

Grace: Under the Wings of God

Ruth 2

As we left off last week, we saw how God had brought Naomi and Ruth through some very trying times. They had lost their husbands and were on a perilous journey back from Moab to Bethlehem.

The lesson we looked at last week was that we have to come to the end of ourselves in order to find the beginning of God. For Ruth and Naomi, it took great tragedy. But they would have never imagined what beautiful blessings God had in store for them once they did indeed come to the end of themselves and cast their lives wholeheartedly into His caring hands.

But now our two grieving women have made it back into Naomi's hometown of Bethlehem and must now find a way to survive. This is where our story picks up in Ruth 2.

Ruth chapter two could not be any more different than chapter one. The purpose of chapter 1 was to reveal how BIG our need is, chapter two is designed to reveal how BIG our God is. In a way too mysterious to explain, we see that whatever chaotic circumstances we find ourselves in, we can trust that God has, is, and will be invisibly at work. Our confidence comes not in the presence or absence of suffering, but in the conviction that we have a God who is sovereign, a God who is good, and a God who works all thing for good for those who love Him.

Scene 1: A "Chance" Encounter (vv. 1-3)

1 There was a relative of Naomi's husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz.

2 So Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."

3 Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

The author of Ruth gives us a heads-up in verse 1, someone to watch for, a man named Boaz. He is called a **"a man of great wealth,"** some translations will call him a "WORTHY man of the clan" or a "MIGHTY man of valor." This word is often translated warrior, it probably means Boaz was not only wealthy, but especially he was a man with a good reputation, with integrity, and honor—someone who is well respected by everyone.

Since Naomi and Ruth had arrived back in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest (1:22), Ruth felt it best to avail herself of the custom of gleaning behind the reapers in a field. Gleaning was the custom of allowing the poor to follow the reapers in the field and pick up and freely take the leftover grain. God has instituted the law of this practice in Leviticus 19 (Lev 19:9-10) and Deuteronomy 24 (Deut 24:19).

By gleaning Ruth hoped to support herself and Naomi. As a widow in a foreign land, Ruth may be helpless, but she is not hopeless. Ruth asks permission from her mother-in-law to glean in the fields. She was hoping someone would show her favor. Focus for a moment on that word **"favor."** In some Bibles it is translated **"grace."** It is a key word

here in chapter 2. In verse 2 Ruth hopes to find favor or grace. In verse 10 she asks, **"Why have I found favor?"** And in verse 13 she responds, **"Let me find favor."**

In His providence God is going to give grace to Ruth and Naomi. He will do it through this man Boaz. Often when Scripture wants us to grasp its point, it incorporates literary devices like repetition. That's what the author uses here.

First, we've read in verse 1 Boaz is a relative of Elimelech, making him kin to Naomi and Ruth. Ruth gains permission and goes out to glean and, in verse 2, just happens to find herself in a field which belongs to Boaz. That word **"happened"** is loaded with irony. There's no accident there. And in case you missed it verse 3 repeats it: Boaz, again, **was of the family of Elimelech.**

If there's one thing Scripture does not teach, it is the idea of luck or happenstance. That word happened is hemmed in on both sides with Boaz' identity for a reason -- the writer is grabbing our attention to remind us of something: God is the hero in this account and His invisible hand moves in unseen ways to bring His man into the lives of these two women.

God is sovereign over circumstances, over evil, over nature, over animals, over nations, over feelings, over success and failure, over wind and rain, over heartache, over life and death, over every detail of our lives. He is over the heart of your boss, your spouse, your mortgage company, your car, your house, your finances, and your promotions. There is no such thing as luck, chance, or coincidence with God. Nothing is ever beyond His control, out of His reach, or above His power.

In some mysterious way, God's sovereignty is compatible with our "freedom." So you and I must work as Ruth worked, pray as she prayed, and watch the sovereign hand of the Lord move. You and I can have supreme confidence that God is bringing about every detail of our lives to accomplish His purposes of glory to Himself, and good to us. Trust in Him! Adrian Rogers said, "Men worry about time, but God only concerns Himself with timing."

Scene 2: Boaz meets Ruth (vv. 4-7)

4 Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, "The Lord be with you!" And they answered him, "The Lord bless you!"

5 Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?"

6 So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, "It is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab.

7 And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.' So she came and has continued from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house."

When Boaz arrives we begin to see what the author means by when he calls Boaz a man of standing in verse 1. First we see His focus on the Lord. He greets his workers in the name of the Lord and they respond in the same way. It sounds like a passage in Numbers 6 where the priest would bless the people and they would bless him in response. May the Lord bless you.

It's no stretch to realize Boaz is unusual. He stands out remarkably in that generation that had forgotten God. With Boaz, what he believed and what he did every day weren't

separate pigeonholes of life. Instead of having a little corner for his spiritual life, he demonstrates faithfulness -- he lives out what he knows is true about his God. Boaz is not just a wealthy man who might help Naomi and Ruth in material ways, this is God's man.

Boaz doesn't recognize Ruth and inquires to his foreman whose wife or daughter she is. The foreman does not say her name, but says she is the Moabite woman who came back with Naomi—a story that everyone clearly knows. The foreman has told him now that Ruth is humble, submissive and hard-working. She didn't demand the right to glean like the Law allowed, she came and asked. She's worked long hours. She's only come briefly to the shelter to get out of the heat.

Scene 3: Boaz cares for Ruth (vv. 8-17)

8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, "You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women.

9 Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn."

Boaz demonstrates kindness to Ruth. In verses 8-9 he approaches Ruth and tells her not to leave his fields. Maybe she'd have thought she would have abused the gleaning privilege by staying too long at his field. Instead he says, stay here with my servant girls. Watch where the men are and follow along after the girls. I've told the men not to touch you. And whenever you're thirsty, go get a drink from the water jars the men have filled. He calls her my daughter. Boaz treats her with the affection of a family member.

I can't help thinking about James 1 where he writes " **Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.**" Boaz is granting legitimacy to Ruth, he's giving her a life, essentially. So in the place of disdain and mistrust that foreigners often receive, Boaz gives compassion, kindness and care, just like we give to someone close to us. Out of sheer kindness and grace, he gives her protection and provision.

That's why we see the dramatic reaction from Ruth in verse 10:

10 So she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"

Boaz offers a partial reason in verse 11:

11 And Boaz answered and said to her, "It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before.

He knew the details. And as such he has high regard for what Ruth's actions. Then Boaz goes even further and offers a prayer for her. He wants to reward her but he also prays God will as well. Ruth has sowed kindness, now she will reap kindness. Boaz prays in verse 12:

12 The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge."

Whenever you pray for someone, you should realize God will often want you to be part of the answer to that prayer. Boaz isn't just putting on a religious show by praying for a needy person, he's going to be quite willing for God to use him.

Imagine hearing words like his -- exactly the right ones for a person in her state. Not only could she continue to glean in on Boaz' property, she now had protection and family status. Ruth takes his blessing and kindness with gratitude, verse 13:

13 Then she said, "Let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you have comforted me, and have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants."

Now Boaz's kindness is even greater, look at what he does in verse 14-17:

14 Now Boaz said to her at mealtime, "Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar." So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed parched grain to her; and she ate and was satisfied, and kept some back.

15 And when she rose up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her.

16 Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her."

17 So she gleaned in the field until evening, and beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.

He invites her to come eat with the workers. He gives her a big enough portion that she could pack up some and take it to share with Naomi. After the meal, she didn't sit -- she was off to work again.

Boaz adds to what he's done and said. He instructs the harvesters pull out some stalks from the bundles leave them for her to pick up. Ruth worked until evening; then she threshed the barley. She took home 20 to 25 pounds of grain -- enough to feed Ruth and Naomi for a week or more.

Ruth and Boaz: two loud and clear demonstrations of God's grace and kindness. They offer us life and blood illustration of what it's like to be people of grace--mirroring God's kindness to people around us.

Scene 4: Ruth brings home a good report (vv. 18-23)

18 Then she took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. So she brought out and gave to her what she had kept back after she had been satisfied.

Ruth brings gleanings and good news home to Naomi. When Naomi sees how much grain Ruth has brought home, I think she is surprised. Naomi probably expected that Ruth would come home with a handful of grain for them—she returns with half a bushel! Incredulous, in verse 19,

19 And her mother-in-law said to her, "Where have you gleaned today? And where did you work? Blessed be the one who took notice of you." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, "The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz."

Naomi is overcome with gratitude to God. This same woman who said that the Lord had afflicted her and His hand was against her, praises God for His kindness in verse 20:

20 Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he of the Lord, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!" And Naomi said to her, "This man is a relation of ours, one of our close relatives."

As we already know, It turns out that Boaz is a close relative (kinsman-redeemer) to them. We will see why this is so very important next week. Ruth tells Naomi how kind Boaz had been to her in verse 21:

21 Ruth the Moabite said, "He also said to me, 'You shall stay close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.' "

Naomi then gives Ruth her blessing to stay close to Boaz (vv. 21-22)

22 And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, and that people do not meet you in any other field."

23 So she stayed close by the young women of Boaz, to glean until the end of barley harvest and wheat harvest; and she dwelt with her mother-in-law.

And so we have quite a turn of events since the first chapter. Chapter one seemed very sad and discouraging. But chapter opens and closes with hope ... There is a redeemer!

In our application today I want to focus our attention on v. 12:

12 The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge."

Obviously, God does not have literal "wings." It is an expression of God's security and protection He offers to His children. As a mother bird protects her young by spreading her wings over them, so the Lord protects His people.

How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings. (Ps 36:7)

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, Until these calamities have passed by. (Ps 57:1)

Because You have been my help, Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice. (Ps 63:7)

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust." Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler And from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers, And under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler. (Ps 91:1-4)

What is it like under the wings of God?

The answer to this question can be found in the gentle care of Boaz for Ruth. It is a beautiful model of the gentle love of God.

1. God takes special notice of you. (v. 5)

Boaz took particular interest in Ruth. She was a poor, helpless person. So are we.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom 5:8)

For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared (Titus 3:3-4)

2. God desires that you stay close to His family. (v. 8a)

Boaz requested Ruth to stay in his field. As the saying goes, "Home is where the heart is..." God's heart is closest to His children.

There is a place for you in the family of God. More specifically, there is a place for you here at New Covenant Baptist Church. We may be small, but we are not insignificant in God's eyes. He has led you here at this time in your life for a reason.

3. God protects you. (v. 8b-9a)

Boaz protected Ruth from harm by encouraging her to stay with his female workers and ordered the male workers to leave her alone.

I know that we Christians are not exempt from troubles. I don't know that I can explain the mystery of this. But God's word promises that God is a protector of His children and we can all probably think of instances where He has done it.

Choir practice at the West Side Baptist Church in Beatrice, Nebraska, always began at 7:20 on Wednesday evening. At 7:25 p.m. on Wednesday, March 1, 1950, an explosion demolished the church. The blast forced a nearby radio station off the air and shattered windows in surrounding homes.

But every one of the choir's fifteen members escaped injury, saved by a fortuitous coincidence: All were late for practice that night. Considering the sanctified site of the explosion, it was not surprising that some attributed the near miss to divine intervention.

They supposed rightly that the odds of unanimous tardiness were slim indeed, especially when the reasons were examined. Car trouble delayed two women. The minister and his wife and daughter were delayed by a dress that needed ironing at the last minute. Others were late because they paused to complete homework, finish a letter, or hear the end of a favorite radio show. One awoke late from a nap. Some could think of no special reason; they were just late.

4. God gives you living water without cost. (v. 9)

Boaz freely offered Ruth to drink from the water that his servants drew. God promises to quench the thirst of every weary soul who comes to Him.

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. (Rev 22:17)

"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, "From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:38)

5. God feeds you with the bread of life. (v. 14)

She was satisfied and even had leftovers. God promises to meet all of our needs. God gave bread from heaven to the Jews as they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. But more so, Jesus Christ Himself is the bread of life.

"I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." (John 6:48-51)

6. God blesses the work of your hands. (vv. 15-16)

God doesn't do all the work for us, but you will find that when we honor the Lord in our workplace, He rewards us with extra gleanings.

Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. (Gal 6:9)

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Cor 15:58)

We have in the gentle care of Boaz a physical description of the divine loving care of God.

Is there a "Boaz" in your life today who is demonstrating to you in very tangible ways the love of God?

Perhaps more importantly...

Are you acting as a "Boaz" to somebody else so that they may see Jesus in you?

I wonder if there is anybody here today who isn't under the wings of God?

Maybe there is somebody here who is tired of putting on the "act" of being a Christian and is ready for the real thing. Jesus can be your Savior today...

God is calling you to find shelter under His wings.

Maybe there is somebody here who is trying to struggle through life without the blessings that God freely offers?

God is calling you to find shelter under His wings.

Is there anybody out there that feels "left out," "forgotten," even, "forsaken?" Maybe you've drifted in your faith... lost touch... even turned your back on God...

God is calling you to find shelter under His wings.

Thank you, God, for:

- Noticing us,
- Desiring that we stay close to Your family,
- Protecting us,
- Providing living water and bread for us,
- Blessing the work of our hands