the welcome he extends to all who take refuge in him, to share table fellowship with him. It also points us forward to the feast in the eternal kingdom of heaven, which the Lord Jesus will share with his people.

HE WAS SENSITIVE, dealing with each person personally and graciously—the widow, the prostitute, the distraught parent, the tax collector, even his mother, as he hung dying on the cross.

THROUGH HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS, he provided protection from the wrath of God against sin for all who take refuge in him. He also provides them with refreshment of his indwelling Spirit.

AND HE WAS GENEROUS. The words ‘she ate all she wanted and had some left over’ (v. 14) remind us of the satisfaction of the crowd at the feeding of the 5000 and the baskets left over (Matt. 14:20). There is nothing stingy about the generosity of the Lord Jesus.