

Reaping

Series: Ruth: A Story of Redemption

Ruth 2

July 15, 2018

Welcome again to worship. It's great to be here together.

There was a young man who went off to college far away. One day, he calls his mother. "Mom, I've found a girl, and I have asked her to marry me. We'll be home Sunday afternoon. But I'm going to bring home three girls and I want you to guess which one is my fiancé."

Sure enough Sunday afternoon come. The son walks in the door with three girls following behind him.

"It's that one", said his mother, without blinking an eye.

"Holy cow", the son exclaimed, "how in the world did you know it was her?"

The mother replied, "I just don't like her."

Last week, we started a series on the Old Testament figure Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi. If you weren't here last week, Naomi is from Bethlehem, which means, "House of Bread." However, because of a famine, her family travels to Moab. While there, her son meets and marries Ruth. Ten years after arriving, Naomi, her husband and her sons dead, decides it's time to go home. She tries to send her daughter-in-law Ruth back to her home, but Ruth will not hear it.

*"Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God."*¹

So, the two women travel to Bethlehem.²

Today, we look at the second chapter, so turn in your bulletin to page 4 and 5. We are immediately introduced to an important character in the book of Ruth: Boaz. The text tells us that Boaz was a wealthy and influential man. We eventually learn that he was a relative of Naomi's dead husband Elimelech. But there is one more tidbit of information about Boaz, and it is his famous mother. We find this out in an unlikely place.

In the genealogical list of Jesus in Matthew 1, we find this in verse 5: Boaz's father was named Salmon, who married none other than Rahab.³ Do you remember who Rahab was? Rahab was the prostitute who housed and saved 2 Hebrew spies from Joshua's army as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. Yes, a prostitute was Boaz's mother. Rahab and her family were the only people that survived the destruction of Jericho. Joshua 6 says:

*So Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute and her relatives who were with her in the house, because she had hidden the spies Joshua sent to Jericho. And she lives among the Israelites to this day.*⁴

So eventually, Rahab marries Salmon, and they have a child named Boaz, and obviously, this family has done well. Boaz's mom, though once a pagan prostitute, was

¹ Ruth 1:16 (NLT2)

² See Ruth 1:22

³ See Matthew 1:5

⁴ Joshua 6:25 (NLT2)

undoubtedly a hero for the people of Israel, and when she married, she and her husband settled in Bethlehem, and grew prosperous.

But let's get back to Ruth. As we studied chapter 1 last week, I would have to say that Ruth 1 is about **Resolve**, the resolve of Ruth to follow her mother-in-law back to Bethlehem and to embrace the faith of her mother-in-law. Now Ruth 2 is about **Reaping**, and I want to share 4 things here.

Once Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem, Ruth immediately goes to work. As far as they know, there is no help for these two widows, so Ruth needs to do something to provide food. So, she begins to reap, and that's our first point:

Pursuit of the reaping.

Look at verse 2-3:

One day Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go out into the harvest fields to pick up the stalks of grain left behind by anyone who is kind enough to let me do it." Naomi replied, "All right, my daughter, go ahead." So Ruth went out to gather grain behind the harvesters.⁵

Let's stop there for a moment. Naomi and Ruth had returned to Bethlehem at the perfect time; it was the beginning of the harvest. There was plenty of food, but how could Ruth, a recent arrival to town get food? By going out into the fields.

Here is a situation, like several in the book of Ruth, this talks about something that is strange to us. Remember last week the Levirate marriage, where Myra would have to marry my brother Greg, something she seemed less than enthusiastic about? Well, this week is another one of those, and it is the law of Moses regarding farming and reaping.

You see, here in America, farmers make sure to harvest every line of crop they have. You never see a field after harvest with anything left, and if you do, you look down on the farmer for not being thorough, being sloppy. Wow, the guy missed a section, the edges.

But that is exactly what the farmers of Israel did: leave crops in the field. But why?

God told Moses in Leviticus 23:

When you harvest the crops of your land, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields, and do not pick up what the harvesters drop. Leave it for the poor and the foreigners living among you. I am the LORD your God.⁶

And in Deuteronomy 24:

When you are harvesting your crops and forget to bring in a bundle of grain from your field, don't go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Then the LORD your God will bless you in all you do.⁷

Throughout the Old Testament, God told His people to treat the poor with justice. The powerless and poverty-stricken are often looked upon by some people as incompetent or lazy when, in fact, those facing that situation may be victims of oppression and circumstance. God says we must do all we can to help those who are needy. His justice gave the poor every opportunity to better their situation, while providing humane options for those who couldn't. None of us is completely isolated from

⁵ Ruth 2:2-3a (NLT2)

⁶ Leviticus 23:22 (NLT2). Also Leviticus 19:9

⁷ Deuteronomy 24:19 (NLT2)

the poor; many of us face needs at one time or another. God wants us to treat each other fairly and do our part to help meet one another's needs.

So God's people were instructed to leave some of their harvest in the fields so travelers and the poor could gather it. It served as a type of welfare program in Israel. Because this law was being obeyed years after it was written, and because she was a widow with no means of providing for herself, Ruth was able to go to a field and find food. And it was obviously a good choice.

Here's our second point: **Providence in the Reaping.**

Unbeknownst to Ruth, she happens upon the perfect field. Verses 3-7:

*So Ruth went out to gather grain behind the harvesters. And as it happened, she found herself working in a field that belonged to Boaz, the relative of her father-in-law, Elimelech. While she was there, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters. "The LORD be with you!" he said. "The LORD bless you!" the harvesters replied. Then Boaz asked his foreman, "Who is that young woman over there? Who does she belong to?" And the foreman replied, "She is the young woman from Moab who came back with Naomi. She asked me this morning if she could gather grain behind the harvesters. She has been hard at work ever since, except for a few minutes' rest in the shelter."*⁸

So there was providence in the reaping. The word "providence" is made up of two words: "Pro" means "Before" and "Video" means "to see"; so the word "providence" simply means "to see before." So when we talk about the providence of God, we mean that God "sees before" and plans accordingly.

Back during the Depression, there was a pastor and his wife and their 3 small children. He served a small country church where times his income was less than \$10 a week. One day, they found themselves out of bread and with only some rancid bacon grease for shortening. The wife used it in making hot biscuits and they managed to eat some of them for lunch. Later, as they put the remaining biscuits on the supper table, the five-year-old daughter prayed very earnestly, "Dear Jesus, help us to eat these biscuits or else send us some better ones. Amen!" Later that evening, the doorbell rang. There, at the door, stood a member of the church who had a bakery route. Before they knew it, he began unloading his large basket with all kinds of tempting sweet rolls, buns, biscuits, dark and white bread. "You know," he said rather apologetically, "I was tired tonight and seven miles out here in the pouring rain seemed so far. I was tempted to wait until tomorrow evening and bring these on my way to prayer meeting as I usually do." Then he added, "But I was strongly constrained to come tonight! Hope you can use these things!"⁹

We don't use the word "providence" much, at least not as Methodist. It seems such a Calvinistic word, but it doesn't mean that we don't believe it.

My friend, you may find yourself in a difficult, maybe even dire situation. There is no food, only horrible biscuits. You have no support system, be it a spouse or a job. You are like a widow in a strange land and hungry. God's providence, His "see before", has your situation before Him. Allow Him to lead you to the field He wants you in.

God led Ruth to Boaz's field where he could help her.

Third, **Protection in the Reaping.**

⁸ Ruth 2:3-7 (NLT2)

⁹ Anne S. Alexander, in Power; downloaded from sermoncentral.com

Being a young woman in a strange place left Ruth extremely vulnerable. She was at the mercy of the scruples or appetites of strangers. Imagine the possibilities. Who knows what might happened to her.

But God protected Ruth through Boaz. Verses 8-16:

Boaz went over and said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter [Kind of like saying, "Ma'am]. Stay right here with us when you gather grain; don't go to any other fields. Stay right behind the young women working in my field. See which part of the field they are harvesting, and then follow them. I have warned the young men not to treat you roughly. And when you are thirsty, help yourself to the water they have drawn from the well." Ruth fell at his feet and thanked him warmly. [Notice how desperate Ruth was, and how thankful] "What have I done to deserve such kindness?" she asked. "I am only a foreigner." "Yes, I know," Boaz replied. "But I also know about everything you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband. I have heard how you left your father and mother and your own land to live here among complete strangers. May the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, reward you fully for what you have done." "I hope I continue to please you, sir," she replied. "You have comforted me by speaking so kindly to me, even though I am not one of your workers." At mealtime Boaz called to her, "Come over here, and help yourself to some food. You can dip your bread in the sour wine." So she sat with his harvesters, and Boaz gave her some roasted grain to eat. She ate all she wanted and still had some left over. When Ruth went back to work again, Boaz ordered his young men, "Let her gather grain right among the sheaves without stopping her. And pull out some heads of barley from the bundles and drop them on purpose for her. Let her pick them up, and don't give her a hard time!"¹⁰

Boaz allows unlimited access to his harvest crew. He tells Ruth to work alongside the other women; where they go, she should go. He ordered his men to protect Ruth in the fields. She's allowed access to their water. She's invited to lunch break, even given lunch. She was not left to fend for herself as gleaners usually were. Then she is allowed to harvest amongst the harvesters, and they were instructed to deliberately drop handfuls of stalks of barley in her path so that she would have abundant provision. This was beyond what Boaz was required by the Law to do.¹¹ That was protection.

Finally, the **Product of the Reaping.**

Verses 17 and following:

So Ruth gathered barley there all day, and when she beat out the grain that evening, it filled an entire basket. She carried it back into town and showed it to her mother-in-law. Ruth also gave her the roasted grain that was left over from her meal. "Where did you gather all this grain today?" Naomi asked. "Where did you work? May the LORD bless the one who helped you!" So Ruth told her mother-in-law about the man in whose field she had worked. She said, "The man I worked with today is named Boaz." "May the LORD bless him!" Naomi told her daughter-in-law. "He is showing his kindness to us as well as to your dead husband. That man is one of our closest relatives, one of our family redeemers." Then Ruth said, "What's more, Boaz even told me to come back and stay with his harvesters until the entire harvest is completed."

¹⁰ Ruth 2:8-16 (NLT2)

¹¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty, Ruth 2:14-16

“Good!” Naomi exclaimed. “Do as he said, my daughter. Stay with his young women right through the whole harvest. You might be harassed in other fields, but you’ll be safe with him.” So Ruth worked alongside the women in Boaz’s fields and gathered grain with them until the end of the barley harvest. Then she continued working with them through the wheat harvest in early summer. And all the while she lived with her mother-in-law.¹²

Because of the pursuit of the reaping, the providence of the reaping, and the protection of the reaping, Ruth was able to have a product of the reaping. The New Living Translation says a basket. Other translations say an ephah. Well, because you’ve never seen an ephah of dog food or anything else for that matter, let me translate. Ruth gathered about 30 pounds of food that day. Wow. I can hardly carry two 20 pound bags of salt down to my water softener. 30 pounds of food in one day! That was absolutely remarkable. It would feed Ruth and Naomi for days and days.

God certainly blessed Ruth. That morning, she had nothing; by the end of the day, she had plenty of food and a place to go back to for more.

That’s the kind of God we serve. He takes us from nothingness to abundance. That’s why our church’s theme verse is Ephesians 3:20. We read this after every Administrative and Ministry meeting:

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.¹³

COMMENT

Did you hear about the lonely frog who goes to see a fortune-teller? He’s told not to worry. She says, “You’re going to meet a beautiful young girl, and she will want to know everything about you.”

“That’s great!” the excited frog says. “When will I meet her?”

And the psychic says, “Next semester...in biology class.”

Life has a way of “going south,” doesn’t it? And we wonder sometimes: “Are we merely the victims of fate? Is there any point to the unfolding events of our lives?” The book of Ruth addresses this question, and what it tells us this: There is a heart at the center of the universe. It’s not just a cold, empty expanse, indifferent to us or to our lives. Nor is it a machine driven by some cruel, malevolent force such as chance. No. What’s behind everything – this is what the book of Ruth tells us – what’s behind everything is a gracious God that is purposeful and loving, who wants to care for you.

Will you let Him today?

¹² Ruth 2:17-23 (NLT2)

¹³ Ephesians 3:20 (NLT2)