

The Proper Man
Series on the book of Ruth
By Dr. Liam Goligher

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Ruth 2
Preached on: Sunday, June 30, 2013

Tenth Presbyterian Church
1701 Delancey Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103-6714

Website: www.tenth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tenth

Take your Bibles, please and turn to Ruth 2. While you're turning there, I want to make a complaint. I want to make a complaint about the Trinity hymnal and the editors for taking one of my favorite hymns which we have just sung and gutting it and changing words. I have memorized these hymns and they go and change the words. Read my lips and you'll get the right words next time we use that hymnal. Disgusting. They have done this a lot, by the way, here. They have done it a lot in this Trinity hymnbook. I'm just telling you that right now. My complaint is over. Back to my normal self.

You find yourself in Ruth 2 here and a few summers ago, I think at the recommendation of Phil R., I took away a book to read and you will know it was Phil R. because it was about the Dutch and it was about the Dutch who settled in North America in what was then known as New Amsterdam. It was a great read, actually. It was very interesting. I had never really read about the early Dutch settlements there but the historian who is telling the story reckoned that one couple whose life he kind of followed in the unfolding of the story, that that one couple of Dutch settlers in New Amsterdam have in the succeeding years of the development of North America, had in the region of 8 million descendants. That's quite an astounding insight, really. Of course, the reality is that none of us have any idea of the impact of our lives. One couple, 8 million Americans today. It's an amazing kind of phenomenon and we see this in the life of Boaz and Ruth as it's unfolding for us in the story.

At one level, if we took a kind of historical lens to look at the story, at one level it's a love story. We'll see this this evening, I hope. We'll see the beginning of that this evening as we look at it and that's great. A love story. A stand alone love story. One of the biggest, best love stories that's ever been told. Two ordinary people. They meet in relatively ordinary circumstances and they fall in love. He falls in love first, actually, and then she comes later as very often is the case and they get married.

Then we adjust our historical lens a little bit and we see the significance of the story to the people who first read it. The people who first read the story, it's significantly at the end of the story because at the end of the story, at the end of the little book that tells the story, we discover that this couple, Boaz and Ruth, have children. Boaz and Ruth fathered Obed. Obed fathered Jesse. And Jesse fathered David, King David.

Then we readjust the historical lens a little bit more and we get a bit of the bigger picture of the story and we discover that this Ruth has a great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandson and we find Ruth in the genealogy of the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus. It's an amazing story. It's a fantastic story.

Then we have to take the historical lens and we let it pan out so that we see not only what happens after the story of Ruth but what happens before the story of Ruth. We discover that the whole thing has been planned and purposed and superintended and guided by the hand of God himself as he prepares the story of the coming of the Savior. And we discover that the taking of this Moabite, Gentile woman and making her part of the family of the Messiah holds out hope for those of us in this room who are not of Jewish extraction, that we too as foreigners, might have a place in the purposes of God for the world. It's an amazing story.

So let's get into it. Previously in Ruth, we've seen the introduction of this new character. He's flagged up in chapter 2, verse 1, "Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz." He comes out of the blue, as we saw, but there it is, flagged up, this new character and the author is saying, "Keep your eyes on this man." Then we saw Ruth going out to glean in the fields. This was permitted by the law of Moses that foreigners or the poor could go out after the reapers as they are reaping the harvest and it was the law of Moses that they should not go to the edge of the fields but that they should leave a little bit of the edge so that the poor could come and they could get some grain and take it home and make some bread, although we don't know whether that rule, that law of Moses was kept in all cases. The woman is hopeful that when she goes out that day, the Lord would show her grace and lead her to the field of a man who keeps the law of Moses and does what the law requires so that she can find grain for herself and her mother-in-law, Naomi. So off she goes to glean in the field.

Then we saw last time this great word "behold," and she goes to the field and, hey presto, would you believe it? She finds herself in the field of this man Boaz whom we've been introduced to in verse 1. It's an amazing coincidence. It's one of those chance happenings that happens whenever God is in the story, wherever God's directing and superintending events. By chance, chance happened and there she is in Boaz's field. This story is now thickening.

Then behold, one of the surprise words of the Bible, behold Boaz turns up. He just happens to come when she's there. He probably didn't go to that field very often. It probably was just a spot check to see whether the boys were doing their work. He turns up when Ruth is there and then, we saw this last time, at the end of that first section we looked at last time, we saw him, Boaz sees Ruth and he goes to the guys and he says, "Whose is that young woman there?" Interestingly, what he wants to know, of course, is she taken? Does she have a boyfriend? Is she engaged? Is she married? I mean, who does she belong to? Is she available? That's the question he's asking.

Now, it's interesting to me, isn't it, well, it's interesting to me and I hope it's interesting to you and if it isn't, it should be, that this is the way the story begins. I want you to notice he hasn't prayed yet. He hasn't gone to his pastor and discussed the matter with him. He hasn't engaged in any kind of spiritual counseling. He sees this girl and he's interested. He can't help himself. He's interested. He hasn't consulted anybody. He's just interested. Interested enough to ask who she is and who she belongs to. What do you think peaks his interest? He doesn't know who she is yet, by the way. He hasn't been told who she is. Actually he knows more about her than he realizes because once he's told who she is, reports that he's heard about this girl. It comes to his mind, he remembers all that he's been hearing, the talk that's been going on in the village of Bethlehem. But at this point, he doesn't know who she is. What gets his attention? Well, she's probably a stunner. That's a Glaswegian word for somebody who looks good. I mean, that's what he sees.

The reason I pause over this is: some of you have, not some of you but some Christian parents have a problem when it comes to dealing with your boys when it comes to the boys thinking about girls and you have far too much to say to them and you have far too much that you want to interfere with things. Let me tell you: boys and girls were made the way they were made by God and one of the key things that they were made to do was to recognize what they like and what they don't like. They don't need your help to see that. They need your help in other ways but they don't need your help to see that.

I read a blog post this week or somebody told me about a blog post, should I say, because I'm not a friend of this person. She hasn't friended me yet but I hope that mentioning that might just encourage them to do that. Anyway, but the gist of this blog post was this: that sometimes when we're bringing up our boys, in order to guard them from sexual impurity we teach them that the female form in all its parts is a potential threat to their purity. We're a bit Islamist, actually, in the way we think about the female form. There are some parts of the female form that boys shouldn't be focusing in on but, actually, most of it, most of it is just the same as what they've got: legs and shoulders and arms and necks and wrists and, you know, there is no difference. And basically here's your simple rule: if they haven't got what you've got, don't focus in on it. Don't think about it. But apart from that, the form was made to be enjoyed, noticed. That's the way it is. Here's what's going to happen if you start putting rules on what boys look at and think about. Do you know what's going to happen? They are going to sexualize parts of the woman's body that were never meant to be sexualized. Forbid them looking at women and suddenly all good looking women or whatever are going to stimulate sexual thoughts, not simply thoughts of admiration or appreciation for beauty in and of itself. You have to be very careful. We can bring our boys up to become oversexualized by suppressing their appreciation of ordinary beauty in the opposite sex.

You say, "Where did you get that from the story of Boaz?" At the point at which we see Boaz noticing Ruth, it's simply at that ordinary level. Do you know you can appreciate a member of the opposite sex being good looking without lusting after them? Do you know that? And we should teach our boys to appreciate women for who they are and what they are and even appreciate the beauty of their form without sexualizing that and forbidding that and giving them more problems than they're going to have. They will have problems

but let them have the problems they are going to have without you giving them more problems.

Boaz saw Ruth and he liked what he saw, but he was also a man of integrity so he asked the right question, "Whose is she? Is she married? If she's married, I'm not going to go any further. I like what I see but I'm not going to go any further. Is she engaged to somebody? Is she seeing somebody? Then, if so, then I'm going to not go any further." He's a man of integrity so he's human and he has integrity. Those are the two things we discover about this man who is going to be, of course, Mr. Right for Ruth.

Well, chapter 2 begins with Ruth acting in faith. At one level, of course, she's acting after necessity. They are poor. They have nothing. They are hungry and Ruth goes out acting on the provision made in the word of God. She goes out on the basis of the word of God to glean in the fields. That was risky business for a young woman on her own for a number of reasons. Not every employer in Israel would have necessarily kept the biblical code. Not every Israelite would have appreciated a foreigner taking advantage of the law of Moses. There was also the obvious danger of a young woman on her own in a remote area with a group of guys and you begin to see the risk involved for her. And gleaning was hard work. In the heat of the day, going around picking the grains up.

But she goes out trusting. She goes out trusting, did you notice, that someone would show her favor, grace. The word "chesed" the steadfast love of God. It's used about 250 times, the lovingkindness of God. God's covenant loyalty to his people. She is hopeful that she'll find somebody who is prepared to show her the kind of love of God towards her. It's a very unusual word to use in the context. It's an indicator of Ruth's own personal faith that she's going back in her mind. She's going back in her mind to what she's already learned about the religion of Israel, the promise made to Abraham that he would be a God to you and when he says, "I will be your God and you will be my people." She's going back to that promise and she's going out on the basis of that promise and she goes to this field and she finds in this field as chance chanced and as happenstance happens, as luck would have it, she finds in the providence of God that this is the field that belongs to Boaz.

Boaz, as we get to know him, we discover a number of things. He's a man full of God, a man full of the Gospel and a man full of grace. He's full of God. He has a God-centered view of life. Do you notice we saw this last time very quickly, we saw that he comes and he introduces himself. As soon as he appears on the scene, he greets his workers, "The LORD," Yahweh, "be with you. The LORD be with you." That was not just a courtesy or a formal greeting. Normally it was used in the religious services in the temple or the tabernacle and here he uses it in ordinary everyday life. He wants the blessing of God that comes upon Israel when they are assembled together to be with his workmen as they are doing their task day by day and he has a relationship with these workmen. These workmen have a relationship with him. They respond the way he has spoken to them, "The LORD be with you. The LORD bless you. The LORD be with you. The LORD bless you," because he has a view that even their work, however lowly and mean it may be is nonetheless work that's done for the glory of God. He's full of God this man and

we'll see that as the story develops. He's full of the Gospel. He's full of Gospel. Gospel means "good news" and we find that Boaz represents good news to Ruth.

I mentioned earlier that Ruth is a foreigner. She's a Moabitess. It's repeated over and over and over again. Sometimes she's just called "Ruth the Moabite" or "the Moabitess." That's meant to underline the fact that this woman has no place in Israel. This woman has no standing among the people of God. This woman is outside of the covenant promises made to Israel as the Israel of God, the chosen people of God. Moab represents the enemies of God. Here's a woman who is a foreigner and yet, in spite of that, look at Boaz's first words to her when he finds out who she is. He speaks tenderly to her and he calls her his daughter. "Now, listen, my daughter." It's a mark of respect. It's a giving of dignity to this foreigner girl. It's taking responsibility for her. She is an alien and a stranger and God had made provision in the law, the law of Moses. The very law of God had made provision, not just for the poor of the land but for the alien and the stranger, the foreigner who happened to be there. That even they had provision within the law of Moses that there was provision for them in this particular generous way and he is eager to show to this foreign girl because he likes her. He likes what he sees. He likes what he's heard about her. He is going to go deeper as we shall see in the way in which he is concerned for her but right from the get-go he begins to show to this alien and stranger the generosity of God's grace. He welcomes the stranger.

The language Boaz uses goes back before ever there was a nation of Israel. It goes back before Sinai where Israel is constituted after the exodus from Egypt. It goes way back to Abraham, to the covenant with Abraham, because Abraham like Ruth had been a foreigner. Abraham had been a pagan. He had been a sun worshiper from Ur of the Chaldees. Abraham was a Gentile. In those days there was no Israel of God. He was a Gentile. God had come to a Gentile, Abraham, and made a covenant with him. So he treats Ruth, in a sense, the way God had treated Abraham and he treats her with grace. She knows that. She recognizes that. She asks him, "Why are you showing favor to me? Why are you showing me chesed, steadfast love? Why are you treating me this way? I don't deserve it. I'm a foreigner. I don't deserve this kind of treatment that you're showing to me."

It's at that point that Boaz reveals that now that he knows who she is, he knows something about her, he's heard stories about her. What he's heard about her, even before he met her, has impressed him and now he's pouring more into the character that stands before him, the character of this woman that he has admired. This woman that he was interested in as soon as he saw her. He wanted to know more about her and now he's putting more in there. He's found out that she is this person about whom he's heard. Now, in a sense, he's filling out the form. The form is lovely but he's filling out the form with character, with the depths that are in this woman. Now there is even more that he has discovered about her that makes her even more attractive to him. Not just with his eyes now with his understanding. This is the woman about whom people are speaking. The woman who stuck by Naomi. The woman who has turned away from the gods of her fathers. The woman who has left her home and what is familiar to her to come and to follow the God of Israel and to mix with God's people, people she did not know. Here she

is isolated and alone, a foreigner in the midst of strangers and she's put herself there by her own choice, as it were. She has chosen to follow the way of Israel and to stick by Naomi.

As you go over the story, you can see Boaz is getting more and more impressed with this girl that he's speaking to. "You're the one and you're the one who has done this and you are the one that everybody is talking about. You love Naomi so much that you are willing," he says, "to leave father and mother to serve her in a strange land." He just looks at this girl that he has initially found attractive and he finds that not only is she attractive externally, she is attractive internally. She has character and his attraction is deepening even as he speaks to her. And it is the most amazing thing, by the way, that a Moabitess should find a welcome in Israel because by nature they are excluded. I mean, for goodness sake, even among the people of God, even among the people of Israel, the problem was of access to God, access into God's presence. The Psalmist put it like this in Psalm 24, "Who may stand in God's holy place? Who can be in the tent with God? Who can be in the tabernacle with God? Who can be in the temple with God? Who can be in the presence with God? Only those whose hands and hearts are pure and who don't worship idols." Who measures up to that? Whose hands are totally pure? Whose heart is totally pure? Who can get into the presence of God? Who can judge whether our actions are acceptable or not?

The big question was: how could someone like her come into the presence of a holy God? Because God's law, you see, kept a Moabite I think to the eighth generation, you couldn't become part of the people of God. The law excluded her. The law excluded her from the tabernacle. The law excluded her from the public worship of God. The law kept her out, kept her away, kept her at arm's length. So what possible hope can there be for Ruth, the Moabitess? And what is remarkable about this story is that the very law that excludes her welcomes her. The law said the Moabites are under the curse. The law said that curse cannot be undone for so many generations. Somebody raised this with me during the week. I haven't answered them yet. I said, "Wait until Sunday and see." I don't like to spoil my own thing.

Here's the answer: the law of God made provision for someone like her and she went straight for it. She went straight for it. She was listening to what she heard of the law of God. The law of God said there was provision in the gleaning of the harvest for the stranger and the sojourner and the foreigner and she takes her stand on the word of God, on the law of God. As far as she was from Moab, God found a way in his own law to open a door for her because the Gospel has always from Abraham's day proclaimed a Savior for the world. When God was making that promise to Abraham, it was so that all the families of the earth would be blessed through you. All the families of the earth blessed through you. And God had left in his law that there would be a way for this girl to find a way into the covenant community of God's people.

You can see how she got there. You can see how Boaz speaks in such a way as to understand exactly on what basis God could deal with this girl. In verse 12, he underlines it. It's God as the one who is rewarding Ruth. "The LORD recompense you for what you

have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" Boaz, you see, goes to the heart of Ruth's decision, her choice to come to Israel with Naomi. He sees that deeper than simply the external commitment to her mother-in-law, there has been a deep conversion in her heart. She has come to find refuge under the wings of the Almighty, the God of Israel. It's a great picture, isn't it? It's a picture of God as a great eagle and Ruth is a threatened little eaglet coming to find safety under the wings of the eagle.

Moses sang a song that is recorded in Deuteronomy 32, "Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, the LORD alone guided." It's the idea of eaglet pushed out of the nest, the great eagle coming and catching it up on its shoulders and bearing it on its pinions and saying, "Here is God the Almighty bearing up his people." Saint Augustine says, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God." Psalm 91 says, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.'" Psalm 57, "Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge." Notice that. "Be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge." Why does Boaz show grace to Ruth? Because Ruth has come to Yahweh, to the Lord, to find refuge in him.

Now, back to Ruth's question in verse 10, "Why have I found favor?" It's not because of anything she's done but because God is pleased to show grace. That's the good news of the Gospel. He welcomes the foreigner. The great good news of the Gospel that's revealed in the New Testament is that to people who were exiles and strangers, the goyim, the nations, the outcasts who have no right to Israel, no natural place in terms of the promises of God, that for us who are the goyim, there is in the grace of God an adoption into the family, into the Israel of God. Boaz is a man full of God, full of the Gospel and full of grace.

Because she is humbled, you notice she's humbled by his words? Then Boaz kind of goes overboard here. He says, "I want you to stay and I want you to take breaks. I want you to take regular breaks to make sure you get enough to drink. The boys there, they're going to be drawing water. The water will be available. You can draw water anytime you like. I want you in particular," by the way, he's not being completely disinterested at this point. "I want you to follow my young women around. Stay away from the boys, please." I think Boaz was bit older, you see. He was a bit afraid of these young guys. He was afraid of what they might do to her. Yes, I think that's partly it, although we're told he told them, "You touch the girl, I smash your face," that kind of thing. He had warned them about that but I think it's more than that. He's afraid, you see, she's younger, she might go for the younger guys. But he's already fallen. He's been hooked and so he says, "Go around with the young women and be sure to take regular breaks. Get enough water. The water's there, please use it, and when we're having breaks for food, don't go off on your own. You be part of the party here. You be part of the party."

So she is. She's part of the party and not only that, not only does she get to eat with all the other workers but did you notice that little bit in the story where he even shares some of his own personal little picnic with her, the seeds that he had which were a delicacy apparently in those days. Healthy, a bit healthy sounding to me but there you go. They were a delicacy then and they had been especially prepared and he shares his roasted kernels of grain with her. In fact, she had so much to eat that she was totally full and had some left over. In fact, that's one of the themes of the story: more and more and more. So she's given permission to reap. She has protection. She has a generous provision of food and water to go with it. She has been given privileged reaping facilities. He says to the guys, "Listen, don't go too near the edge. Make sure that you leave bits that she can work. Just kind of go out of your way to make sure that there is plenty left over for her. You look out for her and you'll be fine, you'll get paid at the end of the week."

He's going overboard now. He is showing excessive generosity towards her because he has fallen for her, yes. Because he's in love with her, yes. That human love, you see, is a demonstration of the love of God. He couldn't help himself, falling in love but he's a man informed also by the word of God and he wants to show generosity to the stranger as well as this person that he is beginning to be interested in. Of course, it's different with God because God chooses to love us. I'm afraid God doesn't fall in love with you because there is nothing within you and I that would get God to fall in love with us but he chooses to love us and he chooses freely to demonstrate his love towards us in so many ways in so many acts of kindness every day of our lives and every moment of our lives. And in Ruth's experience, this love of Boaz which is a very normal human love becomes the instrument that God uses to demonstrate his love towards her. Isn't it amazing that God uses other people to demonstrate his love towards this girl.

So she works until sundown and we didn't read this but I thought it might be too much for us to take in, she gleaned the field until evening. She beat out what she's gleaned. It was about an ephah of barley. And she went home struggling with 30 pounds weight of grain on her back. Much more than she needed. And when she got back, Naomi looked at this and she looked at the grain and she looked at Ruth and she looked at the grain and she looked at Ruth and she said, "Boy, you were lucky today! That's amazing! Who's field were you in that allowed you to get all this stuff?" "Oh well," she said, "I just happened to go to the field of Boaz." "Boaz," Naomi says. You read what Naomi says, she is doing what any parent, she is fast-tracking this. She has almost got them married. They are at the altar already. She's trying to contain her excitement. She can't hold it in. "Boaz, oh, he's one of our close relatives." By the way, that's a far more potent, powerful figure. This is the kinsman redeemer, the relative who can redeem you. He's in a position. "This man is not only interested in you, this man is not only falling for you hook, line and sinker, this man is in a position to do something for you and for us. You stay close to this guy."

It's a very human story. It really is a very human story, that's why I've taken pains to point that out to you because your humanity was made in the image of God, remember that. We were made in the image of God male and female. There is that in the interaction between men, women, male and female which is a sign and a seal of God himself. It's part of the characteristic. We were made different and we were made to interact with each

other as part of the image and likeness of God. There is nothing about that to be ashamed of. Nothing to be afraid of. And everything to be grateful for. And in this developing love story, we see something of the heart of God in which God provides for this woman, the ideal Israelite, the proper man. Boaz, who as we shall see, becomes a type of the Lord Jesus, his greater descendant. Jesus, who is the true vine, the true Israel, who acts in mercy and love towards the alien and the stranger.

In a moment we're going to sing, it's a very old hymn, a 19th century hymn, to a 20th century church and this old hymn I think states it so well,

"Before the throne of God above,
I have a strong, a perfect plea,
A great High Priest whose name is love,
Who ever lives and pleads for me."

Ruth was finding in Boaz the kind of champion, the kind of advocate, the kind of defender, the kind of provider that she needs and which you and I find in the Lord Jesus.

Let's pray.

Father, we pray that in your great mercy and in all the complexities of our human experience, that you would be pleased to take your word and write it on our hearts. Help us to be wise in the way we bring up our children. Help us to be appreciative of all the differences that exist between us as men and women. Help us to see that that which you have built into us is our reflection of your own image. Help us above all to see in Christ the great champion that we need, our great High Priest. And thank you that you have made provision of him for our eternal well-being and our eternal joy and our eternal welfare and the eternal inheritance that is ours in him. We pray in Jesus' strong name. Amen.