

Ruth 2:4-23

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[0 : 00] Have you ever had the feeling that you're being watched? I've noticed that it's impossible to go around London without seeing CCTV cameras everywhere.

! You're telling us that our actions are being recorded. But that's not really what I'm referring to. I'm really referring to that feeling that someone specifically is watching you.

That feeling sometimes hits us at odd times. It might be late at night when we're walking home alone. Or it could be while we're sitting at a desk. Or maybe in a library.

Or maybe it's in a restaurant when you find yourself talking too loudly. And suddenly you realize that you're not being paranoid. That people really are watching you. This is especially noticeable when you're traveling overseas.

You look different. Your clothes are different. Even your mannerisms are different. And even if you get all of that right. All you have to do is open your mouth.

[1 : 04] And everyone knows you're not from around here. Yeah, I'm one. Sometimes they look at you with curiosity. Sometimes they look at you with suspicion.

Have you ever had somebody new show up at work? Or at school? Or in the neighborhood? Do you find yourself watching them? Seeing what they're like?

Sizing them up? Do you wait to approach them because they're different? Do you remember being that new person? That stranger?

When someone comes up and welcomes you? Do you remember arriving at an unfamiliar airport? Coming out of customs and immigration to see someone you know waiting for you? Or visit a new church and have someone greet you and say that they're glad that you came?

The fact is that all of us are being watched all the time. The question really, though, is what does that reveal about who we are? What do they see?

[2 : 09] Today we return to the story of Ruth. A young widow. A Moabite. An outsider. Who's come to Bethlehem with Naomi, her mother-in-law.

It's the time of the barley harvest. Grain in the house of bread. But Naomi is empty. Physically and spiritually. And Ruth has gone out to glean.

To gather grain that's been dropped by the reapers. So that she and Naomi can eat. Hoping to find a friendly or at least a tolerant landowner.

In whose sight I might find favor, she said. Today we find Ruth in the field gleaning. A stranger. A foreigner. An outsider. But one who's declared her allegiance to the new land.

The promised land. To a new people. The people of God. And to their God. The God of Israel. And she's being watched.

[3 : 09] But as we get into today's text. We'll do some watching as well. We will watch Ruth. And we'll watch Boaz. We'll see what kind of people they are. We'll see how their character.

Reflects God's covenant care for his people. And today we'll see Ruth. Using three W words. Watch. Welcome. And wings.

First. Under watching eyes. We're told that Boaz comes to the fields. To check on the harvest. The first thing he does. Is greet and bless his reapers.

May the Lord be with you. He says. And they reply. May the Lord bless you. Now we might at first. Just discard this verse. Simply seeing it as a formality. A polite greeting.

But the text really shows. That this greeting is heartfelt. A caring for those that are in his field. It goes beyond just a casual relationship. But a reflection of his character.

[4 : 08] It's worthwhile noting. That he doesn't just arrive. And immediately go. To meet with his foreman. He shows his consideration. For all of his workers. A lesson that any of us. Who are in a leadership position.

Should take to heart. But as Boaz greets his workers. He also surveys the field. Now he knows his reapers. He knows his field. But he sees something else.

He takes note of a woman gleaning. And here he questions his foreman. To whom does she belong? Obviously she's not one of his. Now no one is totally alone.

Especially in that time. In that age. In that culture. Everyone belongs to someone. Somewhere. Especially a woman. But she's alone in this field. And I believe this concerns Boaz.

Where does she belong? Where are her protectors? But notice here. That the foreman has been watching as well. And he has a ready answer. She is the young Moabite woman.

[5 : 07] Who came back with Naomi. From the country of Moab. To the foreman. Ruth is still an outsider. He would surely know her name. But he doesn't use it.

Instead. In his description. He points to her status. To him. She is a foreigner. That young woman. That young Moabite woman. From the country of Moab.

A nameless person. A non-person. Permitted under the Mosaic law. To glean. But little more than that. The foreman seems almost embarrassed. At first. To have someone.

Especially a Moabite. There in the fields. Almost as if she. He would really rather. That she not be there at all. But despite his opinions. May we even say.

His prejudices. About Moabites. And about Moab. He grants her. At least some grudging respect. First. She sought permission. Please let me glean.

[6 : 03] And gather among the sheaves. After the reapers. She says in Ruth 2. 7. Yes. According to the Mosaic law. She has a right to be there. But she doesn't presume. She asks first.

Secondly. She's been working steadily. And the foreman. Has obviously noticed this. He says. So she came. And has continued.

From early morning. Until now. Except for a short rest. Ruth. Ruth has been working. For several hours. And anyone. Who's pulled weeds. In a garden. Especially a large garden.

Knows what she must be feeling. At that point. Bent over. Reaching for the ground. The pain in her legs. And her lower back. The tightness in her shoulders.

Cleaning would be back breaking work. Now this conversation. Between Boaz. And the foreman. Is included in the story. For a reason. And I believe.

[6 : 59] That reason is. To show a contrast. Between how the foreman. Saw Ruth. And how Boaz. Saw Ruth. The foreman. Treated Ruth. Respectfully. In strict accordance.

With the Mosaic law. Boaz. On the other hand. Treats Ruth. With kindness. Showing the steadfast love. Of the Lord. Now Boaz. Is certainly aware of Ruth.

At least by reputation. People have been watching. Ruth. Since she returned. Again. An outsider. From a suspect. Nation. A suspect. Ethnicity. Who followed her mother.

Back to Israel. Her mother-in-law. Back to Israel. And it's likely. That people. By now. Have heard of her proclamation. That she gave. In chapter one. Where you go.

I will go. And where you lodge. I will lodge. Your people. Will be my people. And your God. My God. And where you die. I will die. And there. I will be buried.

[7 : 55] A profession. Such as that. Is truly profound. Recognizing. The one true God. As her God. Committing her life. To him. And to his people. This is as significant.

As a Muslim. Coming to Jesus. Or for that matter. A celebrity. Or a famous athlete. Proclaiming faith. In Christ. And what do people. Do when that happens. Well they watch.

Is this profession. Real. Is it sincere. Has this person's. Life changed. Is their life. Now consistent. With that proclamation.

Corinthians 5. 17. Says. Therefore. If anyone. Is in Christ. He is a new creation. The old. Has passed away. Behold. The new. Has come. And Jesus. In John 13.

Says. By this. All people. Will know. That you are my disciples. If you have love. For one another. But that love. Really. Was not a new commandment. For Jesus.

[8 : 52] Quoted. Leviticus 19. When he said. You shall love your neighbor. As yourself. Ah. But then there's the question. Remember. Who is my neighbor? Not surprisingly.

In a small village. Everyone knows everyone. And everyone knows. About everyone. Naomi would have talked about Ruth. The women would have talked among themselves.

And even the men. As dense as we tend to be. Would have heard about Ruth. But Boaz. Astute. And compassionate. Picks up on this. He's heard of Ruth's profession.

Her profession of faith. He's heard of her actions. And now he sees something of her character. He calls her over. And Boaz welcomes her. He tells her to stay in his field.

He tells her to stay close to the women reapers. As they harvest. Close. So that she doesn't wander off. Accidentally into someone else's field. He tells her of his personal protection.

[9 : 55] That he's warned off the young lads. And he tells her to drink from his water vessels. Ruth falls on her face in gratitude. She asks. Why me? Why should you have noticed me?

I'm a no one. A foreigner. A stranger. An outsider. But Boaz doesn't see her that way. In verses 11 and 12. He says. All that you have done for your mother-in-law.

Since the death of your husband. Has been fully told to me. How you left your father and mother. And your native land. And came to a people that you did not know before. May the Lord repay you for what you have done.

And a full reward be given to you by the Lord. The God of Israel. Under whose wings. You have come to take refuge. Boaz welcomes Ruth. In the name of the Lord.

But not only do his words welcome her. But his actions also. He demonstrates the covenantal. Steadfast love of the Lord. That chesed.

[10 : 54] That loving kindness. That Naomi prayed for. Before them in Ruth 1.8. That the Lord might deal kindly with them. And in response to this. Ruth fell on her face before Boaz.

Wasn't this the kindness. That she said she was looking for. When. Earlier in the chapter. She said that she would glean. After him. In whose sight. I might find favor. It's also possible.

That these were the first kind words. That she had heard. Since arriving in Bethlehem. Naomi certainly. Had been rather curt with her. The third W today.

Is wings. Remember. Boaz prayed. May the Lord repay you. For what you have done. And a full reward. Given to you by the Lord. The God of Israel. Under whose wings.

You have come to take refuge. Under his wings. In God's promised land. The land of rest. Among God's people. He points out.

[11 : 52] That Ruth is not a stranger. Not a foreigner. By her profession. By her faith. She has come under the wing. Of Yahweh. The God of Israel. In fact. Boaz personally takes on.

That same task. Taking Ruth. Under his wing. Boaz does this in three ways. Three ways. That mirror God's covenant. Relationship. With his own people.

Firstly. He provides a place. In his land. Do not go to the other fields. But lean here. After the women reapers. Stay in my fields. Where you will be safe.

Where I can watch over you. Where Ruth can benefit. From his generosity. Do we welcome the stranger. The outsider. The seekers. Into our churches.

Into our neighborhoods. That same way. Do we show God's steadfast love. To those that we meet. Especially. Those who God has called to himself. Love. Secondly.

[12 : 51] Boaz provides protection. In his land. He instructs his boys. His youth. To leave her alone. Protection from harassment. Protection from harsh treatment. Protection from the other landowners.

Protection from far worse. Peace and rest. And even protection from the heat. And the sun. Telling her to drink. The water. That his boys have drawn. Now that is a true gift.

In a dry and thirsty land. Thirdly. Boaz provides a place. At his table. Think here of Psalm 23. Thou hast prepared a table.

Before me. In the presence of mine enemies. More than just the water. Drawn by his boys. Boaz invites her. To join him. For a real meal. Now would this have been scandalous?

A Moabite woman. At a meal. With a pillar of the society. Recall the reaction. When Jesus ate. With tax collectors. And sinners. In Matthew 9.

[13 : 52] But Boaz doesn't seem to care about that. He offers her bread. And wine. Food. That he's procured. For his own workers. Out of his own pocket. And roasted grain.

So much grain. That she ate. Until she was full. So much grain. That she had leftovers. That she could take home. For Naomi. Going on in.

Psalm 23. My cup runneth over. Here we see Boaz. Demonstrating. In his own life. That steadfast love. Of God the Father. Providing for his beloved children.

We see his generosity. To Ruth. More than just giving Ruth. An opportunity. To glean. Boaz. Instructs his reapers. To put grain out. To pull it out. Of the sheaths.

To be sloppy. In their gathering. To leave extra. For Ruth. We see in Boaz. A model. A type. Of a father. One who watches over his children.

[14:48] Not looking for reasons. To punish. Or condemn. But seeking an opportunity. To bless them. His generosity. Becomes apparent. That evening. As Ruth.

Finishes her gleaning. For the day. And she beats out. The grain. That she's gleaned. You know. Her work. Wasn't finished. Once she had gathered up. The gleanings. Grain.

Such as barley. Is surrounded. By an inedible hull. That hull. Must be separated. From the grain. And that's done. By beating it. With a stick. Or a rod. So that the hull.

Or the chaff. Might be separated. After all that work. The gathering. The beating. The separating. Ruth had about an ephah. Of barley.

Now what. You may ask. Is an ephah. Well most sources list that. As about 22. Liters. Or about 15 kilos.

[15:45] That's about. The amount that you would have. If you got one of those. Oversized. Bags of pet food. That would be quite a load. To have to drag back to town.

After a hard day's work. In the fields. It would also be enough food. For the two of them. To live on. For almost a month. Talk about abundance. Talk about being full. Naomi had come back empty. You can imagine. Naomi surprised them. When Ruth dropped that. In front of her. Where on earth. Have you been? She asked. It's here. I think that. Naomi's heart. Begins to soften. Rather than the bitterness.

That she had. Naomi begins to see hope. Rather than emptiness. She begins to see. God's provision for her. She blesses. That unknown man. Who let Ruth.

Glean in his field. And here again. Now we see the author. Of the story. Coming to the front. We know. Who took Ruth. Under wing. But Naomi doesn't.

[16:46] We know. Who Boaz is. And we know his relationship. To Naomi. But Ruth doesn't. We have a hint here. Of things that might be going on. And where the story might be going.

But neither Ruth. Nor Naomi. Know. That full story. Then Ruth spills the beans. Or in this case. The barley. Boaz. The kinsman.

Of the Lamelech. A redeemer. And Naomi sees God's hand. May he. Boaz. Be blessed. By the Lord. Whose kindness. Whose loving kindness.

Whose chesed. Has not forsaken the living. Or the dead. It's interesting here. That in the Hebrew. The living. Is in the plural. Naomi is referring. Both to herself.

And to Ruth. As the living. Naomi sees herself. And Ruth. In that covenantal love. Of God. Now maybe. Naomi is beginning. To plan.

[17:41] To plot. Maybe she's beginning. To think about. Taking. Matters. Into her own hands. The way she. And Elimelech. Did when they left. Israel. For Moab. During the time. Of the famine. But Ruth interrupts.

Besides. He said to me. You shall keep close. By my young men. Until they have finished. All my harvest. It's interesting here. That Boaz. Has said. Stay with my young women. But Ruth.

May have been thinking. About taking matters. Into her own hands. Too. Thinking about. Finding a husband. From some of those men. That Naomi says to Ruth. Her daughter-in-law.

It is good. My daughter. That you go out. With his young women. Less than another field. You be assaulted. Now the question here is. What's the emphasis. When Naomi says that. Is it.

It's good that you stay. With his. Young women. Or is she saying. It is good that you stay. With his young women. Is it the latter.

[18:37] Or is it both. It's important that you stay. With his. In his fields. And it's important. From the perspective. Of reputation. That you stay.

With the women. But Ruth obeys. She stays with Boaz's young reaper. Or women reapers. Through the barley harvest. And then through the wheat harvest. Leaning in the fields.

For possibly as long as four months. This wasn't just an overnight thing. But God is clearly at work. He's led Naomi to a near kinsman. I'm sorry. He's led Ruth to a near kinsman.

Who has given her welcome. And who has taken her under his wing. Ruth and Naomi are no longer empty. Their physical needs. Are being taken care of. And Naomi begins to see.

That God is faithful. That his steadfast love. Endures forever. And that he cares for them personally. But there is still more to the story. Naomi's prayer for Ruth.

[19 : 32] Is not fully fulfilled. That prayer that. Ruth might find rest. In the house of a husband. We read in the final verse. That Ruth is still living. With her mother-in-law.

As chapter two closes then. The storyteller leaves us. In suspense. How will our loving God. Show his faithfulness. And loving kindness.

To Ruth and to Naomi. And we'll see that begin to unwind. In chapter three. But as I said at the beginning of this series. Back a few weeks ago. The story of Ruth.

Is but one scene. In the biblical revelation. Of the almighty loving God. Who is redeeming the people for himself. From every nation. Tribe. And tongue.

A loving God. Who sent his son. To pay the debt. The debt. That we cannot pay. And to give us rest. In his house. For eternity. Let us pray.