

Ruth 2

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[0 : 00] And turn back to Ruth chapter 2. Ruth chapter 2. It's on page 222. Ruth chapter 2. Emma and I have just signed up for another free trial month on Amazon Prime.

! So it was Netflix. We did the month on that, had to cancel it, and now we're on Amazon Prime. But it means that there's now the inevitable argument about which film to actually watch if we've got time. Now can I say, Emma is much more accommodating than me.

The decision is usually between Bruce Willis action films or Pride and Prejudice romance. I'm sure you can guess which of us want either of those.

So if Ruth, the book of Ruth, was a film on Netflix or Amazon Prime, it probably would be one of the films that I, as a typical bloke, would ordinarily miss out on. And if Ruth chapter 2 was a film, it would probably be more like Romeo and Juliet, wouldn't it, than Rambo.

Because it is a story of an unlikely romance. An unlikely romance between a man and a woman who should never have been allowed to be together in the first place.

[1 : 20] It's a kind of far-from-the-madding-crowd sort of story. It's an unlikely romance. And the writer that Ruth paints for us is a picture of a rural scene in the harvest fields of Boaz, where the seeds of an unlikely courtship begin to blossom, don't they? They are planted.

Ruth meets the man who will redeem her situation. Now the setting in Ruth 2 is full of activity, isn't it? It's full of reaping and production and agriculture and farming.

Don't we get the contrast there with what we saw Naomi and Ruth's life was like in chapter 1, if you were here last week? Where leaving the Lord to go to Moab brought bitterness, death and emptiness.

But at the end of chapter 1 they return to Bethlehem in Judah, they return to the Lord's land, and now we're meant to see the contrast. They arrive at the beginning of the barley harvest, the end of chapter 1.

And the fields are white, ready to be harvested, full of crops. We go from the emptiness of chapter 1 to fullness, from famine to fields of plenty, from sadness to satisfaction.

[2 : 52] And the key reason that the writer gives us for that, I think is in verse 11 and 12 if you look there. Boaz answered Ruth, So it's important to see the truth.

See, isn't it, that the change of scene, from chapter 1 to chapter 2, this change of life for Ruth has come through a changed perspective on God.

To leave one life behind and come to God's people and his place. That's what repentance looks like, isn't it? Instead of running from God, Ruth has turned around and starts to come towards God, to take refuge under his wings in his land.

It's a lovely image that, isn't it? The image of little chicks, little birds, sheltering from the hot deadly sun in the cooling shadow of a mother's wings.

Ruth has found an oasis in the famine desert as she comes back to God, as she shelters under his wings.

[4 : 29] And under the wings of God, God has purposed a man to bring his blessings and care into her life. Under the wings of God, Ruth meets the Redeemer of God.

Now Ruth, too, is shot through, isn't it, with the impressive figure of this man, Boaz. Who is Christ-like in his provision for her and grace and love for Ruth.

Boaz is the one who brings blessings to bear in her life. He says, It is Boaz, isn't it, who pronounces and provides God's blessings on her.

He is Christ-like. But as we dive into this, I want us to see how unlikely and impossible the meeting of Ruth and Boaz really is.

Every good love story has impossible odds, doesn't it? Romeo and Juliet. Juliet, they come from different warring families.

[5 : 41] Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet both hate each other's guts at the beginning. Beauty and the Beast. Well, one of them's a beauty and one of them's a beast, isn't it? Every great love story has impossible odds.

They always have a hurdle to climb over. Something that would normally keep them apart. So, for Ruth, this isn't a simple story of boy meets girl and the rest of history.

Because, first of all, there is the locked door that keeps Ruth out. The locked door that keeps Ruth out. So, amidst the excitement of watching Ruth and Boaz meet in this book, is the underlying fact of the girl's past, isn't it?

Ruth's skeletons hidden in the closet. There is something about her identity, about her very nature, that means that this union is an illicit relationship.

It could be something that would pass us by on, on first reading, actually. But the writer leaves us in no doubt that something is amiss with Ruth. So, how is she described?

[7 : 02] Look at verse 2. Ruth, the Moabite, said to Naomi, let me go to the field and glean. Verse 6.

The servant who is in charge of the Reapers answered, she is the young Moabite woman. Verse 21. Ruth, the Moabite, said.

As a Moabite woman, Ruth has got baggage in this relationship. Her identity as a Moabite closes the door on her to receive any blessings from God.

She should be kept out from the assembly. Now, if you'd like to, you don't have to, but if you'd like to, turn back with me to Deuteronomy chapter 23.

Deuteronomy chapter 23. It's on page... when I get there. 165. Now, in this part of the Bible, Moses preaches to God's people the laws of the Lord.

[8 : 08] And God's land is to be lived in properly. It is to be a holy land where those who reject God cannot receive his blessings. Now, historically, the people of Moab have been at war with Israel.

So the Lord gives a law about them specifically. Deuteronomy chapter 23, verse 3 to 4. No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord, even to the tenth generation.

None of them may enter the assembly of the Lord forever. Because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way when you came out of Egypt.

And because they hired against you Balaam, the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. The Moabites are a marked people.

Marked for exclusion, not inclusion, into God's people. If you're born a Moabite, you're born into a marked people. So you can take the girl out of Moab, can't you?

[9 : 15] You can take her there, but you cannot take Moab out of the girl. It was down to her very nature that she wasn't permitted to be in the covenant.

She was naturally an outsider. Moab was in her blood. It was what made her tick. She was a Moabite at the core of who she was.

She was part of a people who had warred against the Lord. So God's law kept her from coming to him and meeting him. And so we see, don't we, the barrier for Ruth ever receiving blessing from the Lord.

God's covenant promises were not for her. She was an outsider. The Moabite woman could not just stroll in to God's presence and ask for blessing.

It would be an impossible thing. None of them may enter my assembly forever. What a sentence that is.

[10 : 20] I don't know if I could stomach those words. You are never allowed in, God says. You are never allowed in to my blessings. God's perfect, holy, pure law was the locked door that kept Ruth the Moabite out.

Now if this is sounding a bit harsh, we know, don't we, that God is a God of love. God is a God of love. We all know that. But God doesn't love everything in his land.

He is a God of love, but he doesn't love everything. He doesn't love rape. He doesn't love murder. He doesn't love sex abuse.

He is a God of love, but he doesn't love those things, and we're glad of that, aren't we? He doesn't love liars. He doesn't love cheaters.

He doesn't love impure thoughts. He doesn't love evil speech. Now as we go through that list, it gets quite close to home, doesn't it? As we realise that actually we've all got a bit of Moab in us. [11:31] Let me read to you some verses from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Ephesians chapter 2. We all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Paul says it was in our nature. We had Moab in the passions of our flesh, Moab in the selfish desires of the body, and Moab in the mind.

Like Ruth, we come to God as total outsiders, naturally excluded from his presence and his blessings. Now perhaps you're here tonight and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian.

You're very, very welcome. But I wonder if you feel the reality of that tonight. It just feels like there is a total canyon between you and God.

something huge is in the way, separating you. It feels like a locked door. Even to the tenth generation, God says in Deuteronomy, the Moabites are excluded.

[12:50] Now I think that helps us, doesn't it, with the distinction between feeling guilty and being guilty. Feeling guilty and being guilty. You didn't have to feel guilty to be guilty.

You don't have to be conscious of sin, but it's in our blood. By nature, we are all Moabites. Paul says, we were children of wrath, excluded from God's covenant blessings, children of Moab.

And God's law is uncompromising and exclusive. He is a God of love, but he doesn't love everything. Psalm 24, who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?

Who shall stand in his place? His holy place. Leviticus 18, it's one of my favourite passages, speaks about the land vomiting out the people if they make it unclean with sin.

By nature, I am a Moabite. And by nature, God cannot stomach that. His land would vomit me out.

[14:04] He wants sin out. He wants rid of it to vomit it out. You can take me out of Moab. You can put me in a Christian culture.

But actually, it's much, much harder, isn't it, to take the Moab out of me. And so the door is firmly locked for Ruth to reach God's assembly.

God's perfect law marks her as a Moabite. And perhaps we need to feel that a bit more, don't we, these days? To walk into God's assembly and simply ask for his blessings, it should be, should be, impossible.

Prayer meetings, a prayer meeting on Wednesday evening, it should be impossible, shouldn't it?

Knowing God, receiving his blessings, being in his assembly, should be impossible.

By nature, we were all children of wrath, outsiders. He should vomit us out. So there was the door that kept her out.

[15:12] There was the door that kept her out. But then, there is the man who gets her in. The man who gets her in. Just have a look with me at verse 4 to 6.

Verse 4 to 6. Behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and he said to the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered, The Lord bless you.

Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, Whose young woman is this?

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.

Behold, it's Boaz. It's Boaz. And Boaz is a definitively beautiful character, isn't he? We're told in verse 2 that he is a worthy man.

And the fields belong to him, don't they? And as he appears in the field, he comes pronouncing the Lord's blessing on his workers, on those in his land.

[16:18] The Lord bless you. And they reply, The Lord bless you. Boaz is surrounded by blessing and bounty and activity, by production, by life.

He is the head and the workers all surround him in the fields. It's the harvest and Boaz is at the kernel, isn't he? He is at the centre in the midst of his workforce, talking to them, near to them, proclaiming God's blessings upon them as they work.

He is the mediator and focus of the blessings that God has given the people here, Boaz. And Ruth just so happens not only to be in the right field at the right time, but in the right part of the field just at the time when Boaz appears.

It's a providential moment in her life because actually seeking refuge under the wings of the Lord brings her directly to the fields of Boaz.

Even though we're reminded she's an outsider, the Lord brings her providentially into contact with him. With him. The core of all life for the people.

[17 : 37] The Lord brings her to this Christ-like figure. So there's a great paradox there, isn't there, in the work of God. Now think about your front door for a second.

Your front door is not just there for one reason, is it? It's there for two reasons. One reason is to keep unwanted people out, isn't it? Stay out.

It is to keep outsiders away from your family, keeps your house safe from harm. But actually that same door is also used to let people in.

Isn't it? It's a paradox. The same door keeps people out but it lets people in at the same time. Now just going back to Deuteronomy again.

Do you remember chapter 23? The uncompromising force of God's law. Keeping Moabites out. But then only in the next chapter, Deuteronomy chapter 24, listen to these words in verse 19.

[18 : 42] When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

When you reap your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterwards.

It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt. Therefore, I command you to do this.

Moabites stay out. Chapter 23 gives reasons, doesn't it, why Ruth should be excluded. But then only on the next page, chapter 24, gives reasons why she should be included.

It's a funny thing. Ruth qualifies on all three counts, doesn't she? She is a sojourner, foreigner from Moab. She is fatherless and she is a widow at harvest time as well.

[20 : 06] It shows us, doesn't it, that contained within the very law which prevented her access is a provision for access. We see that the paradox of God's law, the open, closed door.

God says to sinners, stop. There is no question about that. And yet, somehow in his grace, the same law of God opens a way for sinners to join in.

Stop, come in. A door keeps people out, stop, but it also lets people in. And without that same door, nobody can enter.

And this opened door is opened by God's Christ-like figure, Boaz. The door was closed, but the man gets her in.

The man is the means whereby Ruth can come into the full blessings of God's covenant assembly. He is the one through whom God gives grace to her, through whom he welcomes outsiders.

[21 : 15] He notices her, doesn't he? Whose young woman is this? He seeks her out. He pursues her and shows her where to glean her barley. Have a look at verse 8 and 9 again.

Back in Ruth. Boaz said to Ruth, now listen, my daughter, don't go to glean in another field or leave this one. Keep close to my young women. 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? When you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn. He leads her to green pastures and to still waters.

He provides safety. He fends off rebuke from her, doesn't he? In verse 15, when she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, let her glean, even among the sheaves.

Don't rebuke her. Verse 16 as well. Also, pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean. Don't rebuke her. Boaz seeks her out, provides, and includes, and welcomes, and protects.

[22 : 32] There's a lovely scene, isn't there? A mealtime scene in verse 14. 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. She ate until she was satisfied and she had some left over. From emptiness to fullness.

From sadness to satisfaction. From exclusion to inclusion through the man Boaz. The Lord Jesus says, doesn't he, in the Gospels, in John's Gospels, I am the door.

I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will not hunger. Whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

[23 : 45] This Christ-like man says to outsiders, no, no, don't rebuke him. Don't rebuke her. Let him glean.

Let her glean in God's field. Don't reproach her. Let her glean here. God's holy law says, stop. But God's holy Christ says, come here.

Dip your morsel in the wine. He passes the grain to outsiders out of his abundance, satisfaction to sinners. This man is the means where Moabites, outsiders, can come in.

He is God's redeemer. I was in Waitrose the other day, and there was a magazine on the shelf there, and it had Dawn French on the front, and it had her tips on minimalistic living.

The headline said at the top, less is more, declutter, get organised, live lighter. Less is more, declutter, get organised, live lighter.

[25 : 00] And that in a sense is exactly what Naomi and Ruth have done since chapter one. So they started off in the land of Moab, which is representative of the world outside of Judah, outside of Israel.

And they moved to a little piece of land, the Lord's land. They downsized, don't they? And then they come to a little town, little town of Bethlehem. And now Ruth is restricted to just one little field.

Out of all the places she could be, she's in one little field. Boaz says to her, don't glean in any other field. So she's downsized in life.

She's become very focused. She's decluttered and become very minimalistic. Just this one field. Boaz's field.

But where Boaz is concerned, less is more. Less is more. It is specifically where Boaz's field is.

[26 : 04] Where the fruit is, isn't it? They're in one tiny field, but in their travels the quality of their lives has been inversely proportional to what they appear.

She becomes focused on Boaz. Life has become more focused in this one place. But the more tight her focus is on him, the more fruitful and vibrant and satisfying and full of life she has become.

She's now sitting with him eating grain with it brimming over into leftovers. And so the way Ruth knows the blessings of God to know him is to glean specifically in the field of Boaz.

she gleans and she gleans and she gleans and she gleans only there. Look at verse 7 again. She said please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.

So she came, she continued from early morning until now except for a short rest. Sometimes I chat to folk in Ealing who call themselves spiritual, spiritual people.

[27 : 22] But often these folk can be quite cluttered in their thinking. Well we're all cluttered in our thinking aren't we really? I met a lovely guy the other day. He called himself spiritual.

But in many ways he was quite confused about God and what he really believed. He was one of the kinds of people who didn't want to commit to anything.

To have a little bit of every religion. He liked Jesus. But he said all these gods are all the same aren't they? I'm just a spiritual person. I don't want to restrict myself to one way of thinking.

That's just bigoted and narrow. But Ruth has had to learn hasn't she that with God's Christ what seems less is more.

To focus on one God and one person in Jesus Christ to glean from him alone is true spirituality.

[28 : 25] It is true blessing and satisfaction. The more pointed and focused we are in the field of Jesus on him alone the wider and greater and more abundant the fruit becomes.

Less is more with him. Sometimes we need to listen to Dawn French don't we? Less is more.

Declutter. Get organized. Live lighter. Get specific with Jesus.

Get specific with Jesus. Glean from him and him alone. Get rid of the spiritual clutter. Don't do pick and mix religion.

There's a great artist called Millet. He painted a picture it's called the Gleaners. It shows two women in the foreground bending over to pick tiny pieces of grain off the soil.

In the background are the farmers with sacks of grain and these two women pick up the straps. It looks like hard work and you're aware of the abundance of the farmers have.

[29 : 31] But there's something honorable about these women in this painting. They're in the foreground. They're gleaning in the right place. They pick with their right hands and in their left hands are bunches of corn.

There's a humility about them. Ruth sits with Boaz and his people. She eats until she's satisfied. She sits and receives from him.

And note how the provision just snowballs from there doesn't it? So after this evening meal Boaz changes the policy on gleaning. Have a look at verse 15.

When she rose to glean Boaz instructed his young men saying let her glean even among the sheaves. Don't reproach her. And also pull out some from the bundles for her.

Leave it to her for her to glean and don't rebuke her. Boaz slightly cheats the system there doesn't he? Boaz gives her a hand. He gives her a head start in the gleaning.

[30 : 31] As she comes to him she gets specific about receiving from him alone. She declutters the more she focuses on him actually the more and more and more she gets back.

Similar to what Jesus says isn't it in Mark chapter 4 Jesus said to them pay attention to what you hear and with the measure you use it it will be measured to you.

Still more will be added to you for to the one who has more will be given. The more attention you pay with him with the Lord Jesus Christ the more you glean from him the more that that will be measured back to you.

And the more and more and more he gives. And he gives us a head start. He gives us more and more from his abundance. So get specific with Jesus and him alone.

This man the Lord of the harvest his workers are happy. They receive the Lord's blessing. It's the harvest and Boaz is in the middle in the midst of his workforce talking to them near to them proclaiming God's blessing upon them as they work.

[31 : 48] And outsiders who glean in his field are satisfied. He is the man who gets her in. As we close, there is a reminder isn't there that at the end of chapter two that you can take the girl out of Moab but less easily Moab out of the girl.

We leave the chapter with a conversation between Naomi and Ruth who comes back to her mother-in-law with the abundance of the gleanings from Boaz's field plus the left Davis from the meal that evening.

Now you can imagine them in this conversation giggling like little girls can't you? The questions come out in verse 19. Imagine Ruth with all of this barley verse 19 Where did you glean today? Naomi says Where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you. Ruth replies the man's name was Boaz.

Well, she says, he may be blessed by the Lord whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead. There's more she says.

[33 : 02] The man, the man is a close relative of ours. One of our redeemers. It is a moment, isn't it, of seeing God's grace to them through this man.

Naomi is seeing Ruth beginning those early stages of coming into the covenant community. And she's met the man who will be able to redeem her as her relative, to marry her into the people. She's finally be able to have rest and security. Now you can imagine them picturing the wedding already, can't you? She's almost going to buy the hat, getting ahead of themselves. The hysterics continue, verse 21.

Besides, he said to me, you shall keep close to my young men until they finish the harvest. you shall keep close to my young men, he said.

No, he didn't, did he? What did Boaz actually say to her? Look back at verse 8. 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.

[34 : 13] keep close to my young women. Naomi hears the problem there, doesn't she? She corrects Ruth in verse 22.

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. See, whilst it's exciting to see Ruth coming close to this redeeming man, there are signs of Moab reappearing, aren't there?

Signs of not quite getting that she needs Boaz and Boaz alone. Stay only in my field, he says, stay near the women.

From quite early on, we get sense, don't we, I think, that Boaz wants to provide for her, wants her for himself, he wants to be the sole provider, the sole redeemer.

And Naomi has to put her back on the straight and narrow, doesn't she? Verse 23, Ruth listens to Naomi and keeps close to the young women of Boaz, disaster averted.

[35 : 27] She remains available for Boaz to redeem her in marriage. marriage. So isn't it a reminder of how we were part of a people who'd warred against the Lord and sometimes that

cluttered, living in the passions of our flesh kind of life we'd come from can sometimes pull us back.

We need more Naomi's, don't we? More Naomi's who pull us up and say, no, no, what are you doing? It's good that you stay near Jesus and make yourself available for him and him alone.

We've all got that bit of Moab in us that craves independence from him. But the door that has kept us out of God's blessings is the door, it's the only door that lets us in through him and only him.

So get specific about Jesus. It is a story, isn't it, of an unlikely romance between a man and a woman because Ruth and Boaz should never have been allowed to be together.

And we should never have been allowed to be with Jesus. But God has sent him to us that we might be like Ruth here like little chicks sheltering from the hot daily sun in the cool shadow of a mother's wings.

[37 : 08] Ruth has found the oasis in the desert of coming back to God. Under the wings of God, Ruth meets the Redeemer of God. Let's play in a short prayer.