

Series— God is the Hero of This Story

“Bless the Man Who Noticed You” Ruth Chapter 2 / Jeff Kennedy / August 6, 2023

**Opening Scripture:** Leviticus 25:24–28 “You are to allow the redemption of any land you occupy. <sup>25</sup> If your brother becomes destitute and sells part of his property, his nearest relative may come and redeem what his brother has sold. <sup>26</sup> If a man has no family redeemer, but he prospers<sup>[b]</sup> and obtains enough to redeem his land, <sup>27</sup> he may calculate the years since its sale, repay the balance to the man he sold it to, and return to his property. <sup>28</sup> But if he cannot obtain enough to repay him, what he sold will remain in the possession of its purchaser until the Year of Jubilee. It is to be released at the Jubilee, so that he may return to his property.”

**Opening Story:** **Have you ever experienced the delight and excitement of receiving a gift from a secret admirer?** The thought that there was someone *you were unaware of leaving you gifts like a breadcrumb trail*, eventually so that you would discover their identity and so that you would possibly reciprocate their affection, creates an electric anticipation in the heart. And that is often how it feels to receive the gifts and resources that the LORD brings into our lives. We often can only see what God has been doing in retrospect. And we may be tempted at times to think that the provision itself is the source of our blessing. But in the end, we discover that every good and perfect gift comes to us not by chance but from the Father of Heavenly Lights.

**Transition:** Ruth Chapter 2 is that kind of story. In the sunlit fields of Bethlehem, the narrative of Ruth takes an intriguing turn, as the foreigner Ruth takes center stage. Against the backdrop of busy reapers and golden stalks of wheat, a chance encounter with a man named Boaz will change their lives forever. It is a story about a mysterious God who, behind the scenes, is providing for Ruth through the gracious provision of a nobleman.

**Now, last week, we talked about God being present in the midst of both scarcity and abundance.** Last week we saw him redeeming Naomi’s bitterness in times of loss, this week, we’re going to see God working to abundantly supply all of their needs.

Let’s pick up the story in Chapter 2:1

2:1–3 Now Naomi had a relative on her husband’s side. He was a prominent man of noble character from Elimelech’s family. His name was Boaz. Ruth the Moabitess asked Naomi, “Will you let me go into the fields and gather fallen grain behind someone with whom I find favor?” Naomi answered her, “Go ahead, my daughter.” So Ruth left and entered the field to gather grain behind the harvesters. She happened to be in the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was from Elimelech’s family.

**2:1 A Man of noble character from Elimelech’s family.** Boaz's stature in Judah is highlighted by the author’s use of the phrase “known in the gate.” He is a man with means, prominence, and influence in the tribe. This is evident from his connection with Elimelech's family, which reveals that Naomi comes from a prominent clan. This is why so many people greet Naomi when she returns to Bethlehem. Additionally, this detail clues to the ancient Jewish reader that Naomi's family and property can be redeemed through a relative according to the law of Moses.

In ancient Israel, gleaning was a practice aimed at preserving the dignity of widows, orphans, and sojourners. It allowed them to maintain their self-sufficiency through diligent work. The Torah (Lev 19:9–10; 23:22; Deut 24:19) outlines this welfare/workfare system.

In contrast to the surrounding pagan nations, there were no clear guidelines or laws regarding gleaning or providing for the poor. Non-Jewish pagan nations often left a portion of their harvest uncollected as an offering to local fertility deities. However, Moses' law required Israelites to offer those resources to those made in the image of God (Lev. 19:18) and as a way to ensure fair treatment of the vulnerable (Deut 24:17–25:19), seeking divine blessings for their efforts (Deut 24:19).

**2:3 “She happened to be...”** Ruth's obliviousness to whose field she has chosen to reap is a subtle hint that God is orchestrating the events of the story. What appears to be a chance encounter is actually God working behind the scenes to bring Ruth and Boaz together.

2:4–7 Later, when Boaz arrived from Bethlehem, he said to the harvesters, “The LORD be with you.” “The LORD bless you,” they replied. Boaz asked his servant who was in charge of the harvesters, “Whose young woman is this?” The servant answered, “She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the territory of Moab. <sup>7</sup> She asked, ‘Will you let me gather fallen grain among the bundles behind the harvesters?’ She came and has been on her feet since early morning, except that she rested a little in the shelter.”

**2:4 Boaz...said to the harvesters, “The LORD be with you” (Heb. *YHWH imachem*).** This was a customary Jewish greeting indicating that Boaz is not (shockingly) an idolater. He is a worshiper of Israel’s God—the one true God—YHWH.

**2:5 Boaz asked, “Whose young woman is this?”** His question is more suggestive in Hebrew than it is in English, as women were considered property at the time. His question is really, “Is this woman married?” This suggests that he was initially attracted to her. The foreman reveals that she is the Moabite woman who returned with Naomi, a story that has spread throughout the region of Judah. He also notes that she is courteous and industrious, as she has been working hard all day to provide for Naomi.

2:8–9 Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Listen, my daughter. Don’t go and gather grain in another field, and don’t leave this one, but stay here close to my female servants. <sup>9</sup> See which field they are harvesting and follow them. Haven’t I ordered the young men not to touch you? When you are thirsty, go and drink from the jars the young men have filled.”

**2:9 “Haven’t I ordered the young men not to touch you?”** Boaz's question shows that he had already inquired about Ruth and taken steps to protect her. He ordered the other men in the field not to touch her, instructed her to stay with the female servants, and offered her water from the cisterns. He showed her more kindness than Moses' law required, and his generosity is just getting started.

2:10–13 She fell facedown, bowed to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favor with you, so that you notice me, although I am a foreigner?” <sup>11</sup> Boaz answered her, “Everything you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband’s death has been fully reported to me: how you left your father and mother and your native land, and how you came to a people you didn’t previously know. <sup>12</sup> May the Lord reward you for what you have done, and may you receive a full reward from the Lord God of Israel, *under whose wings you have come for refuge.*” <sup>13</sup> “My lord,” she said, “I have found favor with you, for you have comforted and encouraged your servant, although I am not like one of your female servants.”

**2:10 “She fell facedown, bowed to the ground...”** In the ancient Near East, bowing down to the ground was a sign of respect for a superior. This gesture is also used in the New Testament as a posture of worship, particularly in the book of Revelation. Ruth is surprised by Boaz's attention because she is a foreigner. This Hebrew word for “foreigner” means “someone out of place; conspicuous by appearance.” Meaning she doesn’t look like all the other Jewish servant girls. Being from Moab, she is likely darker-skinned and speaks with a thick Edomite accent. In other words, she stands out as different in a foreign land.

**2:11 “Everything you have done for your mother-in-law...”** Ruth the Edomite stands out among the other Jewish servant girls for her loyalty, courage, and commitment to Naomi and her God. Boaz recognizes that she has taken shelter under the wings of the Lord God of Israel, a common image in the ancient Near East. This is a clear acknowledgment of her embrace of Israel's God.

2:14–18 At mealtime Boaz told her, “Come over here and have some bread and dip it in the vinegar sauce.” So she sat beside the harvesters, and he offered her roasted grain. She ate and was satisfied and had some left over.

When she got up to gather grain, Boaz ordered his young men, “Let her even gather grain among the bundles, and don’t humiliate her. Pull out some stalks from the bundles for her and leave them for her to gather. Don’t rebuke her.” So Ruth gathered grain in the field until evening. She beat out what she had gathered, and it was about twenty-six quarts of barley. She picked up the grain and went into the town, where her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She brought out what she had left over from her meal and gave it to her.

**2:15 “Let her even gather grain among the bundles...pull out some stalks and leave them for her to gather...”** Boaz invites Ruth to dinner, a high honor in the ancient Near East. As she leaves, he instructs his men to leave her the choice bundles of grain. Ruth returns with a haul of grain stalks and bundles to Naomi, giving her the rest. Scholars estimate that she has gathered enough grain to last for 8–10 months.

2:19–23 “Her mother-in-law said to her, “Where did you gather barley today, and where did you work? May the Lord bless the man who noticed you.” Ruth told her mother-in-law whom she had worked with and said, “The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz.” Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May the Lord bless him because he has not abandoned his kindness to the living or the dead.” Naomi continued, “The man is a close relative. He is one of our family redeemers.” Ruth the Moabitess said, “He also told me, ‘Stay with my young men until they have finished all of my harvest.’” So Naomi said to her daughter-in-law Ruth, “My daughter, it is good for you to work with his female servants, so that nothing will happen to you in another field.” Ruth stayed close to Boaz’s female servants and gathered grain until the barley and the wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.”

**2:19 “Where did you work?” Ruth now fills her in on the whole story and Naomi approves.** She informs Ruth that Boaz is one of her family's redeemers. She likely has to explain this Mosaic statute from Leviticus 25 to her daughter-in-law, instructing her on the significance of meeting a man like Boaz.

Chapter 2 ends with Ruth remaining faithful, not presuming on Boaz or Naomi’s kindness, and just getting up going to work, and providing for her family at the generosity of her new sponsor in Judah.

Some observations from the story.

**We remain faithful to God in a world that rejects the truth.** The whole story reveals in many subtle ways that Naomi's family in Bethlehem is attempting to be faithful to Moses' law in the Torah. We see this in multiple ways.

- **The practice of allowing the poor and destitute**, and foreigners to glean leftovers from the harvest is unique to Judaism.
- **The ethic of protecting young women** from harm is a Judaic ethic.
- **The practice of allowing foreigners to integrate into Judaic society**, so long as they convert and display their loyalty to the God of Israel, is rooted in Torah.
- **They use God's names**, particularly Yahweh, Adonai, and El Shaddai.
- The expectation that a kinsman will redeem his relative's family. This practice is deeply rooted in Moses' law.

**Application:** In the midst of a world that is becoming increasingly godless, unfaithful to God's truth and desperately seeking for life in things that can't provide it, we must remain faithful to God's Word, to his truth, and be faithful worshipers of him.

### **Faithfulness to God looks like...**

1. Exclusive devotion to the one true God.

The first command is "Do not have other gods besides me." (Exod 20:3).

The psalmist sang, "I am at rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him and no other!" (Psalm 62:1).

Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Matt 6:24). I am struck by the example of allegiance to the God of Israel in Ruth Chapter 2. Everyone seems to be very committed to God in a world that has lost its mind and faith.

2. Confidence in God's promises. God has made certain promises to us, and he is trustworthy to finish his work. Listen, the one who started a good work in you (Phil 1) will be faithful to bring it to completion.

2 Peter 1:3–4 "His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. <sup>4</sup> By these he has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire."

Look closely at what he says here. Peter articulates here the doctrine of *Theosis* in contrast to pagan doctrines of *Apotheosis*. Pagan Gentile religions taught apotheosis, which is the deification/exaltation of people to the rank of gods,

usually bestowed for heroic acts on rulers and kings. That is a false doctrine. Theosis is the understanding that human beings can have real union with God and so become like God to such a degree (as bearers of his image) that we participate in the divine nature. But Theosis is the idea that we become partakers of the divine life of the Triune God, resulting in our immortality in the resurrection and sonship through a true transformation, for “the corruptible must be clothed with incorruptibility, and the mortal body must be clothed with immortality” (1 Cor 15:53). You see, “Love is Love” is not true. What that phrase means is that my expression of love is not context-dependent. But that’s only true if one defines “love” accurately. You see “love” is not “love” *GOD IS LOVE*. And God is merciful, compassionate, caring, wrathful, a God of justice, holiness, and righteousness. And his great and precious promise to us is that we become partakers, communers of his divine life—the very life of the Triune God. More than anything in God’s creation, I need God! And that’s the great and precious promise.

- I need God in the midst of an argument with my spouse.
- I need God when my teenagers are being, well, teenagers.
- I need God when there is an economic downturn and in times of abundance, at work, and on vacation/sabbatical. The stuff I need most is not the stuff—it’s the stalks of grain sown by the Hand of his providence, leading me to him. *YHWH Yireh*, the God who provides!

3. Wise stewardship of God’s resources. “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master has put in charge of his household?” (Matt 24:45). Luke 19:17 “Well done, good servant!” he told him. “Because you have been faithful in a very small matter, have authority over ten towns.” Faithfulness looks like wise and compassionate stewardship of God’s resources. I am struck by Boaz’s generosity in the story. He is a picture of God providing for Israel and us. And God is generous, he expects us to reflect his wisdom and generosity. The wise stewardship of resources means we invest in those ventures that promote the gospel in the world. We give toward those causes that further the good news of Jesus. And we also reflect the heart of a generous God who graciously supplies us with all things.
4. Prioritizing the teaching of the Word. 2 Tim 2:2 “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Faithfulness looks like teaching and passing the gospel trust on to the next generation of young men and women who will learn the Word, and be able to live it and share it with

others. As faithful men we commit and charge other faithful men to step up and lead. To answer the call for godly, biblical leadership. The story of Ruth gives me Pause when I think about just how knowledgeable Naomi, Boaz, Ruth are concerning Moses' law. Someone in that clan took the time to inculcate, to coach and instruct a tribe of people in the midst of an unfaithful generation.

5. Resolve to finish the race marked out for us. John the Apostle recorded Jesus' message to the churches, "Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). Are you a finisher? Will there be anything that causes you to stumble and to reject so great a salvation in Christ? Here's what the writer of Hebrews says about that: "Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, <sup>2</sup> keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Let's Pray