
Faithfulness – Of Grain and Good

Ruth 2²

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Introduction

Its Setting

Sadness and hardness were the dominant themes of Naomi's life, of chapter one. There is famine and moving and a husband's death. There is the marriage of her sons to women of Moab. Then sorrow upon sorrow as her sons also die. God's hand was heavy upon her. While Ruth has avowed her love for Naomi and her loyalty to God, Naomi sinks deeper into her misery. Their return to Bethlehem is greeted with joy, yet all Naomi can do is express her own bitterness over the hard chastening of God. She who went away full (of husband and sons and hope) has come home empty. But she has come home just in time for harvest.

Its Structure

Here is a great example of a visual and verbal structure in Hebrew writing.

- a. – Morning – Ruth's Request to Naomi to go gleaning
 - b. – Morning Hours – Recognition by Boaz
 - c. – Noon – Reciprocal Kindness and Mercy
 - b. – Afternoon Hours – Respect by Boaz
- a. – Evening – Ruth's Report to Naomi about the gleaning

In this episode, the private and public righteousness of Ruth and Boaz is exhibited. We know that these two people are committed to God and His Law in their lives. But there is more than just a bare obedience to God's commands, but an exhibition of how deeply the character of God has been worked by grace into their own hearts.

Now the hard and bitter providences will begin to turn in such an unexpected and exhilarating way that even Naomi will see.

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Character

(v.1-7)

Woven through the first portion of this episode is an unveiling of character. We are introduced to Boaz while the character and conduct of Ruth is exhibited. And we are shown, albeit in a subdued way, the character and sovereign hand of God. So the bleakness of the bitter providences are now being turned by an emerging brightness of hopeful provisions.

¹ Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ² And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." ³ So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech. ⁴ And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered, "The LORD bless you." ⁵ Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" ⁶ And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab." ⁷ She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.' So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest."

Of their Persons

Clearly, we are being introduced to Boaz and to Ruth, particularly to the kind of people they are.

Here we find that Boaz is related to Naomi's husband. He is a man of wealth who owns a large farm with many laborers. He is a man who is respected and obeyed by those in his employ. Boaz' first words in the text are a greeting that conveys God's blessing on his field hands. That they respond to him in kind shows us that this is the settled habit of his life arising from a deep Godwardness. The author then is portraying a man of place, position, prosperity who is a relative of Naomi and deeply righteous in God's sight.

Further, we are treated to more insight as to what Ruth is like. We find her to be respectful and submission to Naomi, requesting permission to go and glean. She is a humble and meek woman as she inquires about gleaning; knowing that she does not have the same rights as the Israelites and is cast upon the generosity and kindness of the owner. She is diligent and hard working. The overseers had observed her to have worked hard all morning, only taking water break. Either this sort of earnest diligence was unusual in gleaners or was unexpected from foreigners.

Of God's Providences

Look at verse 3 –Ruth sets out, links up with the gleaners and just happens to end up in Boaz' field. Now certainly the Bible is not making an argument for chance here. Nor are we to try to read into this some deviousness or decision on Ruth's part. With a deft feel for irony, the author dangles before us the prospect of the sure and wise providence of God. While Ruth in her own mind is picking a field to glean in, God is moving in His mysterious power to bring her to the field of His purpose and provision.

Care

(v.8-16)

Now Ruth and Boaz are brought face to face. Boaz takes the initiative to declare himself to her. In all that Boaz does here, we have a faithful, godly Jew who not only knows the law, but whose generosity and grace extends himself on behalf of others *even to the point of personal loss*. He addresses her as “my daughter” pointing to the age difference between them. There is a gentle maturity to his words to her and his way with her. But, through this all we also get a sense that his attention on her arises from a growing attachment to her. But it is oh so subtle.

⁸ Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. ⁹ Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn.” ¹⁰ Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?” ¹¹ But Boaz answered her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. ¹² The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!” ¹³ Then she said, “I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants.”

¹⁴ And at mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine.” So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. ¹⁵ When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. ¹⁶ And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.”

In his Protection

(v.8-9)

Boaz first concern for Ruth is for her personal safety and physical sustenance. He wants her to stay in his field, near the women reapers. He has exerted his authority and placed her under his protection. So while this gentle pastoral scene of a harvest rich and full, there lurks a menace, a danger, these young men who would see Ruth as fair game. Boaz may anticipate this both because he knows them well and is aware of Ruth as a Moabite, outside the normal protections of Jewish Law.

He also assures her that she is to freely drink of the water that was drawn for reapers, even though she is but a gleaner. There is no mistaking here that his initiative is singling her out for special attention. Come to my field, where you will be safe from harm and thirst. As one writer comments, “All of Boaz’s wealth and godliness begin to turn for Ruth’s welfare.” (Piper, *Under the Wings of God*, 7/8/84 AM, Bethlehem)

In their Perspectives

(v.10-13)

Ruth’s response is stunning. She is deeply humbled and bows before Boaz in gratitude. Her question expresses her amazement at Boaz’ care and concern. She sees herself as unworthy and undeserving. Her godly humility expresses gratitude at the grace and gener-

osity of others. Why his favor on her, a foreigner? She does not resent her status, but accepts it. She comes, not asserting her rights and becoming resentful when they are not met – she acknowledges her destitute and dependent helplessness. Understanding this about herself, she can genuinely be both surprised and grateful at the unexpected and unsought kindness.

I cannot help but comment here that our own pursuit of self-esteem and assertion of personal rights serves to undermine our amazement and genuine gratitude at the unexpected and undeserved grace and kindness of God. I sense among people today a curling of the lip in self-pride and self-congratulation *even over our salvation*. It is as though there were something in us, foreigners from a distant land of sin, that we should deserve the grace and kindness of our King. Where are those who are truly humbled by the stunning kindness of God?

Boaz declares that he knows two important things about Ruth. He knows of her commitment to Naomi and all she has done for her. She has left her home and family and comfort for Naomi's sake. And he knows of her casting herself upon God. She has hidden herself in the sheltering wing of Yahweh. Listen to how David develops this thought years later in Psalm 36:7-9.

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
The children of mankind take refuge
in the shadow of your wings.
They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light do we see light. [ESV]

Here is both refuge and refreshment. Here is the protection and provision by God. Here is the soul's feasting in the abundance of God and drinking in the flowing river of God's delights. While the situation of her life may be hard, there is refuge and refreshment, defense and delights in God whose wing is over her, whose house is full and whose delights flow like a torrent.

Boaz sees himself as the instrument by which God repays and rewards Ruth. God's blessing, His protection and provision are upon those who, in taking refuge in God give themselves to God's people. Ruth's goodness to Naomi does not put God in debt to her, as though He owed her. Rather, God delights to respond with rich reward to those who see Him as worthy of their trust, as being their refuge. Because she took refuge in God, she could then commit herself to Naomi and leave the security and safety of her home and family. And God delighted to stretch His sheltering wing over her and place Boaz in her life as the bringer and bearer of God's blessing.

In his Provision

(v.14-16)

But it is not enough that Boaz shield her, he will also supply and sustain her. He invites her to join him at lunch, to sit with him and to share in his bounty. She is to come and dip her morsel in his wine. He sits among his reapers with her near enough to pass food to her. And he gives to her roasted grain until she is fully satisfied and has some left over.

Now, God had commanded that the corners of the field be left for gleaning and that reapers should pass over a field twice. What was left in the inefficiency of harvest supplied the wants of the needy. Boaz goes way beyond this. His generosity is still not yet exhausted. He tells the young men among the reapers, to pull out sheaves and leave them for her. The Law forbade Boaz's reapers from returning to collect those "forgotten" sheaves. As a gleaner, Ruth was not allowed to pick the grain that was still standing. She could only pick up what the reapers left. And they are being instructed not to just leave bits and pieces, but rather to strew her path with the riches of his bounty.

Change

¹⁷ So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. ¹⁸ And she took it up and went into the city. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied. ¹⁹ And her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, "The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz." ²⁰ And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers."

What a picture of fullness this is. She gleaned faithfully and diligently until the evening. Then she sits down to process what she has gathered. It turns out to be over ½ a bushel after it has been pounded out.

In their Providences

(v.17-19)

Here is a great turning point in their providences. While Naomi has gone out full and returned home empty. Ruth has gone out in the morning empty and returned in the evening, full. She not only has all that she has gleaned, but she has the left-overs of the roasted grain from lunch. In the midst of great want has come great goodness.

And Naomi recognizes the change in their providence. She inquires as to where and on whose land has she been gleaning? All that she has brought home cannot possibly have come even through the most diligent of mere gleaning. She knows full well that someone has intervened and provided in a special way. Out of the bleakness of her hardship there now comes a dawning brightness of hope and help. She begins to see their circumstances in a new light.

In their Perception

(v.20-23)

Our author records three important statements by Naomi.

²⁰ And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers." ²¹ And Ruth the Moabite said, "Besides, he said to me, 'You shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.'" ²² And Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted." ²³ So she kept close to the young women of

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

SHE ACKNOWLEDGES THE KINDNESS OF GOD AS THE SOURCE OF THEIR BLESSING. Once again this word “kindness” or *hes’ed* is the key. The living and the dead are not forsaken because of the kindness of God. There is a realization that the line and clan of Elimelech may live on through Ruth and the kinsman-redeemer. So Naomi is awakened and out of the death and darkness of her bitterness she rises to life and light and hope. She is not forsaken by God – His chastening hand and bitter providences have brought them here, where He has greeted them with unexpected kindness and bountiful provisions.

SHE IDENTIFIES BOAZ AS A POTENTIAL KINSMAN-REDEEMER FOR RUTH. Now a kinsman-redeemer in the Old Testament was God’s provision for the continuation of a family line in a clan. The *go’el*, usually translated “redeemer” or “next of kin,” is one legally responsible for protecting the interests of the family. His main obligation is to buy land that must be sold or buy back land that has already been sold, so as not to let property be alienated from its original line of ownership (cf. Leviticus 25:25; Jeremiah 32:7-10). The book of Ruth extends his duties to providing an heir for a male relative who has died childless. Usually this duty fell to a brother (Deuteronomy 25:5–10), but in the case of Ruth who had no brothers-in-law, a more distant relative was expected to marry her, as Naomi would later reveal in chapter 3. [From, New Bible Commentary and Harper’s Bible Commentary] While this seems like an exceedingly strange thing in our ears, this was God’s principle and provision for the Hebrew people under the Law. And Boaz is a kinsman-redeemer for Ruth.

SHE AFFIRMS THE WISDOM OF BOAZ’S PROVISION AND PROTECTION. Ruth tells her that Boaz wants her at his fields near his women where his young men have been charged not to molest her. Naomi encourages her to go back to his fields.

Ruth then returns and gleans in the fields of Boaz through the barley harvest during March and April and the wheat harvest during June and July. This sentence then covers almost five months, and during that time, Naomi and Ruth live together.

What can God do for those who come home just at harvest? He can bring them by His powerful providence to fields of Boaz. There, Boaz, the lord of the harvest and kinsman-redeemer, the bringer of blessing, with Ruth as his partner and worker, becomes the instrument of filling Naomi’s emptiness.

And who knows what God can do when wedding feasts are near!

Reflect and Respond

This is a story about God.

This is a story about the God who is sovereign over all, whose providences are working to serve the pleasures of His will and purposes of His glory.

This is a story about the God who is full of kindness and mercy, whose love takes the initiative to save His people and to shape them by His character.

This is a story about the God who is full of care and concern, whose righteousness protects and provides those who find favor with God.

This is a story about the God who gives hope to the bitter, whose bitter providences are the soil in which anticipation may attach itself to the evidences of His goodness.

This is a story about the God who delights in His people, whose will is working towards the marriage of His Son.

