

Ruth 2016 2A

- After nearly ten years spent outside her land, Naomi returns to Bethlehem
 - She comes back a widow, bitter, fragile and desperate
 - Her family plot of land has been abandoned for nearly a decade
 - It's probably overrun with weeds
 - It no longer produces an income or even enough to feed a widow
 - In contrast to her bitterness, the land is enjoying a renewed strength
 - In v.22 of chapter 1 we learned that it was the beginning of the barley harvest
 - The barley harvest begins in April, so it's springtime
 - After a period of drought and famine, once again the land is producing and life is good
 - Except for Naomi and Ruth, who must find a way to survive without a provider
 - Despite being poor widows together, Naomi and Ruth are actually quite different
 - Naomi is mourning the loss of what she once had
 - And she has no prospect of recovery or so it would seem
 - While Ruth is excited by knowing the Jewish God and the Jewish people
 - She had nothing by comparison in Moab, but now she has access to something far greater than earthly riches
- As we enter chapter 2, let's see how these two women respond to their life in the land

Ruth 2:1 Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

Ruth 2:2 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."

Ruth 2:3 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.

- Chapter 2 opens by introducing us to the next major character in the story, Boaz
 - Boaz is a kinsman, a relative of the family of Naomi and a man of great wealth
 - Apparently, Naomi has traveled back to the general area of her family inheritance, probably intentionally
 - Though she is destitute and has no prospect of finding a husband, she is hoping that her family will take pity on her
 - As the saying goes, charity begins at home
 - The name Boaz means "swift strength" or "quickness" which describes his readiness to serve
 - He is called a kinsman, which is a technical term
 - It doesn't just mean he is a relative of Elimelech's
 - The term kinsman describes someone who is eligible according to the Law to perpetuate Elimelech's family line (more on kinsman later)
 - Finally, he's wealthy, which means he's the ideal candidate to assist two poor widows
- So these two women enter the land of Elimelech's family, and as they do they are focused on basic needs
 - Like Maslow's hierarchy predicts, the women must attend to food and protection before all else
 - The need for food is obvious
 - They have no source of income and they cannot produce their own food over night

- So they must find a way to eat to survive
- But secondly, they must find a source of protection
 - Just as today, two women living on the streets or in the fields were very vulnerable
 - Can you imagine how terrified they must have felt in the middle of a dark night as they heard men moving to and fro?
- So Ruth being the younger, takes the initiative
 - In keeping with her promise to Naomi, she seeks to find a way to provide for both of them
 - And under their circumstances, the only choice they had was to beg
 - So Ruth asks Naomi's permission to glean from the fields
- The Lord in His mercy had made a provision for widows and the poor under the Law
 - The Lord told Israel to harvest their fields in a particular fashion so as to ensure the needy were able to find provision in an honorable way

Lev. 19:9 'Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest.

Lev. 19:10 'Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God.

- Harvesting grain is a multistep process
- First, men took long sharp blades attached to long poles and swung them through the stalks of grain to cut them to the ground
- Then others collected the stalks into bundles
- Then the bundles were carried to a threshing floor where the fruit was separated from the husks usually by treading of oxen
- Finally the grain was winnowed to separate it from the chaff
- In Leviticus, the Lord directed that those collecting the grain from the field should be intentionally sloppy

- As the men cut down the stalks, they typically swung the sickle in a circular fashion, cutting arcs of grain with each pass
- As they reached the corner of the land, their swing would typically leave behind a triangular patch of uncut standing grain
- The Law told Israel to leave those triangles behind in the field
- The point was to leave something for the stranger or the needy
 - The stranger referred to anyone sojourning in the land of Israel who did not have ownership in the land
 - Someone like Ruth
 - And the needy referred to anyone in Israel who was in need due to unfortunate circumstances like widowhood
 - Someone like Naomi
- It's interesting that the Lord commanded the people to leave the grain standing
 - He didn't say harvest everything but then give a donation to the needy
 - Instead, He commanded that the needy be given opportunity to harvest for themselves
 - The point was to make sure the needy and the stranger didn't suffer the humiliation of taking a handout
 - Instead, they were permitted to harvest for themselves
 - They had the dignity of working for what they received
 - Even as they harvested from someone else's field
 - In a sense, they were hired workers for the day and they were receiving the fruit of their own labor
 - This is exactly what Ruth is hoping to do, and she appears to know this custom in Israel, probably because Naomi has explained it to her
 - We can safely assume that Naomi discussed her plans with Ruth during their journey back to Israel
 - She would have told Ruth that they might be able to survive if they can find a land owner willing to obey Leviticus 19

- This is no small step of faith, because remember this is the time of Judges
- It was possible, and maybe even likely, that the Jews in that day would have ignored the law and denied Naomi and Ruth their provision in the Harvest
- Because everyone did what was right in their own eyes anyway
- Back in v.2 Ruth asks Naomi if she can begin the gleaning and Naomi gives her agreement
 - She probably asked permission because she was taking a risk
 - Ruth is taking a risk in going out into the fields by herself
 - And Naomi is taking a risk by letting her go and to remain alone in the fields
 - But they have to separate if they are going to survive
 - So Ruth sets about following the reapers in the field
 - As a Moabitess, Ruth obviously knows no one in Israel other than Naomi
 - So as she goes from field to field, she has no idea where she is headed
 - She gleans for a while in one location and moves on when she runs out of opportunity
 - This is hard work, all day in the fields, exposed to the sun and without water
 - But by the providence of the Lord, Ruth finds her way to the field of Boaz
 - From Ruth's point of view, this is just another field
 - The writer says in v.3 that she happened into Boaz's field
 - But the writer doesn't mean it's an accident or that it wasn't according to God's purpose
 - On the contrary, the writer means Ruth herself didn't know what she was doing
 - But God certainly knew

- As she sets about working in the field, the master of the field comes on the scene

[Ruth 2:4](#) 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.”

[Ruth 2:5](#) Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, “Whose young woman is this?”

[Ruth 2:6](#) The servant in charge of the reapers replied, “She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab.

[Ruth 2:7](#) “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 comes to his field from Bethlehem
 - As he enters his estate, he immediately takes notice of the young woman gleaning in his land
 - The timing of Boaz’s arrival further testifies to the Lord’s hand in all these circumstances
 - On the very day that Ruth happens into Boaz’s field, Boaz happens to arrive back from Bethlehem
 - Every detail of the story is pointing us to the Lord at work
 - As Boaz returns home he greets his servants by saying “May the Lord be with you”
 - To which they reply the same
 - What do we make of this simple exchange?
 - You may not even take notice of it, but don’t overlook it!
 - Remember, this story is set in the time of Judges
 - In this day and age, the people of Israel were not thinking of the Lord, generally speaking
 - We saw that clearly when we studied the book of Judges
- So to have a man during this time greeting even his servants in this way tells us something about his character
 - Boaz is a godly man whose mind is directed toward the Lord and His will

- This detail by itself is a striking contrast with everything else we've seen in the time of Judges
- The hypocrite will display his piety only before men of privilege or wealth or power
- Because in doing so, they seek to make an impression and curry favor to some advantage
- The rest of the time, they revert to their true nature, lording over the poor and taking advantage of the weak
- But a truly godly man or woman will practice their godliness before even the lowest of the culture
 - As James tells us:

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

- James says that true religion...true worship of God...is seen in serving the underprivileged
- Like widows and orphans who have nothing to give us in return for our investment in them...groups that convey no status upon us
- Why take time to invest in their lives? Because you love God
- So when Boaz turns his attention to Ruth, a poor Moabite widow gleaning in his field, we see him practicing true, undefiled religion
 - And this detail, together with his greeting, tells us Boaz is a truly godly man
 - He is godly before his servants
 - And he takes opportunities to serve the less fortunate around him
 - This is just the sort of man Naomi and Ruth need
- Boaz's servant goes on to explain that Ruth was the Moabite related to Naomi and she had asked to glean in the field
 - Moreover the servant explains that this woman has been working in the day

- She arrived early and she worked hard through the hottest part of the day
- And only now she has taken refuge for a time in the house
- The servant's report of Ruth tells us something about Ruth's character
 - Ruth was a woman of high character
 - Though she was destitute and seeking the generosity of strangers, nevertheless she maintained a desire to bless others
 - She worked hard for her support
 - She didn't expect her assistance to simply fall into her lap as if she was entitled
 - She recognized that the law made provision for her but only if she worked
- Ruth's character is the perfect compliment to Boaz
 - Boaz is an example of someone who displays godliness in times of plenty
 - He was blessed with much and yet he approached the needs of others with compassion as a service to God
 - And on the flip side Ruth was in need yet she sought for assistance with an attitude of industriousness and faithful service
 - Her godliness was evident in her desire to bless others in return for their charity, as Paul said to the Thessalonians:

2Th. 3:10 For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.

2Th. 3:11 For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies.

2Th. 3:12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.

2Th. 3:13 But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good.

2Th. 3:14 If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame.

2Th. 3:15 Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

- So Ruth's disciplined, hardworking attitude is evidence of her godly character

- And this is an attractive quality for Boaz
 - But Boaz's interest in Ruth goes beyond her attractiveness
 - He would have also been intrigued by her origins
- You may remember Boaz's mother, Rahab
 - She was also a Gentile woman who found refuge in the God of Israel
 - Rahab gave assistance to the spies of Israel as they entered the land under Joshua
 - So they spared her life and welcomed her into the people of God
- We can say that Rahab, like Ruth, was attached to Israel by God's grace, and in that way she came to know God
 - In fact, Rahab is in the line to the Messiah
 - And so Boaz is a Jewish man prospering among the people of God because someone granted a Gentile woman mercy
 - And so as he looks upon another Gentile woman, one with admirable qualities, he must have been thinking about his own family
- So Boaz gives his servant particular instructions

Ruth 2:8 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.

Ruth 2:9 "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."

Ruth 2:10 Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"

Ruth 2:11 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.

Ruth 2:12 "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."

Ruth 2:13 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."

- Boaz approaches Ruth as she sits in the house and calls her my daughter
 - The term is a tender way to address the young widow
 - She is vulnerable and probably concerned that someone might take advantage of her
 - But now the master of the house comes to her and calls her “daughter”
 - In this context, the term means a maidservant, a woman employed as a servant
 - So Boaz is placing Ruth under his protection in his house
 - He tells her she is to remain in his house, following his gleaners as they work his fields
 - She need not look elsewhere for a provision, because Boaz will endure that she finds all she needs in his home
 - It’s a promise of provision
 - Secondly, he assures Ruth that no one will touch her, that is no one will harm her
 - This is the first anti-sexual harassment policy and it’s found in the Bible
 - Boaz probably wasn’t expecting his servants to attack Ruth in the field, though that did happen to women like Ruth
 - It’s unlikely that a godly man like Boaz would have employed such men in the first place
 - But just in case anyone were inclined to take advantage of Ruth’s vulnerability, Boaz has put everyone on notice not to even think about it
 - The main point of his comment was to reassure Ruth
 - It’s a promise of protection
 - Finally, Boaz says Ruth is to draw water with the servants
 - Access to water in the hot, dry lands of Judah was of particular importance

- Someone like Ruth would have been forced to find water in open pools, or perhaps a stream if one were available
- Such water was likely to be dirty and water-borne sickness was an ever-present concern for the poor
- Or if she could access a well, she would have to do the difficult work of drawing up water for herself
- But Boaz sets those concerns aside by assuring Ruth may drink the clean well water in the jars filled by Boaz's servants
 - Not only will she have ready access to water, but she will have it without the backbreaking works usually required
 - More importantly, she has fresh living water that won't run out and won't make her sick
 - It's a promise of privilege
- Boaz has stepped into the desperate life of a Gentile widow with promises of provision, protection and privilege, and it stuns Ruth
 - She bows in respect to Boaz and asks how could this happen to me?
 - Specifically, she asks why she has found favor in Boaz's eyes
 - The Hebrew word for favor is *chen*, which can also be translated grace
 - Ruth asks why did you show me such undeserved kindness?
 - Boaz answers her by explaining what he has heard
 - Ruth's testimony has preceded her
 - He says I know what you did for Naomi and her family
 - He knows she has sacrificed her family and way of life to help her mother-in-law, Naomi, who was a relative of Boaz's family
 - This act of sacrifice alone would have been worthy of some recompense
 - But Boaz was even more impressed by Ruth's commitment to join herself to a people and a God she didn't know
 - He points to Ruth's choice to seek refuge under the wings of the God of Israel

- And Boaz says may the Lord reward her for her faith
- In other words, Boaz is acting on behalf of the Lord to bring the rewards that belong to any child of God by faith
- Finally, Ruth comes to understand that Boaz was serious
 - She acknowledges that she has received grace and is amazed to have it
 - She has been comforted by these acts of kindness
 - And she embraces her new position as a maidservant in the home
 - Nevertheless, Ruth is conscious that she isn't like the other maidservants
 - She's mindful that she is an outsider who has been brought into the home
 - Her recognition is humility
 - And by her humility she magnifies the master's mercy and kindness
 - Boaz's choice to favor Ruth with the privileges of a maidservant was all the more remarkable when we remember that Ruth was a stranger
- The Lord has united a godly Jewish master with a godly Gentile woman in the midst of an ungodly culture and done it by means of grace
 - It doesn't take much effort for us to see ourselves in this story
 - As we drive deeper in to this story, we'll come to understand that Boaz pictures Christ in many ways
 - But already we can recognize that Boaz's favor bestowed upon Ruth is a beautiful representation of Christ's grace given to us
 - We were strangers to God, working in the field of the world, just getting by
 - We weren't looking for the Lord
 - But then one day the Lord took notice of us
 - He came to us, introduced by His servant
 - The unnamed servant in this story is a picture of the Holy Spirit

- In fact, when a servant remains unnamed in scripture, it's often intended to picture the Holy Spirit working behind the scenes
- In this case, the servant brought Boaz and Ruth together
- But notice the spirit brought Christ to Ruth, not the other way around
- And then as Christ comes to us by way of His Spirit, He brings us His grace
 - Where before we were strangers, Christ now joins us to the house of God, making us His servants
 - He promises provision now and in the kingdom
 - He promises us protection from the penalty of our sin and the power of death
 - And He grants us privilege as adopted sons and daughters
 - He gives us living water
- He does all these things for us before we even opened our mouth to acknowledge Him
 - Before we bowed before Him, before we called Him Lord
 - He was lifting us up and grants us His favor
 - And we see all this represented beautifully in the story of Boaz and Ruth
- But what of Naomi? And how do these events fit into our second story of Israel and the Church? We'll explore that next week