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A Worthy Man

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Ruth 2:1-23

Series: Ruth

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Text

[1] Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. [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. [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."

[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."

[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."

[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, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law. (ESV)

Introduction

- Arouse interest:
 - Well happy Mother's Day. Mother's Day is as good a holiday as any to say thank you to the mothers among us for their love and support of us and our children over the years. It's also a great day to say thank you to our spiritual mothers within the church who have adopted us simply because we needed a family to belong to.
 - Generally, our sermons aren't structured around American holidays, but it would really be nice to have some kind of connection of our passage to the present day. It's really tempting for me to want to say something like, if you are a mother here today, wouldn't you want your daughter to meet a worthy man someday? Wouldn't you want your son to one day marry an excellent wife? What are the characteristics of a potential godly husband or wife?
 - I'd like to introduce this sermon like this, but unfortunately, I don't think this is the main thing our text is talking about. There are things here that can be applied to dating, but fundamentally this story is not about the characteristics of a worthy spouse.

- Surface Need:
 - Fundamentally, this story is about the characteristics of a worthy God, and what a God like this will do when desperate people come to him for help.
 - I wonder whether any of us here today find ourselves in a desperate situation? Maybe it's your fault, or maybe it's something that's just out of your control.
 - There's no shortage of hardships on this side of heaven. But when weak people like us find ourselves in overwhelming circumstances, inevitably, we start looking around for help. Where can we look for help when we can't help ourselves?

- Orient to Text:

- As we saw last week, in the midst of a desperate situation, Naomi and Ruth decided to turn to the Lord. They chose to return to Israel and throw their poor lot in with the people of God.
- Our text today is going to show how God treats those who come to him for help. As we'll see in this part of the story, ***God shows his kindness through his kinsman redeemer.***
- Organization:
 - Our story this morning breaks into three parts: The Plight (1-7), The Provision (8-16), and The Potential for the Future (17-23).

The Plight (1-7)

- Our story opens up with an introduction to a new character. As it says in verse 1:
 - [1] Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.
- The Hebrew here is a little ambiguous. All the text says is that Boaz is a great man. But what kind of great are we talking about here? Great as in great bank account, great body builder, or great man of character?¹

Application

- To the sisters in the church, you oughta know that these are the same kinds of questions that run through my head when you come to me and say that you've met a really great guy. What kind of great are we talking about here? There's a world of difference between a man who is great in cash vs great in character, and we ought not to mix these two up.

Explain

- What kind of great man is Boaz? And why is it significant that he is a relative of Naomi's husband Elimelech? More importantly, how will this man end up treating both Naomi and Ruth? As we recall from chapter 1, Naomi and Ruth are in a precarious situation.
 - Both of them are widows in a time which didn't really have much of a social safety net. Ruth had the chance to return to her mother and father, but she decided to leave her family and her gods in Moab behind to care for Naomi, her mother in law, and to serve and follow YHWH.
 - This also reminds us that Ruth is a Moabite. She comes from a people who were historically the enemies of Israel, and we're not quite sure how

¹ Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, The New American Commentary 6 (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999). 651.

people will treat her. Will they be kind to their former enemy, when she has come to them for aid?

- If all of this isn't bad enough, there is also this note at the beginning of chapter 1 which states that all of this is taking place during the time when the judges ruled. And if you read through the book of Judges, you'll realize that this is a time when Israel is at its worst. These were Sodom and Gomorrah levels of crime going on, and it could be very easy for someone to take advantage of these two in their precarious position.
- Naomi and Ruth are in a desperate situation. Nevertheless, these two decide to trust in the Lord and throw their lot in with his people as they come home to Bethlehem. How will God respond to their faith?
- Well, in spite of the circumstances, Ruth decides to do what she can to care for herself and Naomi. She asks her mother in law in verse 2:
 - [2] "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor."
- The practice of gleaning was a common means for the poor to provide for themselves. In the Mosaic Law, Israel was actually instructed to leave a portion of their grains in the field or fruits in their vineyard for the poor to collect (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19-22). This was specifically to be left for the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow since Israel themselves were once slaves in a foreign land.

Application

- This is a little bit of a side application here. I don't think we can take the legal code of the Old Testament and thoughtlessly apply them to our modern American context, but I do think the assumptions of the Mosaic code really challenge many of our American attitudes which expects everyone to just work hard, pick themselves up by their own boot straps, and climb out of poverty on their own.
- The Bible is a little more nuanced than that. While the Bible assumes that everyone ought to work for a living (2 Thess. 3:10), it also assumes that there will be some people who fall into poverty apart from any fault of their own. As a matter of fact, God commands Israel to leave a portion of their profits for the poor. Why? Because they themselves were slaves in Egypt, and God had mercy on them.
- Brothers and sisters, do we have the same sort of perspective on the poor today? I realize that poverty, particularly the poverty of foreigners, in America is complicated, but personally for you, when you see someone in need is your immediate response to blame them for their own misfortune? Or do you have

- compassion on them just as God had compassion on us? With whatever financial blessings God might be giving you right now, do you always seek to maximize your profits? Or does a portion of your profits go to helping those who cannot help themselves?
- It's something we ought to think about. If Israel was expected to have mercy on the poor because God had mercy on them in Egypt, how much more should we who have experienced the mercies of Christ have mercy on those who desperately need it today?

Explanation

- From a legal perspective, Ruth had every right to glean in the fields of Israel. But this is the time of the judges. And during this time, the people of Israel weren't always as obedient to God's law as they should have been. It could have been easy for someone to reprimand Ruth for gleaning in their fields or even harm her in some manner. It was potentially dangerous for Ruth to be sent out of the city to glean in the fields.
- But what options did the two of them have? Naomi agrees and sends Ruth out. And as Ruth begins to glean, the text says in verse 3 that, "she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech."
- Quite a coincidence. Ruth happens to come to the field of her close relative on the very day that Boaz decides to come and visit his workers. Did this happen just by chance?
- Boaz calls out to his workers in verse 4, "The LORD be with you." And his workers respond, "The LORD bless you." Again, the narrator is subtly implying that these people belong to the LORD. Meanwhile throughout this chapter, Ruth is frequently referred to as Ruth the Moabite. How will the people of God treat this Moabite?
- Boaz sees Ruth in the field, and he calls to his right hand man in verse 5:
 - "Whose young woman is this?"
- And the servant responds:
 - [6] "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."
- Again the Hebrew is a little ambiguous here. We're not sure whether or not she has been working all day or whether she has been waiting for Boaz to arrive to

give her permission. But either way Boaz is here. And everyone is watching to see what he will do with Ruth.²

Provision (8-16)

- This leads us to the next section of our story, the Provision of the Lord. Although Boaz could have easily dismissed this woman and sent her away, he doesn't. No he comes through for Ruth in a way that she could have never imagined.
- Boaz speaks directly to Ruth for the first time in verse 8:
 - [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."
- This is a remarkable act of generosity on the part of Boaz. Not only does he welcome Ruth to glean among his fields, but he welcomes her to keep taking from his field for the duration of the harvest season. Boaz also ensures her protection and provisions which are normally only granted to his field workers. As it says in verse 9, Ruth can go and drink from the water drawn for his servants.
- Ruth is floored by this man's generosity. She falls on her face before Boaz and asks in verse 10,
 - [10] "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!"
- This is one of the rare moments when the people of Israel actually do the right thing. As word of Ruth's story spreads around town, the people of the city are impressed by Ruth's astonishing character. They recognize her sacrifice to care for Naomi and to throw her lot in with the people of God. And as seen in the actions of Boaz, they embrace her as a part of their community.
- Boaz himself prays for Ruth and asks that the Lord would repay her and give her a full reward because Ruth came to the Lord to seek refuge under his wing.
 - And this isn't something strange to ask of the Lord. No, as we see all throughout the storyline of Scripture, this is just how God normally acts

² Block, *Judges, Ruth*. 656.

towards anyone who comes to him for help regardless of who they are or where they come from.

- Abraham, the founding father of Israel was originally a pagan idolater before he left these things behind to follow the Lord.
- Rahab was scheduled to be killed alongside all of Israel's enemies in Jericho, but she asked the Lord for mercy and she and her family were saved.
- Later on, in the city of Nineveh, the most brutal terrorists of the time heard the warning of the Lord's coming judgment, repented of their sins, and asked for mercy, and God took pity even on them.
- And in the New Testament, Paul himself states regarding us in Romans 5:8:
 - [8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Application

- Friends, God has always been kind to those who come to him for help. No matter who they were or where they came from. And if God has a proven track record of being kind to those who come to him, of being gentle to the weak and merciful even to his enemies, then what's preventing you from coming to the Lord today?
- I realize it's not always easy to trust and follow Jesus. As we see in our story today, it cost Ruth her whole family for her to walk with the Lord and his people. And there are some of you whom it would cost just as much to trust and follow Christ today.
- It may not be easy, but as we see clearly in our passage, it's always worth it. God always finds a way to come through for those who come to him for help. And when he comes through for us, he comes through in ways that you and I could never have imagined.

Explanation

- Not only does our passage this morning demonstrate the immense kindness of the Lord, but ironically, as we continue to read the book of Ruth, we can clearly see that God actually uses Boaz himself to answer his own prayer request. We'll see this more next Sunday when in 3:9 Ruth specifically comes to Boaz to seek refuge under his wing.
- But for now, here in our passage, the point is clear. Here again, God is demonstrating his kindness through the kind actions of Boaz, who cared for Ruth even though she was a foreigner of lowly status. As Ruth herself remarks in verse 13:

- [13] “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.”
- Again we see Ruth’s insecurity and hesitation amidst Boaz’s exorbitant generosity. But his generosity doesn’t stop here. In verse 14, Boaz actually invites Ruth to eat with him and his servants. In the culture of the time, this was a significant act. Eating with someone demonstrates fellowship, acceptance, solidarity with one another as one people.³
- And after bringing her into fellowship with himself and his servants, Boaz then instructs his servants to provide for Ruth all the food she needs. Boaz states in verse 15:
 - [15] “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.”
- Not only has Boaz proven himself to be a faithful Israelite, but in his treatment of Ruth, Boaz has gone above and beyond the requirements of the law. Boaz truly is a worthy man. A great man of godly character.

Potential for the Future (17-23)

- But in spite of his generosity, Ruth and Naomi are not out of the heat just yet. Although they have food for the present, and a measure of protection for the time being, they still have no children. And at that time, the lack of children generally indicated a lack of a future altogether.
- During this time, children were not simply a means of preserving the family line, they were also the primary means whereby you were cared for in your old age. Sons in particular provided a form of legal protection as property rights normally were inherited by a male heir in a patriarchal society.
- In spite of their present security, the problems Naomi described in the first chapter of this book are still true. Ruth is without a husband, and Naomi is still empty.
- But something interesting starts to happen here at the end. Naomi’s perspective on the situation starts to change. For the first time in a long while, Naomi starts to see some potential for the future.
- After a long day gleaning in the field, Ruth finishes things up by beating out the grains which she had gathered. By the time she finishes, verse 17 says that Ruth has about an ephah of barley, roughly thirty to fifty pounds of food. Ruth is also shown to have brought home leftovers from her lunch with Boaz’s servants. This is a great deal of food. Far more than any gleaner would ever normally bring home.

³ Block, *Judges, Ruth*. 666.

- And it raises some questions. Naomi asks in verse 19:
 - [19] “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.”
- There’s some playfulness in the author placing Boaz’s name at the very end of Ruth’s sentence. It’s as if the author is holding out the reveal of this worthy man until the very last second.
- But as soon as Naomi hears who this man is, she bursts out into praise and joy.
 - [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.”
- This idea of a kinsman redeemer is important for us to understand. During this time, if you fell into trouble, whether it was legal or financial, a close relative of yours, a kinsman redeemer, was expected to come and lift you out of it. He could purchase you out of slavery. He could re-acquire your family’s land which you needed to sell for a season. Here in Ruth, we also see that a kinsman redeemer could also potentially marry a widow and provide offspring for her and her late husband’s lineage.
- It’s an odd custom, but the point is that a kinsman redeemer could potentially save Naomi and Ruth out of an impoverished future. And Boaz, being a relative of Elimelech could potentially be the kinsman redeemer that they need. The one who could redeem them out of their troubles.
- Nothing is set in stone yet. Everything is still up in the air. Nevertheless, just by seeing how the Lord has worked through Boaz so far, Naomi is starting to have hope. Hope for what the Lord might do in the future. The same woman who said that the LORD had brought her back empty in 1:21 now says here in 2:20:
 - “May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!”
- And with that little glimmer of hope, Naomi instructs Ruth to stay close to Boaz and his servants for the remainder of the harvest season.

Application

- I wonder when was the last time you yourself had any hope for the future? In these dark days, it can be difficult to believe that life is ever going to get any better than it is right now. Some of you are dealing with chronic health issues,

some of you have loved ones who are sick, some of you have been struggling with the same sin issues for a very long time, and some of you have experienced a great deal of loss.

- Friends, I can't say that I know for sure how all the hard things will work out in your life. On my own I'm not nearly wise enough to even know how to be helpful in some of the difficult circumstances our people face on a regular basis. But I can say this with confidence. If Naomi could find hope in her kinsman redeemer back then, surely we can find hope in our kinsman redeemer today.
 - Friends, Boaz gave Ruth the status of servant, but Jesus gives us the right to be called Sons of the living God.
 - Boaz provided bread and water, but Jesus gives us the bread of life and living water to sustain us for all eternity.
 - Boaz sacrificed some profits to care for Ruth in her poverty, but Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection gave up all riches of heaven so that one day we too might rise and have a share in his kingdom.

- Brothers and sisters, I don't know everything that you are dealing with this morning. I don't know what new circumstances the Lord has brought into your life. But I know this, God shows his kindness through his kinsman redeemer, and if this is who God is, if this God is our God, then no matter where we are at, no matter what we are going through, we can have hope for our future.

- And even though this doesn't fix everything, knowing I have a God who has done more for me than I could have possibly imagined gives me just enough hope to keep looking for what God might do next. As we've seen so far, God's got a pretty great track record of coming through for his people, and when God finally does come through for us, he comes through all the way.