

Finding Favor in the Field

Running for Refuge Under the Wings of God

Scripture: Ruth 2:1-23

Sermon Series: *From Bitterness to Blessing*

Topic: Ruth, Favor

I. Introduction

Last week Ben lead us through chapter one as we began our four week journey through the book of Ruth. The series is entitled, "*From Bitterness to Blessing*."

The main character of the book is not the woman after whom the book is named. The story primarily follows the hard life of a woman called Naomi, which means "'pleasant' or 'lovely.'"¹ The book begins with Naomi proclaiming her bitterness, but it ends with her proclaiming her blessing! The means of her blessing however comes through her after whom the book is named, her wonderfully faithful daughter-in-law, Ruth, who we discover at the end of the book, is the great-grandmother of king David.



As Ben also noted, the time this story takes places is "*the days when the judges ruled*," which the time after the books of Judges and before the monarchy of Saul began, which is found in the book of 1 Samuel. This was a very dark time marked by "*everyone doing what was right in his own eyes*" (Jud 17:6; 21:25).

As we begin reading the book, we discover that a famine was in the land of Judah and Elimelech, who lived in Bethlehem, took his family into the land of Moab to escape the hardship of this famine. This is a questionable move, but the narrator does not focus on whether or not this was good or bad. However, this move begins a series of increasingly painful events that unfolds upon Naomi one tragedy after another. She suffers through this and then has to endure the death of her husband and both of her sons. This is devastating to her and

¹ F. B. Huey Jr., "Ruth," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 519.

she is nearly hopeless, until she hears news—“*the LORD has visited his people and given them food*”²—that convinces her that it is time to go back to her home town.

Naomi very strongly urges her daughters-in-law to leave her for, in her opinion, “*The Almighty is against me and has brought calamity upon me*” (1:21). One daughter-in-law leaves her while the other, Ruth, clings to her. Ruth then chooses to leave her family, her country, and everything familiar, in order to stay with Naomi and go with her on this journey to Israel. *Ruth concludes that it is better to remain with Naomi and her God than to stay in Moab with its gods.*

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

Ruth 1:22 (ESV)

Chapter one closes with this ray of hope piercing the darkness of Naomi’s days. Upon arrival back in Bethlehem, they discover that the barley harvest had begun. The news she’d heard was true. The “*LORD had visited his people and given them food.*”³ The light of that hope grows brighter as chapter two opens.

Now Naomi had a relative of her husband’s, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

Ruth 2:1 (ESV)

Naomi had returned to Bethlehem in a hopeless condition. She had told her two daughters-in-law that there was nothing for her. God was against her and she was in a state of despair. And we can certainly understand why she felt that way. Naomi believes that God is sovereignly in control of all events (see 1:20-21). She confesses the belief that it was “*the LORD who brought me back*” (1:21). In her grief and sorrow she views herself as having returned “*empty,*” but that is not entirely true. True, she has returned without her husband or her two sons, however, she does have Ruth with her. She is not completely empty, though that is what she thinks at the moment. But God is about to change her mind.

II. Finding Favor in the Field

Chapter 2 is scene 2. It primarily unfolds in a field in Bethlehem. In this field, we see the favor of the LORD begin to break upon the sad and sorrowful countenance of a hopeless widow named Naomi, and her hopeful daughter-in-law named Ruth. Let’s watch this scene together as Ruth finds favor in a field.

² Ruth 1:6.

³ Ruth 1:6.

In this chapter, we'll face the reality that **A)** Ruth is a foreigner in a foreign land. Next, she will **B)** meet a favorable man, with whom **C)** she will have a favorable conversation and who will then **D)** show her undeserved favor. We will see that **E)** God favors those who run to him in faith and seek refuge under his wings.

A) Foreigner in the Field

First, the narrator forces us to face the fact that *Ruth is a foreigner in a foreign land*. She has no inherent rights in this land and yet she has come in faith.

² And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." ³ So she set out 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 clan of Elimelech.

Ruth 2:2-3 (ESV)

Ruth the Moabite. Ruth is not simply called "Ruth" in this book, but rather she is repeatedly referred to as "**Ruth the Moabite**." The fact that Ruth is a **Moabite** and a foreigner is something the narrator will not allow us to miss. This fact has already been mentioned 7 times in chapter 1, it is noted 5 times in this chapter, and will be noted 3 more times in chapter 4. The fact will be highlighted **15** times in this story. Ruth notes this herself, saying in 2:10, "*I am a foreigner*." She is an outsider. She knows this and the author wants us to know this as well.

The Moabites were questionable people for several reasons;

- 1) They were the descendants of the incestuous relationship between Lot and his two daughters.⁴
- 2) Though Lot was Abraham's nephew, they resisted the people of Israel when they came out of Egypt by refusing to allow them to pass through their land (Num 22-24).
- 3) Balak, King of Moab, seeking to curse Israel⁵ incited some Moabite women had enticed Israelite men to sin and yolk themselves to their gods, which brought on Israel a plague (Num 25:1-9). For this reason, Moabites to the tenth generation were forbidden from entering the assembly of the LORD (Dt 23:3-6).
- 4) Finally, during the timeframe in which Ruth was written, Eglon the king of Moab, had attacked and oppressed the people of Israel (Jud 3:15-30).

To be called a Moabite, was to be singled out as one who had huge obstacles to be overcome if one wanted to be welcomed in Israel. The author wants us to feel this. And yet, "**Ruth the Moabite**" has come in faith to make Israel her new home. We see her faith in her actions.

⁴ Genesis 19:30-38.

⁵ Numbers 22:5-7.

Let me go to the field. Here we see something of the stuff of which Ruth is made. She is asking permission to go to work. Assuming the traditional age of marriage in this culture was about 15-16 and taking into account the 10 years that she was married to Mahlon, Ruth is about 25 or 26. Ruth sees the need at this point and takes the *initiative* to help solve their problem. They need food and Ruth steps up to go to work. She does not expect Naomi to do this, since after all this is Naomi's home town and she might know more people or have better connections. Ruth does not stay home and binge-watch Netflix. No, she asks her mother-in-law, for her blessing to allow her to go out and seek food for the both of them. She does this in faith seeking grace.

And glean among the ears of grain (v.2). "*Gleaning*" is a word that means "to gather [by hand] leftover produce after a harvest has already been gathered."⁶ It refers to following after the harvesters and picking up what is dropped or left behind. God had commanded concerning this practice to make allowance for the poor people of the land to have food.

"And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God."
Leviticus 23:22 (ESV)

Ruth is aware of this practice and so she is seeking to go out and get to work by picking up the leftovers and so have food for her and her mother-in-law.

Him in whose sight I shall find favor (v.2). The word '*favor*' (חֵן *hēn*) can also be translated 'grace.'⁷ The word means "an act of kindness or compassion freely given," without having earned it. Ruth is going out in faith believing that she will find someone who will be gracious to her. She does not go out expecting the world owes her something. She goes out in faith looking for grace. They need food and she knows the only way to get some is to go out in faith seeking God's grace through a gracious person.

She happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech (v.3). The author uses the word '*happened*,' but there is nothing about this scene is random. The text literally says, "*her chance chanced*"⁸ upon the part of the field. The verbiage here is dripping with irony. The author introduced at the beginning of this chapter the man called Boaz, who is a relative of Naomi and now Ruth just "*happens*" upon that part of the field that belonged to that very man! The only thing happening here is the unfolding of God's providence.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible*, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

⁸ F. B. Huey Jr., "Ruth," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 526.

In reality he is screaming, "See the hand of God at work here!" The same hand that had sent the famine (1:1) and later provided food (1:6) is the hand that had brought Naomi and Ruth to Bethlehem precisely at the beginning of the harvest (1:22) and has now guided Ruth to that portion of the field belonging specifically to Boaz.⁹

Summary. Ruth is a foreigner. She and everyone else knows this. Nevertheless she is an industrious young woman who is willing to go to work. She is not afraid of hard work and difficult manual labor. And she has faith in God of Israel that someone will be gracious to her. And indeed God is working for her because he leads her to the part of the field that belongs to a relative.

But what kind of man is this relative?

B) A Favorable Man: Boaz

The narrator introduces us to Boaz and further introduces us to the character of Ruth.

⁴ And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered, "The LORD bless you." ⁵ Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" ⁶ And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab." ⁷ She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.' So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest."

Ruth 2:4-7 (ESV)

The LORD be with you! The LORD bless you (v.4). We see the kind of man Boaz is by this little window into this work life. Boaz comes in the morning and meets his *reapers*. He blesses them and they bless him in return. Why does the author include this little exchange? This is effectively a scene of the boss blessing his employees and the employees blessing their boss in return. We've already been told that Boaz was "*a worthy man*" (2:1) and now we have a hint why. He's good to work for. He blesses his workers and they answer him in kind.

If someone were to interview your coworkers or your subordinates at work and ask them what it's like to work for or with you, what would you hear? If you want to know the true character of a man, have coffee with his coworkers. Better yet, have coffee with those who report to him and see what they say about him? Would they bless him or curse him?

⁹ Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, vol. 6, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 653–654.

Whose young woman is this? (v.5). Boaz knows his workers and he knows when someone new is in his field. He gets a report of this young **Moabite** woman. She asked permission to glean. *"Please let me glean."* She did not even presume that she had the right to glean. She sought permission. Even though the law instructed landowners to remember the poor, Ruth still sought permission. She did not come in demanding food, but rather she came humbly seeking permission. She is also a hard worker. *"She has continued from early morning until now."* Ruth knows how to work hard. She started early and has been working diligently.

This leads to a conversation.

C) A Favorable Conversation

Boaz is introduced to Ruth. They meet and have a favorable initial conversation.

⁸ Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. ⁹ Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn." ¹⁰ Then she fell on her face, bowing 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?" ¹¹ But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. ¹² The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" ¹³ Then she said, "I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants."

Ruth 2:8-13 (ESV)

Now, listen, my daughter (v.8). Boaz, after learning about Ruth, goes to her and has a conversation with her. We get a clue that he is older than he since he refers to her as *"my daughter."* He protects her. He tells his young men *"not to touch you."* "Boaz is hereby instituting the first anti-sexual-harassment policy in the workplace recorded in the Bible."¹⁰ He also provides for her, telling her stay in his field and to *drink* from his water.

She fell on her face, bowing to the ground (v.10). Ruth is amazed at the treatment she is experiencing. She humbles herself before Boaz in astonishment. She lowers herself before him because of the *favor* (v.10) he is showing her, even though she is a *foreigner* (v.10). She does not understand why Boaz is being so gracious and kind toward her.

¹⁰ Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, vol. 6, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 660.

All that you have done... has been fully told to me... (v.11). Evidently after learning that the young woman in his field was the woman who returned to Bethlehem with Naomi and stirred up the whole town (1:19), he went and inquired about her and discovered all that she had done. Boaz Googled her and found out all about her story. And Boaz was impressed with her. He discovered that she “*left her father and mother and her native land and came to a people she did not know*” (v.11). Ruth chose Naomi over her own family. Ruth chose Israel over Moab. Ruth chose Yahweh over Chemosh, the primary god of Moab.¹¹

Under whose wings you have come to take refuge (v.12). Boaz blesses her for what she has done. He interprets her behavior as essentially “*running for refuge under the wings of the LORD*.” All that she left behind—and she left all behind—was an act of faith in coming to the LORD for refuge and safety. Recall what she promised to Naomi, “*Your God shall be my God*” (1:16). Ruth has forsaken everything in order to come to Israel and throw herself wholly upon the God about whom Naomi has told her. She has come seeking *favor* and *refuge* from God and his people and she is beginning to find it!

I have found favor in your eyes... though I am not one of your servants (v.13). Ruth responds graciously to the grace she has been shown. She knows Boaz is not obligated to do show her the kindness he has shown her. She thanks him kindly for the kindness he has shown to her even though she is “*not one of his servants*” (v.13). Boaz is treating her like a daughter, even though she has no relationship with him at this point.

Summary. Ruth went out looking for favor in the field and in the field of Boaz she found the favor she was seeking. Now, she finds even more favor.

D) Further Favor

Boaz now further favors Ruth.

¹⁴ And at mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine.” So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. ¹⁵ When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. ¹⁶ And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.”

Ruth 2:14-16 (ESV)

At mealtime Boaz said to her (v.14). Now it is midday and it is time for a meal. Boaz’s favor extends further than Ruth would ever have dared to dream. She has been amazed at all that he has done for this Moabite foreigner and now he is doing even more.

¹¹ Numbers 21:29; 1 Kings 11:7, 33; Jeremiah 48:7.

Come here and eat (v.14). Boaz invited her to “*come here*” and eat beside him and his reapers. That he had to tell her to “come here” reveals that she was sitting at a distance. He invites her to luncheon with him and his employees. This would have astonished everyone. Boaz is publicly welcoming this foreigner. His open kindness and generosity is showing an amazing degree of favor. He is clearly modeling the kind of treatment towards Ruth that he expects his reapers to show her. He kept passing her roasted grain until “*she was satisfied and had some left over.*”

Pull out... for her and leave it... do not rebuke her (v.15-16). Boaz’s favor for Ruth is growing. Not only has he allowed her to glean in his field, and invited her to lunch, but now he is commanding his men to intentionally give her plenty of grain. He is commanding them to provide abundantly for her. This is nothing but favor upon favor, or grace upon grace.

E) Final Favor of the Day

Now we come to the conclusion of this scene. Ruth leaves the field and returns to her mother-in-law.

¹⁷ So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. ¹⁸ And she took it up and went into the city. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied. ¹⁹ And her mother-in-law said to her, “Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man 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.” ²⁰ And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!” Naomi also said to her, “The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.” ²¹ And Ruth the Moabite said, “Besides, he said to me, ‘You shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.’” ²² And Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, “It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted.” ²³ So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaned until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Ruth 2:17-23 (ESV)

She gleaned... until evening. Then she beat out... an ephah of barley (v.17). Ruth has now worked from “*early in the morning*” all the way “*until evening.*” She’s worked all day. And she gathered an “*ephah*” of barley, which is about 5.5 gallons of grain. This is about a two-week supply of food for two people.¹² This is an incredible amount of favor that has been shown to them in only one day! When she returns to Naomi, the olde woman can barely contain her excitement.

¹² ESV Study Bible at note on 2:17-18.

Where did you glean today? Blessed be the man who took notice of you (v.19). Naomi's language here is a reflection of *surprise and praise*¹³ because of the large amount of food that Ruth has brought home. For the first time Naomi is speaking of blessing rather than bitterness. "*Blessed be the man...*" (v.19) Things are changing. The LORD who was against Naomi is now the LORD who is for her. The LORD who brought her back empty is now the LORD who has brought back Ruth full of roasted grain. And for the first time we find the word 'blessed' upon the lips of Naomi.

The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz (v.19). Perhaps this is a name that Naomi had forgotten. Perhaps in her sorrow and bitterness she had forgotten about this name. Just as when we are in bitter circumstances we can forget God's kindness toward us, so she may have forgotten that she still had family. After hearing his name, Naomi again speaks of blessing.

May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken (v.20). Upon hearing the name, Boaz, once again Naomi speaks of blessing. Another ray of hope has just shown into the darkness of these two widows. The LORD whose hand was against her is now the LORD whose kindness has not forsaken her. Suddenly Naomi's words are turning, because her heart is turning. If the words of the mouth flow from the heart, then the bitterness that was in her heart when she arrived is now beginning to turn to blessing.

The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers (v.20). The redeemer who was a kinsmen had responsibility for destitute members of his family. The term '*redeemer*,'

...denotes the near relative who is responsible for the economic well-being of a relative, and he comes into play especially when the relative is in distress and cannot get himself/herself out of the crisis.¹⁴

There is hope after all. This kind man is member of family. It is one thing when you meet a stranger who is kind, it is quite another when you meet a member of *family* and he is kind. If Boaz has been generous to a Moabite stranger, then what will happen when he discovers that they are related? And besides, he has already invited her to "*keep close*"¹⁵ to his servants until the end of the harvest. Naomi agrees, "*it is good to stay with his young women.*"

So she kept close... gleaning until the end of barley and wheat harvests (v.23). This is exactly what she did. She stayed close to Boaz's young women for the duration of both harvests, which would have been about a month or so.

¹³ The excitement is also reflected in the form of the blessing (lit.): "May he who took notice of you be blessed!" (*yěhî makkîrêk bârûk*). This structure occurs elsewhere only in 1 Kgs 10:9 (= 2 Chr 9:8), in an expression of praise to Yahweh, and Prov 5:18, in a metaphor. Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, vol. 6, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 671.

¹⁴ Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, vol. 6, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 674.

¹⁵ Ruth 2:21, 23.

Conclusion

So what would the Lord have us attend to from this chapter.

1. ***God is sovereign over all the “happenings” of our lives.*** It was no accident that Ruth “happened” into the part of the field owned by Boaz.

The heart of man plans his way,
But the LORD establishes his steps.
Proverbs 16:9 (ESV)

It was in the heart of Ruth to go into the field to work and get food, but it was the LORD God who directed her steps into the part of the field that belonged to Boaz, through whom the gracious LORD had chosen to show Ruth his grace. The governing providence of God is over all the events of our lives, whether they be famines, funerals, or fruitful harvests.

2. ***God cares for all who seek refuge under his wings.*** This is primary point of this chapter. Ruth forsook the false gods of her family and in faith fled for refuge under the wings of Yahweh, God of Israel. Ruth pledged her allegiance to Yahweh of Israel and she forsook Chemosh of Moab.
3. ***God’s work is a gracious, but mysterious.*** Ruth sought favor, in the eyes of a favorable person. She sought God’s grace through a gracious person. She knew she deserved nothing and yet she came as a stranger in a strange land seeking God’s grace. She had to go through 10 years of childlessness and loss of her husband to get there, but she kept her faith in God. She did not abandon her faith in the face of sorrow and hardship. She clung to God in the face of her suffering.

William Cowper (1731-1800) was an English poet and writer. He is one of those who struggled to keep his faith in the middle of suffering. He struggled with depression his whole life. He attempted suicide three times before being institutionalized. After recovering to the point he could be released, he moved in with a family who cared for him. Through them he met John Newton, who read one of his poems, originally entitled Light Shining Out of Darkness, and published it. It was later turned into a hymn which has been sung ever since.

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform.
He plants his footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

You fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds that you so much dread
Are big with mercy and will break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace.
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill.
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sovereign will.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding ev'ry hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flow'r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan his work in vain.
God is his own interpreter
And he will make it plain.

Naomi thought that the Almighty was against her, but then by Ruth in faith seeking favor in the field, suddenly she moves from speaking of bitterness to pronouncing blessing. She discovered that behind God's frowning providence was hiding His smiling face. The dark clouds she perceived to be anger, were actually the life-giving water necessary for a bountiful harvest. God was working his sovereign will even though she at first could not see it. So you who are suffering, fresh courage take and trust His sovereign plan. Get up and get to work. Go out into the field in faith seeking the favor of the Lord. His grace has come to us through the work of the Redeemer.

If you are weary or suffering, then in faith run to the Lord for refuge under His sovereign wings.
Worship Him while we sing.

Discussion Questions

1. What is gleaning?
2. What is 'favor'?
3. Why did Boaz 'favor' Ruth?
4. What kind of man was Boaz? What is admirable about him?
5. What kind of woman was Ruth? What is admirable about her?
6. What is the main point of this chapter?
7. What does this chapter reveal about the culture in which this story takes place?
8. What is revealed about Naomi in this chapter?
9. What is a 'redeemer'?
10. What does this chapter reveal about God.