

Ruth & Naomi!

Overview

Well, Church, it's so good to see you. It's been a while, actually. I was saying hi to people that I saw a whole year ago, and I'm like, it's probably one of the last times I've preached, so thank you for being here, for sharing Mother's Day, and I just look forward to sharing God's Word.

I always find it difficult to kind of find messages that might be conducive to a holiday, but I believe that God is so gracious and kind that He always wants to speak to us. Like I said, Happy Mother's Day to all of you who are caregivers, aunts, uncles, moms, grandmothers, great-grandmothers, but I also understand that Mother's Day sometimes brings some not-so-great memories, and as I was pondering that and preparing for this week, I was brought to a book, the Book of Ruth, and for some of you, you might have read it a hundred times or a thousand times, and I hope today that the way that we're going to look at it might bring some new light to you as it has for me. Looking at Ruth, I'm going to summarize from Chapter 1. We're going to dive into Chapter 2. It's been an amazing journey for me to dive in and actually look at the Book of Ruth, not just, even though I'm not minimizing it, it's a story of redemption.

It's a beautiful place of where sometimes we think in the Old Testament, God is different, and only when Jesus comes, everybody's saved, but as I dove into Ruth, I'm like, man, the God that we say, the God that we serve, the God that is who He is has always been about the salvation of all people. Amen? Although we find sometimes ways to say, until Jesus came, of course, He fulfilled everything, everything that has been said about Him from the beginning of time, but Ruth is a beautiful picture of that. So that's what we're going to look at today, Ruth 2, and I'll read through most of the book, but bear with me as I summarize some stuff along the way, but as I was looking into this, I was really aware of just where I am in my season as a mom and a preteen daughter, and I realize now that what it means to really be a parent, and for those of you who've raised kids, who've helped raise kids, who've had your own, or still raising grandchildren or great-grandchildren or kids, you'll know what I mean.

I don't think that I've ever been more aware that I have no control over their life, and not because I don't in terms of a daily thing, but some of you might know, but I didn't grow up in the church, so the last 20 years of walking with Jesus has been just a new discovery for me. I didn't grow up going to Sunday school, youth groups, camps, conferences, Sunday services, and so I don't really have a measure of what it means for discipleship or for a healthy understanding of what my children should be experiencing, frankly. So at the time, I'm like, I don't know.

Looks good, you know. I'm doing my best, but as the kids are getting older, you know, 11 and then almost 10 and 9, my oldest daughter got baptized two years ago, and she just was asking to be baptized for two years, and I just wanted to make sure she knew what she was asking, but yet it came to a point where the Lord just helped me see, you know, at the end, do I believe that Jesus has been doing something in her life that I haven't been able to? Yes, and what markers do I need for her to prove herself except for the fact that she loves Jesus and she wants to follow Him, and that's a mark of the Spirit of God moving in my children, and to me, that's been the biggest testament and humbling reality that I really don't. I don't have control over my kids, and I don't know about you what you're walking in with today, but those of you who are grandparents, great-grandparents, if you have your kids or you're walking with other people and you're praying for them and you're desiring them to know the Lord, I know that's a burden that we carry, but a good and holy burden.

I hope that today as we look at Ruth, we're reminded that the God that has always been about redemption is still at work, but not only in a general way where we hope because we understand this abstract that He does this, but through the lens of grace, I hope we are reminded that we can see Him at work in the smallest ways that sometimes we dismiss as daily life, and so I'm going to summarize a bit of Ruth 1 because we're not going to read Ruth 1, but Ruth 1 is basically the story of how Naomi and Ruth, these two women, are together. So Ruth is a daughter-in-law. Naomi is this mom, is her mother-in-law, and they go through this tragic season where basically all of Naomi's sons pass away, and she's left with these two daughters-in-law, and one of them is Ruth, and she basically says to them, listen, I've done this. I've been here. I'm older now. You are at least are young.

You can get married again. Go do something with your life. You can make something of it. It's too late for me, says Naomi, and so one of the daughter-in-laws says, I love you so much, and then she gets going, but this amazing thing happens is this other daughter-in-law, Ruth, basically says, you cannot get rid of me even if you tried your hardest, so you're stuck, but in the nicest way possible, which she says, where you go, I go. Where you stay, I stay. Let your people be my people.

Let your God be my God, and I've myself, I've read this time and time again. I was like, that's a beautiful testament, but the more I sat in it, I realized how much of a miracle that is for someone who's actually not from Israel to have made that kind of commitment not only to her mother-in-law, but to God. We don't get all this backstory, which I find so fascinating because that's what God does, where he leaves room for him to speak to us when we read scripture, but there must have been something about Ruth and her faith in the God of Israel.

As Ruth, a daughter-in-law, as a Moabite, got married into this family, she was introduced to the customs and the reality of a God of Israel, and when everything was gone, when there was nothing left, when her mother-in-law was just like, I can't do this anymore. I have nothing to offer you. You have every reason to leave, and she did, but she didn't.

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It's nothing short of a miracle that Ruth decided to stay, and not only just stay for the sake of like clinging to life and hoping that you're going to journey through a rough season together, but saying, I'm committing to you in the most intimate and truest way, but also the God that I've seen you worship and walk with, and so we come into chapter two with this as a background, that they're finally deciding to go back to Jerusalem, and they're coming back, sorry, to Bethlehem during the time of barley harvest. So I'm not a farmer. I know, if you know me, I kill plants.

I don't grow plants. My dear husband has the green thumb, but I've learned about season and living in the Beamsville, Maniaga region. I've learned like right now, between May and like August and September is when everything is coming to life.

We get to reap the harvest of all the hard work. We get to eat the fruit and the vegetables that are coming through our farmers and our local farmers around the area. So this is when they're coming back.

They're back to Bethlehem. They have nothing to their name, no status, no money, and so Ruth too begins with this. Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a man of standing from the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

So it's like a, if you ever watch a movie and there's like a little black screen that tells you like this is where the story starts, that's what this is. And then the second verse, it comes and it says, now real time, this is what's happening with Ruth and Naomi. Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor. So she wants to go and pick up leftover grain because people are just going row after row harvesting the grain. And there's a lot that's left over on the ground and she's just saying we need, I need to do something. So I will go and trail them and be at the end and I'll pick up what's left over.

Naomi said to her, go ahead my daughter. So she went, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. As it turned out she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech.

Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, the Lord be with you. In these first few verses of Ruth 2, it's easy just to read over and say that's an interesting turn of events. I love how intentional the writers of this book is because as you know, verse one was by the way there's this guy named Boaz and he's from this clan.

Just to make sure we know that it's not another Boaz, this is the Boaz. It turns out that this is the field that Naomi happens to be gleaning from. And I love how it seems like it's quite intentional that these words, as it turned out.

You know in the New Testament when we read Jesus where there's suddenlies, it's not suddenly to Jesus ever, but it's suddenly for us and it was suddenly for them. So as it turned out, was it a surprise for Ruth? Of course, she had no idea who Boaz was. She had no idea that she had landed in a certain place in a certain time in a certain way. And obviously Boaz too. He's walking into his own field of all places. I don't know, I'm guessing that the fields are really, really big.

Very many acres. And he so happens to come to his corner in this area and says, hello. And then the next few verses he asks his harvesters, who is this woman? So the writer is really indicating that there's an element of what we would as human beings chalk up to be coincidence, luck. But in reality, do we really believe if we believe in the God that we know in coincidences? Here's the thing. If we look at this, even just this moment, through the lens of what grace is, because we say we're held by grace. The grace of God is always at work and that's true.

But what does that actually mean? It means sometimes in seasons where we are just forced out of one situation into another. Where it seems like we're just taking the next right step and we have no idea what's next. Where to the point where Naomi in chapter one says, don't call me Naomi.

I am too bitter. I need to change my name. She was at her wit's end. Because looking forward seemed like there was nothing. There was no point. And yet somehow her daughter-in-law commits to her and says, I'm going to walk.

Let's go. We're going to do something. And then she says, can I go glean in this field? And then they end up in a place and a time and with a person that they, that she needs to be in. You see God's grace sometimes looks like realignment, reordering, or simply being held in a moment, in a place, in time where it seems to us is chaotic. Because the human experience is that we don't know. We are not in control.

And when we're in changing situations or in turmoil or when we are just done and we have no more like Naomi, it feels like God is not in control. But when we are able to read and look from the outside in, we get this gifted perspective of grace of knowing, oh my goodness, God knew exactly where Ruth needed to be and Naomi needed to be. Amen.

God's grace is at work. As in, it was not Ruth and her smarts or Naomi and all of her wisdom and her age saying, you should really go to this field. This is the perfect field.

No. God's grace ushered them in a silent, quiet way and moved them to where they needed to be. But the human experience felt like I'm just making one decision after another.

And when I looked at this, I was reminded by, to go back to Hebrews 11, where we see how faith is basically defined. And then it says, and it starts listing these people in the subsequent verses of Hebrews 11 saying, by faith, Noah did this. Noah built an ark.

By faith, Moses went to a place that he did not know. And I was struck by the by faith piece because by faith, they didn't just sit there and say, well, God, you're calling me. So what's next? What are you going to do? And sometimes I think that's where disappointment comes from because it feels so tumultuous.

It feels so heavy when we don't know that we just want God to show up like, you know, manna in the day. Oh, that's you, God. No, he could. But more than not, he shows up in ways that we can't even articulate or even touch, but he's there. And by faith, without, I would suspect that without her even knowing it, Ruth by faith said, I need to do something. And in the stillness and quietness and ushering of God's grace, she decides to go here and choose this field.

By faith, she made a step. It's amazing to realize that God's holding us, realigning us, ushering us in the times where we absolutely don't feel it. And it humbles us because it really means we can't earn it.

We can't do it even if we tried. And that's what's beautiful about the story as we keep reading on because we see how he asks his harvesters, he's like, who is this woman? And they're like, well, she's been gleaning at the end. She's been no trouble. She's actually a really hard worker because she's only rested a little bit. This is hard labor. It's hot.

It's outside for hours on hours. And he approaches her and he says this in verse eight, Boaz goes to Ruth and he says, my daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with the woman who worked for me. Watch the field where the men are harvesting. Follow along after the woman.

I have told the men not to lay a hand on you and whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled. At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me a foreigner? Do you remember that when she asked Naomi in the first few verses, she's maybe, just maybe I'll choose a field and I'll end up being allowed to be there if someone gives me favor.

That's a glimpse of something she was hoping to happen. She got an inkling that that's why I need to go. But that didn't promise, her inkling didn't promise that that was going to happen. And yet she realized in that moment, she's like, how? I'm a foreigner. I don't belong to your people. And later in verses, she's like, I don't even, I don't even have standing to sit at this table with your workers, with your harvesters.

I am an outsider. And a beautiful thing happens because Boaz replies and says, I know what you've done. I heard about you and how you're with your mother-in-law.

And then he actually does something like, he prays for her and he blesses her. He says, may the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

Can you tell me that that's a normal reaction of a man who's running a business at the busiest time of the year in harvest? Let's be real. Sometimes when we read scripture, and I think Ruth and Boaz, like this book, I found that the many times I've read it, a lot of the times we go right to their behavior and say, they are, what a great woman of character. What a wonderful godly man.

And they are, right? But that's not all. That's actually not what it's about because if it was about that, it would mean that their good works and their good character demonstrated them to be, you know, able to be in scripture. No.

It's that somehow defying the social standards and everything that was normal at that moment for someone who had no standing, for someone who owned everything. That for him, for Boaz, to view her and actually see her through the eyes of grace and for him to pray that reveals that he has, he's looking at her through a lens that only God could give. You see, that even the very ability to acknowledge someone's need and what God is doing for them in that moment is the grace of God at work, right? It is not by our wisdom or ability to say, I am, I follow Jesus and I love him so much.

He has formed me. So now I am so hospitable. I am so generous. There is growth. But ultimately, it is the power and grace of God that opens our eyes to say, look what I've done. Look what I'm doing here. I am protecting her. And now you, Boaz, be an instrument of that protection, of that grace, of that mercy for this woman. Practically, my friends, that's what it looks like to be in any position. I think we can relate to Ruth in many ways. Oh, I mean, for me, I did. I think about feeling like an outsider, not because when I came into the community of God, I felt like an outsider, like I didn't belong.

I felt welcomed in a way that had never been before. But I wasn't used to what we do here, worshiping, singing songs, praying. It's all foreign and new to me. I think back, and I remember my first day walking into a church building. I've told some of you this before, where my eyes were fixed on exit signs because I was just making sure, like I see that one over there and that one over there. That's exactly what it was like 20 years ago, where I walked into the building scared and hesitant, but knowing that someone was doing something, that this God that I'm searching for must be something more, right? And when I look at Ruth, I resonate with just how vulnerable she feels.

And sometimes I would also say, the longer we walk with Jesus, sometimes we lose that. Sometimes we look at a story like this and we feel that we're always in the position of Boaz, which we might be. And if you've walked with Jesus for longer and you're at a place where you have so much to offer the following generations of people around you, that's a blessing and a gift.

But the beauty of Ruth is demonstrating something that's critical to the gospel of Jesus, is that we are all outsiders, my friends. As in, none of us, none of us were born in this tribe. None of us deserve the grace and the redemption.

But yet, it was always in the plan of God, even the God of Israel in the Old Testament, to redeem someone like her. And she's not the only one. If you read the Old Testament, there's many men and women who were outside of the tribe of Israel and the people of God that were favored and called.

Because that is the heart of God, my friends. And praise God for that, for sure. But my encouragement as we read through this, and as we listen, and as we sit with who might I be in this season, let's say, it's easier to identify ourselves as Boaz's to say, okay, God is calling me to give.

And he might be. But being recipients of grace precedes the ability to actually be instruments of grace. Do you know what I mean? As in, we only give what we've learned to receive. And the beautiful thing about the cross and about the people of God is that we're never done receiving grace from the Lord. There's never a time where we have achieved enough grace so that we don't need it anymore. And we're only the type of people that give it to other people who need it. The beautiful thing about this story is that we are reminded that we are all recipients of grace first before we have anything to offer and give. And it happens again and again, which is why the ground at the foot of the cross is level, meaning left and right. That's it.

We're all on the same ground. We look at each other as brothers and sisters. The hierarchy in the kingdom is only that the Lord Jesus is here. And so it is a wonderful image of a protector and a provider that Boaz is offering. But it's also a testament of his heart and how he's been formed with the God that he's followed. And so while grace sometimes feels like a container or a movement of a shift and being held, grace is also what forms and shapes us as we learn to yield and let grace form us.

Because when you think about Ruth, she has no idea, I think, in the moments that she's been walking, what she's doing. She's doing the next best thing and she's going, how is it that I have found favor in your eyes? And it says in the following verses that she sat down with his harvesters and she ate all that she had wanted and even had some left over. And then she went to gather and she went to finish gathering and then she basically pulled some stalks from her bundles. And then she was ready to go home. And it says that the weight of what she gathered was 30, was an epha. I think I'm saying that right.

Effa. And so in my Googling knowledge of what that means, it's 30 to 50 pounds of barley. I equate that to two to two and a half bags of 20 pound flour that I get from Costco that I immediately put in the cart because I don't have to carry it.

But could you imagine working a 10 hour day out in the fields, trailing a bunch of harvesters, taking whatever's left over on the ground, and then separating the barley. And I don't know what she had, a cloth bag, whatever she had, and then she had to walk it all the way back to Naomi. And it says she went back and her mother-in-law asked her, and before before Naomi asked her, she actually gave Naomi the leftover of what she had eaten.

So leftovers. She ate and she was so full that she had leftovers. And then she brought the leftovers to Naomi.

When I read this, it reminded me of Jesus and he multiplied fish and loaves to people. Because when God's grace is at work, these small miracles are slightly, it seems invisible. But the fact that she was given favor, the fact that she not only ate and she didn't have to get her own water, it was water that other people got and she was allowed to drink it.

And she ate more than she needed, she had more than she needed, and she had leftover to bring to her mother-in-law. That's God's grace upon her life. That's a miracle provided by the God that she is committed to.

And then when she went home, Naomi said, where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you. She told him, the man I work with today is Boaz. The Lord bless him, Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. He has not stopped showing kindness to the living and the dead. She added, that man is our close relative. He is one of our guardian redeemers. So it so happens that Boaz is in the family line of Naomi. And if he would be willing, he could basically redeem them and care for them. And if you've read the book, you'll see what happens in the next few chapters.

But pausing for a moment to look at this situation through the eyes of Naomi. Just a chapter ago, we were told that she was done. That she didn't even want to be called Naomi because her heart was so bitter from the loss, from the pain, from the hopeless future that she seemed to have to the point where she just wanted to let everyone go and say just let me be.

This is the end of my life. But the grace of God hung on to her and wouldn't let her go. And it came in the form of a daughter-in-law named Ruth.

And it came in the form of being provided for in times where she was like, I have nothing to offer. She couldn't even get her own food. Her daughter-in-law comes home not only with 30 to 50 pounds of barley that they could use, but leftover food for her to eat at the moment.

And then she tells her that she ended up being in a field with their guardian redeemer. I don't know about you, but there's been times where I'm just like, I don't know. Or I'm so tired.

Or there's too much loss. I don't know how to move forward. Our gracious God knows.

He has never left. And when we can see that the grace of God is present in ways that we cannot always understand or imagine, but yet in hindsight, if we're able to look back and if you picture your life every decade, every few years, I imagine you could see the markers of how God's faithfulness and his grace has pursued you time and time again. But could also imagine that if you put yourself back in that moment, it didn't feel like that, did it? Naomi had nothing left.

She didn't want to give up, but that felt like all she could do. And so by the grace of God, Ruth stuck by her side. By faith, she made small next choices that led to where exactly the Lord had planned for them.

Because his plan was to redeem them. His plan was to save them. And his plan always brings him glory. Because it is so clear that even if they tried, they would not have ended up in the right place, in the right time, for the right reasons, with all that they needed. You can't check all the boxes, but with God, that is what can happen. Amen.

And you see, Naomi, and here's the other beautiful thing, is sometimes it's hard to be in the position where you feel like you have nothing to offer, especially the older we get, especially the more life we've experienced. It's hard to be vulnerable. It's hard to feel like we have nothing to give.

Friends, this is the reason we need Jesus, is that it's okay not only to be vulnerable, but it's okay to have nothing. Because when we have nothing, we only have two choices, really. We have a choice to receive grace and to lean in, so that the power of God can move abundantly in and through, not only you, but the people he's surrounded you with.

Or we can resist it and keep pushing through. There's only so much, my friends, that our flesh can handle. And the cross is an invitation, lifelong invitation, to come if we're tired and weary and burdened, so we may find rest, so that we are not working our way to give something we don't have.

And when we look at Naomi and the story, it's so beautiful because each person is making small decisions and walking their way forward, but together, it is the grace and power of God at work in each of them and through them. And through Ruth, Naomi has a glimpse of hope. Hope that she didn't have days and weeks before, where she could see, man, if I just pushed her away, if she didn't stick by me, I don't know where I'd be.

But also, how amazing is it that God wouldn't let go of me, even when my hands lost grip. There's that saying that, like, you know, God's grip on you is ever stronger than your grip on him. It's like, even when we have nothing, we have no strength left, and we're just like this. His hand has never and will never let go of us. And so, friends, I hope you can be encouraged this morning. I don't know where you are in your life season, but I felt compelled to zoom us out a bit to remind us that wherever you are, maybe you feel like Naomi today, or you've been in a season of just a lot.

Take heart that the God who was and is and is to come has a hold of your life, even when it seems like it's not. And when you don't have anything left, he has surrounded you. And maybe it's the heaviness of a heart, it's hard to see, but maybe the grace of God opened our eyes to be able to see who he's given, what he's given alongside us, so that we may learn to receive even when we don't want to, because we need to.

That when we thought we have surrendered enough, there's more to lay down, so that the power and grace of God can come. Maybe today you feel like Ruth and an outsider. Take heart again.

You're looking at someone who was a very big outsider, who had never imagined that I would be in the church, that I would be sharing the Word of God, doing anything of any meaning. I always say, if you can save a stubborn person like me, you sure can save anybody. And so I invite you friends, whether you relate this morning to Boaz, to Ruth, to Naomi, or to a combination of all, I'm going to invite Linda up and we're just going to sing a song just as a declaration of our hope of God's faithfulness.

But before we do that, I want to invite you, you take a couple minutes, if you want to close your eyes, I want to invite you to think about like a decade or 10 years before. Where were you? What has happened? What were some markers within these years that led you to where you are today? Because we can see the activity of the grace of God much better when we look back. Maybe there's things that we didn't even notice that were just coincidental.

May the Lord help you see that He was so intentional to bring you to those people, to those places, and allowed for seasons of change and maybe some choices you made that were actually choices of faith that you didn't even realize. God has been faithful. God is faithful and He always will be.

And maybe you have people you've been thinking about. Maybe it's yourself and your own life. Hold those people, those situations now and bring it to the Lord and ask Him to do what He's always done.

Ask Him to open your eyes, to see His grace at work, and to learn to surrender as a recipient of His grace in your life and to have the faith to do the next best thing, trusting that you have ordered our steps.