

Title:        **“HANDFULS OF PURPOSE”**

Text:        Ruth 2:15-16

Reading:    *Psalm 107:1-43*

Subject:        *The Typical Significance  
Of The Beginning of Barley Harvest*

Introduction:

Some people God allows to run freely and unrestrained, until they run headlong into hell. Others, those who are the chosen objects of his mercy, love, and grace, he hedges up and graciously forces into the arms of Christ. I want to preach to you tonight from the Book of Ruth about a chosen Moabite woman whom the Lord God hedged up. We will begin in the first chapter.

(Ruth 1:1-6) “Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. (2) And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. (3) And Elimelech Naomi’s husband died;

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Readings:    *Ruth 1:1-2:1-17*

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and she was left, and her two sons. (4) And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one *was* Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. (5) And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband. (6) Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread.”

(Ruth 1:19-22) “So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, *Is this Naomi?* (20) And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. (21) I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why *then* call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? (22) So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.”

Oh, how merciful, how gracious, how wise, how good our God is to his people! How gracious he has been to our souls, my brothers and sisters in Christ, in hedging

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up our way, bringing into our lives disappointments, pains, afflictions and sorrows, by which he has sweetly and irresistibly forced us to return to him, seeking mercy and grace in Christ. How graciously he continues, by every providence, to incline our hearts to return to the him, our Savior and our God! Oh, how gracious it is of him to visit his people, again and again, with spiritual sustenance, when by sin and disobedience we call forth a famine upon our souls!

Let us hasten back to our Father’s house, like Naomi and Ruth hurried back to Bethlehem-Judah, convinced that there is bread enough and to spare in his house for our souls, knowing that this world, like Moab, affords no resting place for our souls.

- Let nothing dissuade us.
- Let no fear keep us away from our Savior.
- To whom shall we go but to Christ, the Bread of Life, who alone has the words of eternal life?

He is our Bethlehem, our House of Bread. In him alone is life; and in him alone is bread for our souls to live upon forever!

Like Ruth, let it be our determined resolution, to go where he goes, and to know nothing among men but him. Be wise, O my soul, and forget your own people, and your father’s house. In life and in death, desire none in comparison to Christ! — *“Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the*

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*strength of my heart, and my portion forever”* (Psalm 73:25-26).

In chapter 2 we are introduced to Boaz, Ruth’s kinsman-redeemer. Everything in Ruth’s life hinged upon that man who had the right and the might to redeem her. And everything in our lives hinges upon Christ, our great Boaz, our Kinsman-Redeemer, who has the right and the might to redeem our poor souls.

(Ruth 2:1-5) “And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband’s, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name *was* Boaz. (2) And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after *him* in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter. (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, who *was* of the kindred of Elimelech. (4) And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The LORD *be* with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee. (5) Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel *is* this?”

(Ruth 2:15-16) “And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not: (16) And let fall also *some* of the

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handfuls of purpose for her, and leave *them*, that she may glean *them*, and rebuke her not.”

Boaz commanded his young men, saying, “*Let fall also some handfuls of purpose for her.*” That is what I am going to preach about tonight — **“HANDFULS OF PURPOSE.”**

In the Old Testament, under the Mosaic law, gleaning was one of the rights of the people. The farmer was forbidden of God to reap the corners of his fields. If he, by some over-sight, mistakenly left a bundle of wheat in his field, he was not allowed to go back and pick it up. It was to be left for the widows, the fatherless, and the poor in the land. The same thing was true of their orchards and vineyards.

In this second chapter of Ruth, we see this law of gleaning illustrated. The things recorded here are written for our learning and for our admonition. Indeed, all that is written in the Book of Ruth is intended by God the Holy Spirit to show us the goodness, grace, and glory of Christ, our Kinsman Redeemer. Everything in the history of this chosen Moabitess is typical and allegorical, portraying Gospel truths for our souls’ comfort and edification in the knowledge of Christ.

- *Ruth* represents God’s elect, all who are saved by the grace of God.

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- **Boaz** represents the Lord Jesus **Christ, our Kinsman Redeemer**. — He is the **owner of all** things. All the fields of this world belong to him. — He is the **Master of all** things. As Boaz was master in his house, so Christ is **Master in his house**, the Church. Everything is subject to him. And he is the **Master of the universe**. We obey him willingly; but all things obey him absolutely (John 17:2).
- The **field** in which Ruth gleaned represents **the Word of God**.
- The **young men**, the reapers, represent **those who preach the gospel** of Christ.

**Proposition:** As Boaz commanded his young men to let fall some handfuls of purpose for Ruth, even so, the Lord Jesus Christ commands his servants, those who preach the gospel, to let fall some handfuls of purpose for chosen sinners.

**SEEKING SINNERS**

Seeking sinners are like gleaners in a field. The old writers and preachers used to talk about sinners, sensible sinners, seeking sinners, and saved sinners. I do not care much for those distinctions, as a general rule. Sinners are sinners. But the distinctions do serve a useful purpose.

- **A sinner** is a person under the wrath of God, lost and ruined in his sin, but utterly unaware of his sinful condition (Rom. 5:12).

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- **A sensible sinner** is a sinner awakened to know his lost condition, a sinner under conviction, a sinner who knows that he is lost and needs Christ — a sinner convicted of sin who shall soon be convicted of righteousness and of judgment.

“When Adam by transgression fell,  
And conscious, fled his Maker’s face,  
Linked in clandestine league with hell,  
He ruined all his future race.  
The seeds of evil once brought in,  
Increased and filled the world with sin.

But lo! The Second Adam came,  
The serpent’s subtle head to bruise;  
He cancels his malicious claim,  
And disappoints his devilish views;  
Ransoms poor sinners with His blood,  
And brings the sinner back to God.

[To understand these things aright,  
This grand distinction should be known:  
Though all are sinners in God’s sight,  
There are but few so in their own.  
To such as these our Lord was sent;  
They’re only sinners who repent.]

[What comfort can a Savior bring  
To those who never felt their woe?  
A sinner is a sacred thing;

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The Holy Ghost hath made him so.  
New life from Him we must receive,  
Before for sin we rightly grieve.]

This faithful saying let us own,  
Well worthy ‘tis to be believed,  
That Christ into the world came down,  
That sinners might by Him be saved.  
Sinners are high in His esteem,  
And sinners highly value Him.”

*Joseph Hart*

- **A seeking sinner** is one who knows he needs Christ and is seeking him.

He feels his need of Christ, seeks him earnestly in his Word, in his house, by prayer and supplication, and will find him (Jer. 29:11-14).

**(Jeremiah 29:11-14)** “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. (12) Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. (13) And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. (14) And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you



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again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.”

Like the four lepers of Elisha’s day, they have resolved not to perish if life can be had (2 Kings 7:3-4). Like the Syrophenician woman, such needy souls will not cease seeking the Lord God in Christ and the mercy they need from him until they have found him and obtained mercy (Mark 7:24-30). — Clearly, Ruth represents such sinners.

- **A saved sinner** is one who has come to Christ, one who trusts Christ as Lord and Savior, one who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. A saved sinner is one who has been convinced of his sin, of Christ’s righteousness, and of judgment finished by the sacrifice of his Redeemer.

When Ruth came into Boaz’s field, she came as a gleaner seeking bread (vv. 2-3). As such, she is a picture of a sinner seeking the Lord in the house of bread.

**She was a Moabite.** — She was the cursed offspring of a cursed race; and she knew it. She had no rights, except the rights of a stranger to glean in the fields. That is exactly our condition by nature. We are the cursed offspring of a cursed race (Rom. 5:12; Eph. 2:1-4). We have no rights, but the right to pick up what God has left for sinners, the right to glean in his field.

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**Ruth had been reduced to a very low and poor condition** (2:10).

(Ruth 2:10) “Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I *am* a stranger?”

She was once very wealthy, married to Mahlon, daughter-in-law to Elimelech. Like her, all Adam’s sons and daughters were once very wealthy. “*God created man upright!*” Before the fall, our father Adam possessed all God’s creation and ruled over it. God gave man everything, even a righteous nature. But, like Ruth, fallen man is reduced to abject poverty (Eph. 2:11-12).

- She was poor.
- She was hungry.
- She was in desperate need of help.
- She humbly took her place among the poor.

**(Ephesians 2:11-13)** “Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; (12) That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: (13) But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.”

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**Though she was a poor Moabitess, Ruth had resolved to seek and to follow the Lord God of Israel** (1:16-17).

(Ruth 1:16-17) “And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, *or* to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people *shall be* my people, and thy God my God: (17) Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, *if ought* but death part thee and me.”

Blessed is that sinner who has been taught by the grace of God something of the abject poverty of his soul before God. Poor, hungry, and in desperate need of help, he will humbly take his place in the dust before the throne of grace, seeking mercy (Heb. 4:16).

“I can but perish if I go,  
I am resolved to try;  
For if I stay away I know  
I must forever die!

Perhaps He will admit my plea,  
Perhaps will hear my prayer;  
But if I perish, I will pray  
And perish only there!”

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**Notice also that Ruth had a very high opinion of Boaz’s handmaids** (2:13).

(Ruth 2:13) “Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens.”

She knew she was not like his handmaidens, but she wanted to be. And those who seek Christ have a very high opinion of God’s people. They know they are not like the children of God, but they want to be. They want forgiveness, righteousness, and acceptance with God. They want to be found in Christ, accepted, at peace with God, possessing eternal life.

**GOSPEL PREACHERS**

Boaz was the one who was reaping his fields; and it is Christ himself who reaps his fields. Soon he shall come to gather his own unto himself in glory (Rev. 14:14-19). But he is reaping his fields today, and throughout the ages of time. And, like Boaz, he employs chosen servants by whom he reaps. Gospel preachers are his reapers. Our Master uses his servants as reapers. Preachers are reapers in two ways.

1. **They reap the wheat and bind the tares of this world** (Matt. 13:30; 2 Cor. 2:14-17). The preaching of the

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gospel is God’s ordained instrument both for salvation and condemnation.

(Matthew 13:30) “Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.”

(2 Corinthians 2:14-17) “Now thanks *be* unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. (15) For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: (16) To the one *we are* the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who *is* sufficient for these things? (17) For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.”

2. They gather the wheat, the bread of God’s Word, prepare it for his people, and feed them with knowledge and understanding (Jer. 3:15).

Every gospel preacher is responsible to feed the Lord’s sheep. Those men who are called of God to do this great work are uniquely gifted and qualified by God for the work to which they are called (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9).

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(1 Timothy 3:1-7) “This *is* a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. (2) A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; (3) Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; (4) One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (5) (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) (6) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. (7) Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

(Titus 1:5-9) “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: (6) If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. (7) For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; (8) But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; (9) Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.”

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In keeping with the story before us, the preaching of the gospel is the scattering of handfuls of purpose, the purposeful distribution of the bread gathered from the Word of God.

Notice that Boaz gave his young men four strict commandments regarding Ruth. I take these to be four strict commandments from Christ to every man who preaches the gospel.

First, he says, “Let her glean, even among the sheaves.” — I take that to mean that Gospel preachers are not appointed by God to guard and protect the Word of God, giving it out in bits and pieces, as they see fit. Everything in the Book of God is profitable to his elect (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

(2 Timothy 3:16-17) “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: (17) That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

Let needy sinners glean anything they want “*even among the sheaves.*”

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Second, Boaz said, “**Reproach her not,**” or “shame her not.” — How sad that any preacher should need to be told that, but many do. It is not the business of gospel preachers to chastise the Lord’s children, but to comfort them (Isa. 40:1-2). As the man of God proclaims the gospel of God, when it is applied by the Spirit of God, it convicts, corrects, chastens, and comforts the people of God.

**When we set up standards** and tell sinners they must meet those standards or forever perish, we are guilty of reproaching and shaming them, **setting up barriers between them and Christ.** This must not be done! There are no pre-requisites to faith in Christ!

- Not Experience!
- Not Doctrine!
- Not Emotions or Feelings!
- Not Repentance!
- Not Knowledge!

**The issue is “whether ye be in the faith,” — “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”** not your evidences of grace. The fact is, a spark of faith may exist (and often does) in an ocean of unbelief.

(Isaiah 40:1-2) “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. (2) Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her



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sins.”

Third, Boaz said, **“And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her!”** — I take that to mean that gospel preaching is to be plain and simple. **“Handfuls of purpose”** are purposefully left for specific people, with specific needs. They are left, not by the preacher’s whims, but by the Spirit’s direction. **True preaching is personal, purposeful, and passionate.** God can make stones preach, but he uses men to preach to men. Only men feel what men feel. We are to scatter the Bread of Life with purpose, but by the handfuls!

- **Handfuls of Promises!** — Promises for Saints! — Promises for Sinners!
- **Handfuls of Doctrine!** — Sovereign Election! — Effectual Redemption! — Free Justification! — Certain Perseverance!
- **Handfuls of Christ!** — His Person! — His Work
- **Handfuls of Grace** (Eph. 1:3-14, 15-23; 2:1-10)

**ILLUSTRATIONS**

- The Farmer who walked 50 miles to hear **Thomas Manton** — “There was nothing in it for me.”

**Spurgeon once said**, “In our ministry there should always be a corner cupboard for the tired and timid saints. I think there should never be a sermon without a Benjamin’s mess for the children. There should be

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strong meat for the men, but there should always be milk for the babes. Ready to adapt our ministry to all sorts of people, if we forget any we should never forget these. My brother, wouldest thou minister to these gleaners? Let me remind thee, first, that our ministry must be plain, for these timid souls cannot feed on hard words. **Dr. Manton** once preached in St. Paul’s Cathedral, and a great crowd went to listen to him. A poor man who had walked fifty miles to hear the good doctor, afterwards plucked him by the sleeve and said — ‘There was nothing for me this morning.’ The doctor had preached a very learned sermon, full of Greek and Latin quotations which the poor countryman could not understand; but the doctor had not expected him, and there was nothing for him. I think there should always be in our ministry some things for poor Ruth; so plain and so simple that the wiseacres will turn up their noses and say, ‘What platitudes!’ Never mind, if Ruth gets a handful of corn, our Master at the last shall know who did his errand best, and served him with a perfect heart.”

- **The Preacher who was Suddenly struck Blind**

Then Boaz repeated his first command using stronger word — **“Rebuke her not.”** — God’s people do not belong to their pastors, teachers, elders, or visiting evangelists. They belong to God. They do not belong to me, but to him. It is not my place or yours to chastise his children. Yes, sometimes the faithful pastors and

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teachers must reprove and rebuke; but they must do it with all longsuffering and patience.

**Illustration:** “*You’d better be careful how you treat my children.*” — **Don’t pull out the whip!**

Boaz’s reapers understood that they were responsible to care for, protect, and provide handfuls of purpose for Ruth. They understood that she was distinctly the object of his love; and they treated her accordingly. — “*So she gleaned*” (v. 17).

**OTHER HANDFULS**

All that we have seen in this chapter took place after Ruth came to Boaz’s field. **But there were other “handfuls of purpose” that preceded these, “handfuls of purpose” that were altogether unknown to Ruth, “handfuls of purpose” which had brought her into Boaz’s fields and at last into his arms. I am thinking now about God’s wise, adorable, and good providence, by which he secretly hedges up the way of chosen sinners and brings them to Christ.** I cannot say much about this, because time will not permit. But I cannot omit it, because it is so delightful.

Ruth could never have known Boaz, she could never have been numbered among God’s chosen people, had not many other things taken place, by the arrangement of God’s good providence. Things that, to carnal reason,

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would have most certainly excluded her from any hope of being named among the redeemed of the Lord.

- Lot’s Incest
- God’s Curse upon Moab
- Elimelech’s Sin
- The Loss of all in Moab
- Her Widowhood
- Her Faithful Mother-in-law

Just as Boaz took special notice of Ruth before she saw him, the Lord Jesus Christ took special notice of chosen sinners before the world began. As Boaz commanded his young men not to touch Ruth, so Christ has command all things to touch not his chosen. God’s elect are under his special protection. As Boaz provided handfuls on purpose, specifically for Ruth, so the Lord Jesus rules and commands all things specifically for his chosen (John 17:2; Hos. 2:18; Rom. 8:28).

(John 17:2) “As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.”

(Hosea 2:18) “And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and *with* the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely.”

(Romans 8:28) “And we know that all things work

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together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.”

How I thank God for those “*handfuls of purpose*” by which he hedges up our way and sweetly forces us into the arms of Christ Jesus the Lord, our mighty Boaz, our Kinsman-Redeemer! Don’t you?

O Spirit of God, ever grant us grace to glean in the fields of Christ, in the fields of Holy Scripture and in the fields of divine providence, bread for our souls from “*the handfuls of purpose*” our God so graciously drops in our path. Truly...

“God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds you so much dread  
Are big with mercy and will break  
With blessings on your head.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan His works in vain;  
God is His own interpreter.

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And He will make it plain.”

Amen.