

So Far Beyond What We Ask or Think

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Bible Text: Ruth 2:14-23

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Well, we've seen a wonderful story so far in the book of Ruth. It's really astonishing when you study this book a little more carefully than just a quick flyby read of it, just how much there is for our Christian lives in what we find in this part of God's inerrant word.

Last time, we ended at the end of verses 12 and 13. You remember, Naomi and Ruth had returned to Israel in poverty and once they settled there, Ruth goes out into the fields to try to eek out an existence for the two of them and it ended last time with Boaz and Ruth speaking kindly to one another. Look at verses 12 and 13, Boaz says to Ruth, "May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge." This is another expression of Boaz's godly heart as he pronounces blessing on her and desires God's goodness to surround her and be a part of her life. You remember that he spoke to the workers in his fields in a similar way in verse 4 when he said, "May the LORD be with you." And you see this gracious, godly man concerned for the people that are in front of him and he extends that also to Ruth. I think there's very little doubt that beyond his generous heart in the Lord, that he also had a personal interest in Ruth as the story unfolds, but this is a godly man speaking to her, speaking to this Moabite woman, this foreigner, and it's just a sign of the Lord's own care for Ruth. She says in response there in verse 13, "I have found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants."

So that's where we pick up the story and what Boaz does here is, as we move on, he expresses further tangible care to Ruth and further cares for her. He invites her to the meal with his reapers and he serves her food. Look at verse 14, "At mealtime Boaz said to her, 'Come here,' or draw near, "that you may eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.' So she sat beside the reapers; and he served her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied and had some left."

Now, let me just pause here for a moment and just kind of set the stage for you a little bit maybe theologically in terms of what's going on here beyond the details of the meal that they were sharing together. Remember Ruth and remember what's going on here in her life and where she started from; this is so important to understanding the whole flow of the message. Ruth was born into Moab. We know nothing about her background there

except that Moab was a nation that was separated from God and had no part in the promises of God and so Ruth grows up in total darkness, spiritually speaking. Then this Jewish family from Israel comes and settles in and she marries into that family, but as she was growing up, she had absolutely no expectation of anything from the God of Israel. She had no expectation. There was no reason for her to think that there was anything in her future associated with the true God, and yet this Jewish family comes and she marries into it and lo and behold, after 10, 12 years or so, her husband dies; all of the men in the family die and she is left with her mother-in-law and we saw that in Ruth 1 there in verse 16 was really the time of her conversion. She said, "Your people shall be my people and your God my God." And they go back to Bethlehem and they are there and as far as Ruth knows at that point in time, all that she knew was, all that she could have expected was a meager existence with her mother-in-law and whatever it meant to have converted to the Jewish faith. That's all that she had to go on. No big expectations, and yet as this story unfolds and what I want you to see tonight is the abounding, immeasurable, greatly fantastic goodness and generosity of God here that so far surpasses anything that we could ask or think, that's the title of the message. Ruth finds just greater avenues of blessing unfolding before her eyes as she goes along and yet she does this unaware. She goes into Boaz's field unaware. She doesn't know the significance of who Boaz is and yet these things unfold as time goes along.

Well, beloved, there is probably something like that about your own Christian experience when you first came to Christ. Hasn't it turned out to be much greater for you being a Christian than what you ever expected when you first came to Christ? I know it was for me. I know on the day that I was converted, on that Sunday morning when I was converted alone in my apartment in Bloomington, Indiana, I remember like it was yesterday, I remember giving my life to Christ and just thinking that what I expected was, I don't know what I expected really. I just knew that it was a matter that I was going to follow Christ whatever that meant and I had no real expectation of blessing to come out of that. It was just going to be the right thing to do. I was finally going to do the right thing as I trusted Christ and I was going to give my life to him and I had no concept that it was going to revolutionize my life. I had no concept that Christ was going to totally overturn all the anger and hatred and other sins in my heart and give me new life and give me peace and give me joy that I never even knew existed. I knew that Christ would save me from sin, I knew that Christ would rescue me from damnation, but I had no idea whatsoever that there was going to be all of these spiritual blessings attendant to giving my life to him. It was so much more than I thought. It was so much more than I asked for. I simply asked to be saved from sin and what did he do? He overturns my life and changes me and gives me this joy and peace in the midst of a heart that had just been filled with anger and pride and so much else, and salvation turned out to be far more than I expected.

Okay, so that was the first 24 hours. Let me tell you about the second. No, I'm not going to do it that way. But this was all from the start. It was so much more and then as you walk with Christ and just more and more blessings unfold as you are taught truth and you understand, you know, the electing grace of God and his sovereign Providence and the way that Christ has secured us for all of eternity and it's just wave after wave after wave

of joy and truth and profundity enter into your life. You say, "I had no idea but, wow, this is much better than what I ever thought!" Well, do you know what? Just tasting that in an earthly sense, multiply that, expand it geometrically, multiply geometric expansions and maybe we've got a little foretaste of what heaven will be like. Heaven will be geometrically better than anything that we can possibly ask or think. So we just see that God deals so graciously and so abundantly with those that he saves and it ought to make you love him deeply and profoundly with the most sincere sense of loyalty and allegiance that, "My life belongs to him. I don't care what happens in the world." And you see this played out in Ruth's life as God's blessings unfold, you know, and just get bigger and bigger and bigger. They just mushroom as it goes along. I love God for that and I know you do too.

So what you see here, what you see is Ruth is born into darkness, no expectations. She goes with Naomi expecting a meager existence and then she finds that she can go into the fields and glean after the reapers and she goes expecting to just glean and get a little bit of food to survive on, and yet here she is, more than she asked, more than she expected, the landowner there in verse 14, has invited her in to his party of workers and has given her a place at the table with those that belong to him, those that are working for him, those that are serving him, and it starts a pattern that I want you to see in the text tonight, beloved, is that Ruth is continually getting more than she asked or expected. More than she could have thought would have come her way and for you to see and to understand and to remember that this is exactly how God has dealt with you if you're a Christian. God has given you far more than you expected at the moment of your conversion and it is inversely proportionate to what you deserve and you just see the immeasurable grace of God being expressed through Boaz into the life of Ruth. Her place with the reapers was a sign of acceptance that she couldn't have asked for that; she had no grounds to expect that. Boaz actually serves her food, a special mark of his favor, of his kindness. She couldn't have asked for that. She was a foreigner on his piece of land and yet he shows this love and this grace and this favor and he gives her lunch. That's great, but he gives her more than she could have needed. She walks out with a big doggie bag of leftover food because she was satisfied and there was more left over.

So she enters this field as a poor widow and before the day is over she had more lunch than she could eat and she was sitting with the people who belonged there. Isn't that like what it is to be a Christian in one sense? I mean, we're just getting started here but when Christ saved you and he brings you in, as it were, into his banqueting table and sets his banner over you, his banner of love is set upon you, and you belong. All of a sudden you belong in the family of God. He's adopted you into his family. He has put his Spirit in you. He has forgiven all of your sins. He has washed away all of your guilt. He accepts you fully in Christ. You couldn't ask for that. You couldn't demand that. You don't deserve that. Do you see how great God's grace is and how it goes beyond everything that you ask or think? What a great God. What a magnificent God he is and as we were singing, "Joy to the world," to realize that this gracious God is so vastly great that he steps into humanity in order to take your sins in his body on the cross; that he takes on humanity so that he has lifeblood to spill out of love for you in your soul to secure your eternal redemption. You couldn't ask for that. You couldn't demand that at the throne of

God. "Hey, come down and save me." You've got no right to ask for that. And yet that's what he did.

So while we are overwhelmed by the sovereignty of God in the story, that's magnificent, and the holiness of God revealed in Scripture and that drives us low and makes us bow down and worship when we see how immeasurably good he is to us, we're just triply humbled before him at the greatness of his goodness and the goodness of his greatness. Yet it goes on. Remembering that Boaz is a godly man and Boaz is simply an instrument of God's blessing in the life of Ruth and so you just see this pouring over into a Gentile life.

Look at verse 15 and 16 with me. "When Ruth rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, 'Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her. Also you shall purposely pull out for her some grain from the bundles and leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.'" Boaz uses his authority as the field owner to instruct his workers, "You help her. You be gracious to her. Don't insult her. Don't threaten her. You do what I command so that she is well taken care of." Well, the nature of the law was such that these gleaners, the widows and the poor people who would come in, what the law provided was for them to go in after the reapers' work was done and then they would, after the reapers had done their job, then they could pick up what's left over and just according to the law, that was what you were entitled to in that God ordained system of welfare that existed at the time. You couldn't expect anything more. You were already getting free provision that you just worked for.

Well, so that's why Ruth went in. That's what she could have expected. Maybe that's what she was entitled to. She got so much more. She got so much more. Boaz says, "Guys, here's what I want you to do. As you're harvesting, I want you to take what you're doing and you intentionally leave some behind. Not just accidental leftovers that she comes along, I want you to intentionally put things in her path so that she is sure to get plenty." And he gives his orders to protect her and he says, "You can go in." Boaz, while the law allowed the poor into the field after the reapers were finished, Boaz invited Ruth into the field while they were reaping, while the best of the crop was still available, and told the reapers to drop grain in the field for her. She couldn't have expected that. Boaz was just showing all of this self-motivated kindness toward this woman just in the same way that Christ showed unprompted kindness to you in your sin, graciously drawing you to himself. And Boaz appoints protection over Ruth as she comes into his care. We see a picture of what God does for us. We enter into the sphere of his providential protection and he orders life in order to protect us materially and spiritually and in every other matter that affects our soul. You couldn't have demanded that at the start. This is all at Boaz's initiative that Ruth receives this kindness and it reflects the way that at God's initiative, at God's motivation, we enter into all of these spiritual blessings in Christ. It's amazing. It's the most wonderful thing that could ever be told, the great goodness of God toward those that he sets his affection on and all I want you to see, all I want you to see tonight is just how much you should love him in response. That's all I want you to see is to picture this for you so that you're drawn to gratitude and thanks and love and

allegiance in response; to set aside the things that captivated your thinking on this day and just be overwhelmed and captivated by the great mercies of God on your soul.

So there in verse 16, again, Ruth receiving more than she could have asked and it turns out to be this great abundance in verse 17. Look at it there with me, "So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley." About 30 pounds, give or take. Thirty pounds of grain are bestowed upon her. In other words, Boaz made sure that her need was abundantly met. Have you ever tried to carry 20 pounds of potatoes out of the market? It's pretty awkward, isn't it? It's heavy and it's clumsy to try to carry, well, here's Ruth walking out with 30 pounds of grain, far more than she could have asked or expected.

So remember at this point in the story, she doesn't even know who Boaz is. Remember that Boaz has initiated all of this and it's not something that Ruth asked for, it's just out of the kindness of Boaz, and so in innocence, in a little bit of being blissfully unaware of what was transpiring, she comes home and she dumps all of this stuff out before Naomi. Look at verse 18, "She took it up and went into the city," so she left from the field and went back to where they lived, "and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned." And, you know, Ruth just kind of lays it out there, lays out that 30 pounds of grain and, "She also took it out," it seems that what she's talking about is the leftover lunch that she had because she had more than she could eat at lunch, "and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied." So, "Naomi, I've got some leftovers from lunch and I've got all of this grain here." There's kind of this embarrassment of riches that are going on compared to what she expected when she first went out. You know, and remember, remember, I mean, my mind is just going everywhere here at this time. Remember that when Ruth went out, when Ruth went out and stepped out to go and do this, she is acting out of a commendable character that says, "I will work with my hands and I will work with my back and I will sweat in the sun in order to provide a meal to take care of my family. I'm the only one who can do this and so I'm going to go out and do it." There was no sense of entitlement here. There was just a sense of responsibility that, "I'm going to fulfill my duty and out of love for Naomi, I'm going to make sure that we have something to eat today." She comes hauling back in this tremendous blessing.

Well, Naomi gets it. The lights are starting to go on for Naomi. Look at verse 19. She can't believe what she's seeing here and so she's got some questions and it just kind of tumbles out of her mouth as well in a way that I can sympathize with. She is so excited about what she sees that these things and questions just come out. Verse 19, "Her mother-in-law then said to her, 'Where did you glean today and where did you work?'" really asking the same question two ways, "Where were you working in the fields that this happened? This doesn't happen, Ruth. I know you're new to our country but let me tell you, this kind of thing is unusual. This has the marks of something extraordinary." And she says, "May he who took notice of you be blessed." Notice that, she's praying again. We tend to read through these things and think about it in just kind of superficial terms but Naomi speaking out of her own faith says, "May he who took notice of you be blessed. May God show favor to the man who did this for you because he has certainly

been kind to you. Ruth, I just pray that God would return the blessing to this man whoever it may be."

"So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said," so the story is building up, the tension is building, said, "Ruth, tell her. Tell her who it is," because we already know from chapter 2, verse 1, that Boaz is a relative but Ruth doesn't know that and Naomi at this point doesn't know it but we as the readers know it. We know this is coming up to this big explosion of something really cool.

"So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, 'The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.'" Boaz? You've got to be kidding me. It was Boaz? Look at what Naomi says to her daughter-in-law there in verse 20, "May he be blessed of the LORD," using the name of the covenant faithfulness of God; the Lord being the covenant name, the promise keeping name that expresses all of the faithfulness of God. "May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead." Naomi gets it. The light bulbs are flashing in her head and she understands that this is really significant and she thanks God that he directed Ruth without Ruth knowing it, he directed Ruth to the field of Boaz who just happens to be a close relative in the family. And she sees by Boaz's response that Boaz is showing kindness to Ruth and she sees that as a token of the fact that God has not forgotten her in her widowhood and that, in fact, God was still showing kindness to the memory of her dead men in the family, even though they didn't deserve it.

"May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead." And Naomi's mind is running and then she comes back, she's got to say it to Ruth and explain to her why she's so excited. "Naomi said to her, 'The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives.'" Now, as you read that in English, a close relative might not sound like quite such the big deal that it actually is here in the story. We'll get to that in a moment.

Verse 21, "Then Ruth the Moabitess said, 'Furthermore, he said to me, "You should stay close to my servants until they have finished all my harvest.'" What's going on here? There's a lot more going on than meets the eye in your first English reading when you read the story. First of all, the writer emphasizes again, I think it's five times he calls her "Ruth the Moabitess," a reminder that she was a foreigner who had no claim on these blessings. So all of this goodness from God through the hand of Boaz is coming on someone who had no claim on it just like you had no claim on Christ through your own merit.

Naomi is praising God because without trying, Ruth found the right man. You see, Boaz was more than a relative. He was a redeemer. God was displaying his love and faithfulness through Boaz. Why was Boaz so important? Why is this such an electric moment? One commentator summarizes it this way referring to the Hebrew term for "closest relative" there at the end of verse 20. "The Hebrew term 'goel' functions," listen to this because this is just like really important. It's more than just blood relation that's going on here. "The Hebrew term," I quote, "The Hebrew term 'goel' functions as a

technical legal term referring specifically to Israelite family law. It 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 or herself out of the crisis." What Naomi is saying is that Boaz is a redeemer. He's a close enough relative that there is family responsibilities that he has here that's invoked by the law and the redeemer was one who could rescue a relative from trouble when the relative could not save himself. So what Naomi sees playing out here is that Boaz has that legal responsibility; he holds the position of one who is responsible under the law to provide deliverance to his family, but more than that, Boaz has demonstrated that he wants to go far beyond what the law requires. He's showing such generosity to Ruth and so he has this position and yet from that position he's doing far more than what he would be required to do.

The kinsman redeemer was the one who defended the rights of the person and helped him in a time of trouble. This is all laid out in passages in the Mosaic law. I want to take you to them. Look at Leviticus 25 for just a moment, just to give you a little bit of a flavor of what's going on here. Leviticus 25:25 says, "If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman is to come and buy back what his relative has sold." So you're in economic distress, you have to sell your land in order to get through economically, the kinsman redeemer comes and buys the land back on your behalf so that it doesn't leave the family. It stays in the family.

This close relative, this redeemer, could rescue a family member from slavery. Look at Leviticus 25:47, just across the page probably for you, "Now if the means of a stranger or of a sojourner with you becomes sufficient, and a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to him," with regard to that stranger, "that he sells himself to a stranger who is sojourning with you, or to the descendants of a stranger's family." So he has sold himself to this family in order to take care of the economic situation. "Then he shall have redemption right after he has been sold. One of his brothers may redeem him, or his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or one of his blood relatives from his family may redeem him; or if he prospers, he may redeem himself." So he sells himself into service and what Scripture is saying here is that there was a right attached to him as an Israelite that one of his family members could come and rescue him out of his slavery, redeem him, buy him out of it. The word for "redeem" in this passage is the same root as the "kinsman" that we've been talking about. That's why Boaz is so often called a kinsman redeemer. The close relationship in the family gave rise to the duty and the privilege of redemption.

One more thing in Deuteronomy 25, it even extended to marriage. Deuteronomy 25:5, "When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. It shall be that the firstborn whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel." So the idea of this kinsman redeemer is that if he's an unmarried brother and his brother dies, that he has a responsibility to take his brother's wife as his own to raise her up and to preserve the family name.

Now, let's pull all of this together as we consider what Boaz is doing here. Boaz was not a brother to Ruth's deceased husband. The blood relationship was somehow more distant and perhaps Boaz was not legally obligated to marry her, but if so, that only makes this story more compelling. It's only more profoundly an illustration of the grace of God that Boaz, without a strict legal responsibility, would gladly undertake for this widow of his relative. This is exceedingly far beyond what Ruth could have asked or thought that Boaz from his position as a close relative would act in ways that go beyond what was required.

You know how the story comes out. We're getting a little bit ahead of it here. That's okay. Just remember this: look back at Ruth 1:9, if you would. Ruth 1:9 as we've done in this series of Ruth, we're going to draw out some practical lessons for Christian life from them. Notice as we pointed out last time, notice the prayer that Naomi offered. Notice the prayer that Naomi offered for her daughters-in-law in Ruth 1:9, "May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." When she prayed that, she was expecting the two of them to go back to Moab and marry Moabite men, just go back to their former way of life. As it turns out, Orpah went, Ruth stayed with her. And knowing how the story goes, do you see how God answered Naomi's prayer in ways that go so far beyond anything that she could have asked or thought? I mean, this is just crushingly wonderful. She prays, "I pray that my covenant keeping God would give you a husband. Now go on your way." Ruth says, "I'm not leaving. I'll take your God." Well, what you see happening and you see why Naomi is so excited, you know what it's like, most of you; you know what it's like, don't you, when you're praying for something to happen that's beyond your ability to control and all of a sudden unexpectedly there's this rushing wind, as it were, that comes through the room and God answers in a way that goes beyond anything that you could have asked or expected. It was so much more than you asked for and what's your response to that? You're giddy with excitement. You're overwhelmed with the greatness of it all. You say, "Oh, God is so good! He's so faithful!"

Well, that's what's going on with Naomi here in her excitement about what she's seeing. She was concerned for Ruth, prayed that she would find a husband, and thinking, you know, she'll go and marry some, Jeb the Moabite. Jeb, not being a biblical name. I just made that up. I know you don't always track with my sense of humor sometimes. Jeb the Moabite is what Naomi had in mind, instead, it's Boaz, a godly, generous man who is a relative of the family who stands in the position of a kinsman redeemer. Naomi never dreamt that God would send a goel, would send a kinsman redeemer to be the answer to her prayer. This was so much more than she thought. I mean, this just expands the balloon and expands until it pops and just goes beyond anything that she could have stretched her thought to encompass.

So Naomi encourages Ruth to stay put. Verse 22, you know, the wedding hasn't come to be yet. This isn't all put together but Naomi can see the direction that it's going and so she says to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, verse 22, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maids, so that others do not fall upon you in another field." She says, "Stay put. Keep going back there. Stay with Boaz." I mean, I'm sure she's putting together the future potential in her mind. She's a woman, after all. You know, this is what women do, right?

They think about the way matchmaking should go. And besides, it wouldn't be fitting for Ruth to go to another man's field after Boaz had shown such kindness to her and Ruth, in keeping with her godly character, does what Naomi says she should do.

Verse 23, "So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest." The two harvests back to back maybe seven to eight weeks. So there's a time lapse that's expressed there in verse 23. "And she lived with her mother-in-law." In other words, as this harvest is going on and she's going out to the fields to work, she went home night after night to be with Naomi during that time. So Ruth faithfully stays with Naomi, faithfully keeps doing the manual labor required in the context of this great kindness that Boaz had shown to her.

Now, that brings us to the end of chapter 2. We'll see the outcome of these developments next week. For now, let's consider a few life lessons along the way here as we consider what we've just seen and I've already kind of previewed my thoughts about it with my prior exposition of the text that I've been going on. This just sweeps you up in such wonderful themes. First of all, what would I have you take out from this passage? 1. See the great goodness of God. See the great goodness of God. I don't mind repeating myself here. You say, "I know. You don't mind repeating yourself anytime you preach. You say the same thing 10 times over in a single message." I know. I'm trying to cut it down to seven but I just can't discipline myself enough. See the great goodness of God. God showered his goodness on a foreign woman who wasn't even looking for it. As I said earlier, she was looking for food for the day. She walked away with 30 pounds of grain, an eventual husband, the beginning, unbeknownst to her, the beginning of the line of David which led to the line of Christ and now Ruth is with Boaz experiencing the great blessings of heaven around the throne of Christ. Honestly, what words do you use, what tongue is fit to declare the greatness of the goodness of God to her? She goes out ready to curl her fingers around hard work and what she finds now as we're standing here now, she's on the other side of eternity, welcomed around the throne of her 15th great-grandson, the Lord Jesus Christ, making that number up. Really, how can you account for such infinite goodness for someone that it wasn't even looking for it? There aren't words to describe.

Secondly, see the great picture of Christ. See the great picture of Christ in the life of Boaz. And it's important to remember the historical story as we enter into this, that Boaz was a real man who lived in real time and space who was actually related by blood to Naomi's family. He really was a man that was gracious and godly and generous beyond all thought. You know, goes to his reapers, "May the LORD be with you. Ruth, come and sit with the reapers. Here, let me serve you food. Workers, you take care of her." What a godly man. Boaz would have made a great pastor, wouldn't he, if he was qualified to teach, I guess, I don't know. But he certainly had the character of a pastor showing it on this foreign woman who at one level had nothing to offer him, and just all of this boundless generosity to a foreigner.

Do you see the picture of the way that Christ is our kinsman Redeemer? Do you see that this is exactly how Christ has dealt with you? Our brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, has used

his resources, his position, to show mercy to you; to relieve you of your need and to show favor to you that goes far beyond anything that you could ask or think. As great as Boaz's generosity to Ruth was, our Lord Jesus Christ has been geometrically, infinitely more generous to us. There we were, Gentiles, forsaken, some of you not even having a Christian heritage to lean on. You're outside the family of God and you don't even know the Bible. You didn't even have a Bible. You didn't even care about the Bible, you just cared about your life of sin, and yet here comes this great kinsman Redeemer who shows mercy to you and brings you in and uses his resources on your behalf. Who steps into your need; bears your sin on the cross of Calvary; showers you with spiritual blessings, every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ in this life, and this is just a brief appetizer foretaste of the greater glories of heaven that we're going to one day see soon. That's what your kinsman Redeemer is like. That's how great Christ is. For all of the wonderful nature of Boaz, Christ surpasses him infinitely in resources, in generosity, in kindness.

You say, "Why aren't you saying anything?" Well, this Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silent before him. There comes a point where as you start to see the greatness of Christ unfolding before your eyes, sometimes it's just time to stop talking and to let your silence be the response of worship. This is incomprehensible. This belongs to another realm. This is not human. This is divine love. This is divine grace. Totally self-motivated by Christ, not prompted by anything in you or me.

Thirdly, see the great provision of God. See the great provision of God. God's provision for Ruth started in his word centuries before she was born when he laid out this concept of the kinsman redeemer in his law, laid out the provision in the field which invited a poor woman to go and find subsistence living, and that system of welfare became the means by which Ruth was introduced to Boaz which started the line, I've said it before, I don't mind saying it again, started the line that led to David, that led to Christ, that led to your salvation. What great provision is this? How great his word must be. How great the mind of God must be to contemplate all of these things and to have it perfectly planned out in his mind before creation began. He knew exactly what was going to happen when he inspired Moses to write these words. He knew exactly what was going to happen when Ruth was born into Moab and it's just a matter of it playing out as he providentially orders things to accomplish exactly what he desired when he established his decree before the beginning of time.

So he provides for Ruth in his word. He provides for Ruth in the field. He provides for Ruth in Boaz. And don't miss that this all ultimately is rooted in the starting point is in the word of God how this all flowers out in time, and realize that it is the same inerrant inspired word of God which gave birth to life in your soul, and it's the same word of God that is sufficient; Scripture says, that the man of God would be equipped for every good work; that in the Bible alone you have everything you need for life and godliness. In the Bible alone, you find the direction and wisdom you need for life. Why would you dabble in, why would you look to secular things like psychology or psychiatry or psychology to satisfy the deepest needs of your soul? It's right here in the Bible, beloved. Scripture is equally sufficient for you and able to equip you for every good work in your life, to carry

you through every trial of life, to comfort and give solace to your soul when you're breathing your last on your deathbed just moments away from entering into eternity. That's how great this word is. That's how great the provision of God is. It starts in Christ, the Word Incarnate, the Spirit indwelling us, the riches of heaven. We're just greatly blessed, do you see it? The great provision of God.

Finally, in retrospect I might have started these points and gone the other direction. I started with the high point and came down to the human here, but you see the flow of what I'm saying. This brings it down to daily life, I guess is why we end up here in point 4: see the good example of Ruth. See the good example of Ruth. Ruth was on the receiving end of an incredible divine Providence. How was it that she was positioned for that blessing? Well, you see, I mean, I despair of my inability to express these things adequately. On the one hand, you have this massive, unspeakable goodness of God playing out in her life; faithfulness that goes to the skies and is deeper than the ocean and is broader than the horizon. How was it that this infinite realm of God's great goodness intersects with the life of Ruth? It's not through any great deeds or great person of who she is. God meets, God delivers his providential blessing, he conveys his great goodness to the life of Ruth through the simplest acts of quiet, unassuming faithfulness that you can imagine.

Ruth was content. Ruth gladly engaged the thought of manual labor to serve the one she loved. Ruth gladly left behind her homeland for the sake of Naomi and Naomi's God, expecting nothing in return. She was faithful when there really didn't seem to be much in it for her, humanly speaking. Naomi didn't promise her, did she? "Come with me to Israel and I'll introduce you to my family." I know Naomi isn't Italian and neither is my fake accent. "I'll introduce you to the family and I want you to meet Boaz." She didn't say that. There was none of that. Ruth had none of that to go on. Ruth was content with the hard work. She did not fear the unknown. She was happy simply to be faithful in her present duties.

What does that say to you and me? The avenue to God's blessing for you is faithfulness in those little things that mark your present life: the present relationships; the job that seems to have no connection with the kingdom of God; the marriage that sometimes is good, sometimes it is hard, and you're just trying to be faithful to that. You know, going further, not wanting to get too personal but there are a lot of you in here that need to be affirmed and encouraged in this: those daily trips, that daily interaction with family members in failing health who are suffering and you're just giving them the cup of cold water and dispensing the medication to them when no one's watching, that kind of simple faithfulness, that kind of Christian goodness, is the meeting point, is the intersection point with the great untold blessing and goodness of God in your life. God bless you. Be encouraged that God met Ruth pulling up grain in a field. Well, so much more so when you're honoring a parent who is in declining health and you're meeting them there pulling up the difficult weeds of existence there. God sees that. God is faithful. God will bless that beyond your wildest imagination.

What else does it tell us? The good example of Ruth, where else does it point us? Be content with Christ. Oh, beloved, I know what it's like from personal experience, you're always wanting the next thing, wondering what the next opportunity is going to be, where is the next goal in life? My whole life has been motivated by that kind of ambition, some of it good, some of it detestable at this point. But to you young people, especially I would say: learn to be content in Christ and beware especially in our prosperous Western society with very sophisticated marketing that is designed to make you discontent in order to get into your wallet, beloved, beware of that abiding sense of entitlement that always wants something more, that expects something more as if the world owes it to you, as if somehow having Christ in this life weren't enough to satisfy the deepest desires of your heart. Beware of that and be content with Christ.

Finally, beloved, what would I say to you? Be patient with Providence. Wait on God. These things in Ruth's life played out over 15 years or so, 10, 15 years. This took a long time to play out from when she first met Naomi's son. This played out in time and as we pointed out in times past, the ultimate fulfillment, the ultimate purpose of God's Providence in Ruth's life wasn't really made manifest for four generations until David rose to power. Only then could the real significance of Providence be played out, could be recognized in retrospect, and only then could that Providence be seen in the greater David that came in Bethlehem whose birth we remember at this time of year. Be patient with Providence in your life. Follow it. Don't force it when the time is long and the work is hard and the rewards seem small. God's Providence is worth waiting on. Oh, is God's Providence worth waiting on! God's Providence is worth banking your entire life upon and the fact that you are here with me tonight, that people like you, Christians like you, are here with me tonight is a proof of how God's Providence is played out in faithfulness in my own life. I can't tell you how I thank God for the Providence that brings me here and then brought you to share in life in Christ together. Every one of you, even you, Julie. Especially you.

So, beloved, as we contemplate these things, don't trust in what you can see. Don't make judgments about the purposes of God or the goodness of God by measure of your present circumstances. That's utterly unreliable. Look past your circumstances into this spiritual realm explained to us by Scripture where a God of great goodness exercises his great Providence to bring great blessing to those of us who are greatly undeserving. He always does more for us than we ask or think. He always does so far more than we ask or think. He's worthy of your trust.

Let's bow in prayer.

"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

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