

Ruth #2

Chapter 2 HOPE RENEWED

(Sermon notes are a transcript from the sermon with only minor editing, retaining the conversational style.)

After a night out with friends, David Brown, an Englishman, woke up with a series of random numbers on his mind. After much internal debate as to why they were there, he sent a text message to the listing, asking, "Did I meet you last night?" The recipient was Michelle Kitson, who obviously was confused. She lived just 60 miles from Brown. NO! They had not met the night before, but over time, they would meet. In fact, 5 years after the first text message was sent, the two married. "She really is the girl of my dreams," Brown says.

Coincidence or Providential? Webster defines a coincidence as The occurrence of events that happen at the same time by accident but seem to have some connection.

As we study the Book of Ruth I want you to ask yourself , ^AAre these series of events coincidental or providential?@

1. Ruth 1:22: So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth, the Moabitess,, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning. The timing is critical for it means that Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem just when the grain for bread is ready to be cut. That is, in early March or late April, by our calendars. Since barley was the first crop to be harvested each year, the timing of their arrival meant that Naomi and Ruth could get settled at a time where they hopefully will be able to gather some food and store it during the dry season.

2. Chapter 2 Verse 2: And Ruth, the Moabitess, said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter."

Naomi was probably moaning and groaning in her bitterness, and Ruth takes the initiative and realizes that something needs to be done if they want to eat. Ruth ask permission from Naomi to go out in the fields and glean during the harvest.

3 So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. We meet Boaz which is the third main character in this story. He plays an extremely important role as we shall see. \

The delightful Old Authorized Version says, ³ And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz. Hap comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word, meaning happens. Of all the fields that she could have chosen to glean from, it so happened belong to Boaz.

How did she find her way into the field of Boaz when it was so very important that she go into the right field? Did God put up a stop and go sign, a red and green light, or point an arrow into the right field? Of course not.

The line from Casablanca keeps running through my head as I read this verse, ^AOf all the gin joints in all the world, she had to walk into mine.@

Great Theological Mystery. God uses our free will and yet at the same time directs our paths. Psalms, God directs our paths.

The writer knows, and we, the readers know, that this was no accidental Δ HAP. $\text{\textcircled{a}}$ In our story it was extremely important that Ruth arrives at the field of Boaz, because if she doesn't the story is over.

Looking back you can see how it was providential that Ruth picked the right field to glean from for two reasons:

1. For Ruth to find favor in Boaz's eyes.
2. He was from the same clan as Ruth's deceased father-in-law Elimelech, thus being able to function as a Δ Kinsman Redeemer $\text{\textcircled{a}}$ preserving the name and family of the deceased.

In order for God's divine agenda be fulfilled, it's imperative that both elements had to be present.

When you look back in your own life can you think of the many different Δ Hap situations $\text{\textcircled{a}}$ of God directing you and you didn't even realize it? Ruth so happens finds herself in the field of Boaz.

The Mosaic law displayed particular compassion for the poor, the orphan, and the widow. Leviticus 23:22, Δ 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. $\text{\textcircled{a}}$ NLT

This commandment required that the harvesters deliberately leave the grain in the corners of their fields for the poor. This was God's way of taking care of the poor, and Ruth and Naomi were very poor. The very fact that Ruth says she wants to go and glean is an indication of their extreme poverty.

We have idealized images of how gleaning actually worked. In reality, gleaners were often mistreated and went home hungry and a landowner might choose to keep them out or eject them if he pleased. Harvesters could get rough. Unattached women were especially at risk and could be and were victimized. Especially Ruth being a Moabite.

Then of course, gleaners competed with each other. Bump into another gleaner who is stronger, more aggressive, or simply hunger-drive, and you can expect to get shoved around. Depending on conditions and attitudes in the field, Ruth could easily labor all day and not bring home enough to feed her mother-in-law and herself. Gleaners were the poorest of the poor. A gleaner can be compared to a homeless person rummaging in the garbage outside a fast-food restaurant, scavenging for a few discard fries or the uneaten remains of somebody's Big Mac. Any big city you'll see that.

Even though gleaners had a right to pick the left overs in the harvest field, I'm sure there were many landowners that disregarded the Mosaic Law altogether, or some were skimps and didn't leave much grain in the field for the cleaners to pick, and most likely there were only a few who were very generous.

Like tithing today, landowners at that time had to struggle with the basic questions of, How big is a corner? How wide is an edge. How thoroughly do I want my workers to clear my fields of grain, given the fact that we only have one chance to clear it?

Typically when harvesting a field, hired men went first - grasping handfuls of standing grain stalks with one hand, cutting them off at the base with a sickle, then laying the cut stalks on the ground. Female workers followed, gathering and binding cut grain into bundles to be carted to the threshing floor where raw kernels of grain were separated from the husks. Gleaners came last and were permitted in the field only AFTER both teams of hired workers finished and bundled sheaves of grain were removed from the field. Boaz in verse 4 comes on the scene. He comes later in the day. He probably was at the First Bank of Bethlehem getting the pay role. Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem, and greeted the harvesters, "The LORD be with you!" "The LORD bless you!" they called back.

Boaz is a man of impeccable character, a man of high integrity, a man of faith, and a man of wealth. He's a type of man that you would love to work for. Notice how he greets his workers. The Lord be with you! When was the last time your employer greeted you like that?

From the outset we sense that Boaz has provided a positive work environment for his people. With a boss like this it is no wonder that Boaz's workers respond with a blessing of their own.

Just from the context of this story it appears that it doesn't take Boaz long to notice a stranger in his field for he asks his foreman in verse 5, "Whose young woman is that?" He assumes that Ruth, obviously a stranger, would not be independent; surely she must belong to someone or be engaged to some landowner like himself. The fact that he recognizes her as a young woman suggests she is considerably younger than he and perhaps attractive. The foreman answers, "She is the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi." The foreman continues by saying in verse 7, She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.

Ruth and Naomi's economic situation was desperate because Ruth made a bold request that she wanted to go where gleaners were not permitted, to work among the harvesters where plenty of newly cut grain lay waiting to be gathered into bundles.

Robert Hubbard writes with admiration, Ruth emerges as courageous, if not slightly brash. Probably aware of possible rejection and ostracism, she willingly took a sizable risk in order to benefit her mother-in-law.

Boaz gets the shock of his life when a first-time gleaner - a foreigner at that - asks for permission to work behind the harvesters.

Carolyn James writes, Ruth is not merely going the distance to fight for her mother-in-law's needs, she is also pressing Boaz to color outside the lines of his understanding of God's law. The letter of the law says, "Let them glean." The spirit of the law says, "Feed them."

When the foreman told this to Boaz, all eyes are on him, waiting for his reply. Will he brush her off or lash out over the forwardness of this foreigner? The Moabitess has gone too far. Ruth has crossed the line. Will he eject her from his field? Will Boaz prove tightfisted, or will he open his hand?

Boaz is intrigued by this woman. He has already heard the talk of the town and is aware of the remarkable sacrifices Ruth has made to return with Naomi. This is where Boaz's integrity begins to come out. His godliness and character begins to show.

What follows is an openhearted sequence of actions where Boaz extends his hand of kindness (hesed)

to Ruth. Yes, by all means, she may glean among the reapers where there will be plenty of grain for her.

He grants her special rights in his fields for the entire harvest season and urges her not to wander into other fields, but to glean only with his servant girls.

Verses 8 & 9, So Boaz said to Ruth, "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. 9 Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled."

Notice how he addresses Ruth as my daughter. It's obvious that Boaz's intention is to break down the barriers that naturally separate her from him. He makes it very clear in verse 8 to Stay With or Stay Here with my servant girls. Those two words. Stay With is the same verb that was used earlier in Chapter 1 of Ruth Clinging to Naomi. Cling to my servant girls. What Boaz is doing here is putting his cloak of protection around her. It was dangerous for a woman in Ruth's position - a widow, a woman from Moab to be gleaning in the open fields. Boaz is instituting the first anti-sexual harassment policy in the workplace recorded in the Bible.

If that is not remarkable enough, Boaz takes it a step further and gives Ruth permission to drink from the water jars that his men had filled. Culturally it was expected for foreigners would draw water for the Israelites and the women would draw for men. This is extraordinary. Overwhelmed by Boaz's generosity,

NIV says She bowed down with her face to the ground. She says, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes?"

Verse 11 Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. 12 May the LORD repay you for what you have done

Boaz is thinking to himself, So this is the woman that everyone in Bethlehem is talking about! We can assume that two things were being talked about in the town gossip regarding Ruth.

1. Her extraordinary kindness to her mother-in-law
2. Her extraordinary courage in accompanying her back

Then Boaz says in verse 12, May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge." Boaz introduces one of the most beautiful pictures of divine care in all of Scripture. He imagines Yahweh as a mother bird who offers her wings for protection of her defenseless young. Boaz draws on an image that was common throughout the ancient Near East. He speaks of Ruth's experience as coming to seek refuge/asylum under his wing.

That is a beautiful metaphor of God's wings of protection. Similar pictures are drawn in Deuteronomy, Moses, in Psalms of God's wings of protection. Wings of protection give images of safety, stillness, help and hope. God's wings of protection upon us.

We can safely say, Boaz marveled at Ruth's inner character in at least two ways:

1. Her humbleness. Ruth views herself as occupying the lowest rung on the ladder. She places herself even

lower.

2. How she has demonstrated tremendous love to Naomi.

Boaz still isn't finished. He continues to extend more favor on Ruth. At mealtime, he invites Ruth to join his table and share a meal with his workers. Verse 14, At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar." When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over.

In ancient Near East people didn't eat only to satisfy hungry stomachs; eating together also had great symbolic significance. Meals were put on by hosts as an expression of hospitality.

The fact that Boaz ate with his harvesters says something about him, but his actions at this meal must have caught everyone by surprise. He invites Ruth, an outsider, a Moabite woman, to join him and his workers. Unheard of. He gave her the best to eat. He would not allow her to eat dry bread, but to dip it in vinegar, alcoholic base and, Boaz serves her himself, roasted grain and gave her more she can possibly eat. Then to top it all, Verse 15, As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, "Even if she gathers among the sheaves, don't embarrass her. 16 Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don't rebuke her."

Boaz says to his workmen, I want you to show her every courtesy and consideration. You let her come up and glean right where you're reaping. When you see that Ruth is gleaning immediately behind you, when nobody is looking, you just drop a bundle back there and go on. When she gets up to it, she'll call, Yoo- you dropped a bundle, You just tell her you're sorry but you can't go back and get it, and for her to keep it. Boaz makes his workers responsible for making sure Ruth does not go home empty-handed.

Boaz again commands his workers not to rebuke her. Don't shame her with snide comments about low class status but treat her with respect. We have some interesting dynamics going on here.

Now I have to ask you a question. Is Boaz falling in love? Do you believe in love at first sight? Someone asked J. Vernon McGee if he believed in love at first sight. He said he believed in it very strongly. He went on to say, I proposed to my wife on the second date we had. The reason I didn't propose to her on the first date was because I didn't want her to think I was in any hurry.

Traditionally most scholars and pastors have interrupted this as love at first sight. Is Boaz falling in love with Ruth at this point or just showing extreme kindness? Before you answer that let me throw out a few thoughts for you to think about.

There is a word in the Old Testament that is somewhat equivalent to the New Testament word Agape. That word is HESED and there's no word in the English Language that captures its exact meaning. The best way to translate the word hesed is, kindness, mercy, loyalty, loving-kindness. God's faithfulness to his people.

Carolyn James writes, Hesed is driven not by duty or legal obligation, but by a bone-deep commitment - a loyal, selfless love that motivates a person to do voluntarily that no one has a right to expect or ask of them.....They willingly pour themselves out for the good of someone else. It's actually the kind of love we find

most fully expressed in Jesus. In a nutshell, hesed is the gospel lived out.

The argument is because Boaz was a man of noble character he was driven not by romantic love but by hesed, Extreme Kindness.

The New American Commentary, the narrator shows how Boaz took an ordinary occasion and transformed it into a glorious demonstration of compassion, generosity, and acceptance - in short, the biblical understanding of hesed. The text offers no hint of any romantic attraction between Boaz and Ruth. Given the racial and social barriers that separated them, the thought would not have crossed Ruth=s mind. As for Boaz, he was simply a good man Asent@ by God to show favor to this woman. Leave it to scholars not to have any romance in their souls. The fact is Boaz and Ruth were worlds apart. Background, ethnicity, social status, economically, the thought of romance was unthinkable. Was it love at first sight or showing HESED, generous kindness? I=ll let you make the decision.

Verse 17, it says that Ruth worked until evening and gathered the grain which amounted to an epaph. How much is an epaph? Epap could be anything between 30-50 pounds. Incredible. In a single day Ruth brought home roughly equivalent of a half-month=s wages or more. Imagine Naomi=s eyes when Ruth brought home all this grain. Not only that, Ruth reached down in her cloak and brought out the left overs from lunch.

Dr. Hubbard writes, By now Naomi=s head was probably spinning. To glean so much grain was astounding, but to come home with cooked food was a shock that required explaining.

Verse 19, Her mother-in-law asked her, "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!" Ruth replies, the name of the man I worked with today is Boaz. Ruth has no idea of the connection here. This news triggers an immediate and dramatic transformation in Naomi.

* Lips that were formerly bitter with lament now overflow with blessing.

* The depression that has been holding Naomi hostage seems suddenly to release its grip.

In a blink, Mara and her bitterness depart. Pleasant Naomi is back.

What is the connection with Boaz? Boaz is one of Naomi=s husband=s relatives. Verse 20, "The LORD bless him!" Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. "He has not stopped showing his kindness (HESED) to the living and the dead." She added, "That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers."

At the end of chapter one of Ruth the situation is one of sorrow, bitterness, aloneness and poverty.

Now the situation is one of hope, comfort and provision. Hesed, Kinsman-redeemer

HESED: Hesed appears only three times in the narrative, the book of Ruth is thoroughly soaked in it. Hesed can be boiled down to this: Someone cares and has freely made it their business to look out for your.

That is what Naomi realizes through the actions of Boaz, that God continues to show kindness, Hesed, after all that she had experience. She also makes the stunning discovery that hesed is still actively at work for Elimeliech, Mahlon, and Kilion, the living and the dead

In the deepest of pain, God=s Hesed continues to pour out to His people. When we encounter difficult times, there is a tendency to believe that God turns his back on us. God=s hesed had run out in our lives.

In one of the most depressing Books in the Bible, the Book of Lamentations, (the name itself express the mood of the book, Jeremiah is pouring out his soul to God in despair, yet in the midst of all hope being lost

we come across these verses in chapter 3: 21 Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: 22 Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. 23 They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Naomi goes to sleep that night with a full stomach, enough grain to last for days, and her head resting on the pillow of God=s hesed. You can almost feel the weight of worry rolling off of Naomi. Doesn=t mean that Naomi=s troubles aren=t over. She will still shed plenty of tears. She remains in poverty, but she is reassured of God=s hesed for her.

We live in a broken world and Naomi=s story shows that both pain and blessings are present in this life, and one does not eliminate the other. So when trouble strikes, a late-night phone call, bad diagnoses, or when death strikes, - the one thing we can be certain of is that God=s kindness (hesed) is still actively in force.

In 1985 Tina Turner had a Grammy-winning hit entitled, *What=s love got to do with it?* Without a doubt it is arguably Tina Turner's most popular and successful single. It became her first number-one hit in the United States and establishing Tina Turner as a mainstream Pop and Rock artist. Basically the song talks about the fact that the heart is in danger when love is involved. The potential for pain is alarming. Better to keep your guard up than risk being wounded by something so fickle and lethal as love. Some of our deepest scars come from injuries inflicted by those we loved or thought loved us.

Aren=t you glad that God didn=t take Tina Turner=s advice. That He allowed His heart to be broken. That He allowed His heart to feel the agony of our sins when He allowed His Son Jesus Christ to be crucified.

Today He extends that Hesed to every single person knowing that in many cases it will be rejected, broken, and yet He continues to love, and love and love even more.

Today, maybe you are going through pain, and you find yourself closing your heart to His love because you are angry, or hurting, I implore you to open your heart today to Him. He wants to extend His HESED, kindness, His love to you today. Won=t you do it?

The purpose of posting this sermon is for personal Bible study and resource material for pastors.

Resources materials:

Carolyn Custis James, The Gospel of Ruth, Zondervan, 2008

Daniel Block, The New American Commentary, B&H Publishing Group 1998

J.A. Motyer, The Message of Ruth, Inter-Varsity Press, 1983