

Ruth 2

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[0 : 00] To be seated and turn, if you will, to Ruth chapter 2.! Ruth chapter 2. Which, if you've got a Bible, I think it's 222.

What a difference a day can make in a person's life. What a difference a day can make in a person's life. One April day in 1945, Harry Truman wrote to his mother, I'd better hurry to the White House to see the President.

When I got there, I found out that I was the President. Moses, do you remember that story from the book of Exodus? One day he's out in the back of beyond, out in the bush, tending his sheep.

It was one day like any other day, and yet that day, God spoke to him out of a burning bush, and he became the Savior of Israel. He became the one to carry his people out of Egypt.

Elisha, do you remember him? He was plowing a field when suddenly, out of the blue, Elijah turns up and recruits him to be his successor. Andrew, Peter, James, and John, they were fishermen, mending their nets on the side of the shore.

[1 : 29] And Jesus comes along, and he recruits them to be fishers of men. Matthew was in the office, a tax collector. Just an ordinary day like any other day.

And Jesus came and called him, and his life was changed. What a difference a day can make. And what a difference this day makes in the life of Ruth.

It's a very important day. It's arguably one of the most important days in her life. Because this was the day she meets her husband-to-be.

Bachelor boy, Boaz of Bethlehem. He's introduced to us in a very interesting way, isn't he? You can almost hear the violins playing in Ruth chapter 2.

It's a spring day. We're told that at the end of chapter 1. It's the beginning of the barley harvest. It's about late April. And Ruth has gone out into the fields, and look what happens.

[2 : 26] Look what it says. In verse 3, it says, Fancy that.

What a stroke of luck. The writer wants you to see that right at the start of the chapter. He seems to be emphasizing it. Look at verse 3 again. 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 the clan of Elimelech.

Ruth's father-in-law. Now notice how he goes on. Behold. Behold. What are the chances of that? Behold, Boaz turns up from Bethlehem.

It so happened. But you and the writer to this story, we know that things don't just happen, don't we? That God is working out his purposes here as well.

And so that's the first point. I want us to see the first point is God's hand at work. Look at verses 1 to 7. It's a kind of spoiler alert. Look what it says. Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

[3 : 44] And so the storyteller drops you a hint. He's telling us something that Ruth doesn't know at this point. He's kind of flagging it. It's very, very good storytelling.

He's giving us a heads up. Watch out. What is going to happen? Here is a bloke coming. And keep your eyes on this guy. 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. 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 from the clan of Elimelech. He's a wealthy man, this guy, Boaz.

He's a good guy. He treated people fairly and well. Perhaps most important of all, though, he was a relative, a close relative, of Naomi's dead husband, Elimelech.

It's a bit like a Charles Dickens story. Set in the grinding poverty of Victorian England, there's always, isn't there, a rich relative that turns up.

[4 : 55] And here's the rich relative. Two poverty-stricken widows, destitute widows. They're on the edge of desperation and despair. And behold, what are the chances? Here's a rich relative.

Here is someone who's able to help them, Uncle Boaz. And not only is he a good bloke, he's a godly man. And so can you see the hand of God in the way this story is developing?

It's a Charlie Brown cartoon. And Charlie Brown is sitting in a room and he's reading a book. And he's holding the book right in front of his eyes.

And Lucy comes into the room and she says, Charlie Brown, what are you doing? And Charlie Brown says, I'm reading between the lines. And the writer of this story wants you to do that.

He wants you to understand that God is at work here. Beneath this everyday story of country folk, there's a much bigger story. And that is true of your story and my story.

[6 : 00] Behind all the random things that have happened to you this week and all the frustrations that you're facing in life and all the disappointments and all the rest of it, there's a bigger thing happening. The sovereign hand of God is at work.

And he is working out his purposes and he is working all things to gather for the good of those who loved him and are called according to his purposes. And it's almost as if, isn't it, the writer of Ruth is putting this up on a split screen.

Because you see the action in the story, but we also see behind the scenes. And God is at work. Look at verse two. Let me go to the field, Ruth says to Naomi, and glean among the ears of grain after him, in whose sight I shall find favor.

And she said to her, go, my daughter. 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 the clan from the clan of Elimelech.

John Flavel was one of the Puritan writers. He's got a little book called The Mystery of Providence. And he says, the providence of God, which is God's plan and purpose, the providence of God is like the Hebrew language.

[7 : 15] It can only be understood backwards. And so if you've got a Hebrew Bible here this morning, you've got to read it from the back to the front. It's a back to front language.

And the providence of God is like that. The hymn writer says this, with mercy and with judgment, my web of time he wove. And ere the dews of sorrow were lusted with his love, I'll bless the hand that guided, I'll bless the heart that planned, when throned where glory dwelleth, in Emmanuel's land. Because it's not until we get there. It's not until the end of the story. It's not until you're in Emmanuel's land that you can look back at all the things that have happened to you and see that God's hand was guiding you.

But it's more than God's hand guiding you. Do you know what it's like when you're in a big city and you want directions? It's a bit different now, isn't it?

We've all got phones. But you go to a city and you've got no idea where you are and somehow you're sat there or your phone isn't working. And so you go to pull over and you ask, you wind down the window and you ask someone on the pavement and you ask, can you tell me how to get to such and such a place?

[8 : 29] And if you're like me, you listen, don't you? But it's just a complete overload of information. And you wind up the window after he's finally finished and you've immediately forgotten what he's just told you.

And you pretend you nod at him and thank him, but you go to the next street, pull over, and do exactly the same thing. But what a relief it is, isn't it? When somebody reads the situation, when they see that expression in your eyes and they read that look of utter bewilderment and they have pity on you and they say, well, I'll get in the car next to you and I'll take you there if you want. What a relief that is, isn't it? You see, there's something better than guidance. God hasn't just given you a map of directions. He hasn't just given you Google Earth to show you the way through life. God hasn't given you a computer readout so that you can follow those instructions. What has God done? God has actually gone into the car next to you. That's what the good news of the Lord Jesus is all about.

God has already said that. God has already said that. God has already said that. That's who the Holy Spirit is. He is a comforter. He is a comforter.

[9 : 49] And that is what is happening here. He is our guide. He is God himself who's gone into the car with us. And he's taking you to your destination.

And Ruth doesn't necessarily see how all these things are happening on this particular day. Ruth doesn't see how these things are going to fit together any more than you or I do in the things that happen in our lives.

But God's hand was upon her. So that's the first point of seeing God's hand. But secondly, she knows God's protection. Verses 8 to 12. She knows God's protection.

It's an old story, isn't it? It's about 3,000 years old. The social context and the customs of Ruth 1 and 2 are very different than our society. But there's some powerful lessons here.

It's things for us to learn as a church. For us to learn as a country. I love what it says in verse 12. It's in many ways the key verse in the book of Ruth. when Boaz first sets his eyes on her and says, Who is that woman?

[11 : 01] Where does that woman come from? And they explain to him, This is Ruth the Moabitess who's come back with Naomi from Moab.

And he says, Yeah, I've heard about her. I've heard her talk about this woman Ruth. He says to her, You are the one who has come to shelter under the wings of the Almighty.

Isn't that a lovely description? What a testimony Ruth must have had in that community. That she'd not just come out of loyalty to her mother-in-law.

She didn't just come out of love and loyalty to Naomi. She'd seen something in Naomi's kindness to her. She'd seen something of the covenant kindness of God to his people.

She'd seen in Naomi a brokenness. Her tears of repentance. She saw something of the heart of God to forgive sinners. And so Ruth is drawn to come and shelter under the wings of this God.

[12 : 04] It's beautiful, isn't it? And she finds protection there. And I want to tell you three things and suggest to you three things she finds protection three different ways.

She finds protection through the state provision. It's quite interesting, isn't it? She finds protection through the state provision that were in place in Israel.

Ruth is doing the equivalent of signing on in the Old Testament. She's signing on in Old Testament terms.

You see, God in his law had made provision for people like Ruth and Naomi. It was the gleaning laws in the Old Testament. You can read about them in a number of places in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

Let me read to you from Leviticus 19. When you reap the harvest of your land, the farmer is told, you shall not reap your field right up to the edge. Neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest and you shall not strip your vineyard bare.

[13 : 08] Neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them. Why shall you leave them? For the poor and the sojourner, the refugee. The sojourner is the poor and the poor and the refugee is the foreigner.

There's the reason given. And it's not some arbitrary piece of legislation where told, why should we do this? God says, for I am the Lord your God. God. That is why, in other words, that law was enshrined in the law of Israel as a reflection of the character of God.

And so the people of God, Israel, was to be a caring society because our God is a God who cares. He cares about refugees. He cares about aliens. He cares about foreigners.

He cares about widows. He cares about orphans. He cares about the marginalized in society. And he makes provision for them in the law of Israel. So do you remember what the psalmist says?

He says, I am poor and needy and the Lord ignores me. And the Lord doesn't give me a second chance. And the Lord just walks past me. Is that what it says? No, it says this, I am poor and needy and the Lord despises me.

[14 : 18] He looks down his nose at me. The Lord thinks, what a pathetic creature I am. Why doesn't that person get their act together? No, the psalmist says, I am poor and needy.

And guess what? The Lord who made the heavens and earth, the God who keeps this incredibly massive universe ticking, thinks about me. He thinks about me.

And in his sovereign providence, he has enshrined that his kindness and his care should be put into the law of his people Israel. And in his sovereign providence, he has brought these two widows, these two Moabitists, these despised foreigners to Israel at the beginning of the barley harvest at just the right time.

For her to avail herself of this particular provision, it's beautiful, isn't it? So we read in verse 2, let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor. Let's do this, she says. The law says there's a provision and so let me go and glean. And so you ask yourself, how did Ruth know this?

[15:31] Well, the only way she could have known that was Naomi must have told her. It's interesting, isn't it? She says, let's go, let's go, she says, to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor.

The law was there, the provision was there, but not everyone took it seriously. It's a sad comment, isn't it? On how things were spiritually in Israel. How poorly they were treated.

Sad comment on what goes on in many churches. How poorly we represent the heart of God. To people who come in amongst us, let me go and do what God has told me I can do if I can find someone who will show me mercy and favor.

Some maybe would have refused her point blank to glean in her field, in their field. Others may have begrudgingly let her do it but made her feel a bit of a basket case.

If you've ever had a sign on the dole, you might perhaps begin to know how she feels. It can be a humiliating and an undignified experience, can't it?

[16:51] Sometimes because of the attitudes of people that you know, we should know better. Sometimes the cold-hearted bureaucracy of filling in the forms and being treated like a number or a statistic, it can be a humiliating and undignified experience.

If your circumstances are such that you need some kind of provision, there's no disgrace in that at all. You can do that with a good conscience, without shame and with full Christian dignity.

And there may well be people who abuse the system but that's not the point. If you genuinely need that kind of assistance, it's not an ungodly thing to take advantage of it.

Now it is interesting that in the Bible, there is never just a handout. There's never just goods or money, cash given.

There is always a kind of working for what you're given, a showing that there is a value in it. And so it's never just a kind of handout.

[17:57] That's for another sermon. It is part of the way that God brings his kindness to people. I think it's interesting in Israel that there's never a handout. You never see that folks were kind of given things or money and just sent away.

There was a need for working them. Now, she found protection through the provision of God's law, but she found protection in this man, Boaz, too, didn't she? Despite this beautiful law, the gleaning law didn't always turn out very well.

For vulnerable and marginalized people like Ruth, some of those people, when they went to work in the fields, no doubt they were taken advantage of and abused. A young woman like Ruth, who's obviously very attractive, she's probably about 10 or 20 years younger than Boaz, in her 20s, and she's wandering around the fields of Israel during the time of the judges.

She's in danger of being attacked, assaulted, raped, left for dead. You've only got to read the book of Judges to realize that's the kind of time they were living in.

They were dangerous days. And that is why Boaz is so concerned for welfare. So Boaz said to Ruth in verse 8, now listen my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women.

[19:16] And then he adds in verse 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? Don't let them lay a hand on you. I've told them that. And in verse 15, he says to the men who work in the field, don't reproach her, don't mock her, don't embarrass her, don't humiliate her.

The word there has got sexual overtones. Treat her with proper respect, no coarse joking, no wolf whistling, no improper behaviour.

Do you see what God has done? God has brought this girl to Israel into this system which characterises and displays the character of God. So that she can take hold on the provision that God has made.

But not only has God made provision for her, he's raised up a champion for her. And we'll see more than a champion because Boaz is a good and a godly man who's willing to help, who's full of God's kindness, and who's wanting to show that kindness.

Those who know mercy show mercy. And so there is a sense, isn't there, where we shouldn't have to legislate for a kind of diaconal ministry in the church.

[20 : 30] like IPC, it should be happening naturally, and praise God, it often does. As it did in the Acts of the Apostles, where they had all things in common, they shared their goods, they were generous with one another, they'd experienced the mercy of God, and they couldn't but help share the mercy of God with others.

And so here's a godly man called Boaz, who knows God's kindness in his own life. And now he shows that kindness to others. How sweet the name of Boaz sounds in her poor gleaner's ears. It soothes her sorrows, heals her wounds, and drives away her fears. She finds protection in the law, she finds protection in Boaz, and most beautifully of all, she finds protection in the Lord. She's come to shelter under his wings. It's a beautiful image. Some of you will remember Deuteronomy 32, and Moses sings there. And Moses celebrates God's kindness to his people, and he does so in terms of this image.

In a desert land, he found him. In a barren and howling wilderness, he shielded him and cared for him like an eagle that spreads out its wings.

[21 : 52] It's a beautiful picture. That is what God was to Israel. that God had found Egypt in slavery. He spread his wings. He stirred up the nest as in his wings.

And he carried them into the promised land. It's a beautiful picture. You see it in the words of Jesus. As he approaches Jerusalem, he says, Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that killed the prophets and stoned those who are sent to it.

How often would I have gathered your children together like a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing. Jesus shows the instincts of a mother.

And that is the heart of God. That is the character of God displayed supremely, of course, in Jesus. And so now here is this foreigner, this Moabitess.

And let me remind you, according to the New Testament, apart from maybe one or two of us, we're all foreigners. We're all aliens. We're all strangers to the covenant and its promises to the common wealth of the people of God.

[23 : 01] But God, through the Lord Jesus and his blood shed on the cross has brought us in. That's what he's done with Moses. He's brought him in amongst his people. He's placed his arms around him and sheltered him under his wings.

Is that where you are spiritually? Have you come to shelter under the wings of the God who has revealed himself in the face of Jesus? Where else would you like to be in a world like ours today? Than amongst God's people sheltering under the wings of the Almighty? God's God's protection. God's protection. And thirdly, experiencing God's protection.

Verse 13 to the end. There's not a lot of kindness in our world, is there? There's a philosopher of the name, I would normally pronounce it Alan Bottom, but I'm pretty certain that that is not the way to pronounce it, is it?

Alan Dubuaton? Is that right? Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think he's an agnostic rather than atheist. He's a philosopher, he's written a number of books, and one of the books he's written is Religion for Atheists.

[24 : 19] And in that book he suggests that atheists, instead of mocking religion, that agnostics and atheists could learn a lot from religion. religion. He says they are packed with ideas on how to live and how to arrange our societies.

And in that book Dubuaton has got a whole chapter on kindness. He's very concerned, this agnostic man, about the lack of kindness in our society.

And we see it, don't we, in the ironic nastiness of so much so-called comedy. The comedy of cruelty where the disabled and the vulnerable are made the butt of cheap jokes.

You see it in the humiliation of real life people in what they call reality TV. You see it online on social media. You hear of it, don't you, in reports of elder abuse in nursing homes and hospitals.

And he says something really interesting for an agnostic to say. He says, our deepest wish is that someone would come along and save us from ourselves.

[25 : 27] Isn't that interesting? It's very interesting for an agnostic to say. Our deepest wish is that someone would come along and save us from ourselves. And that's what the book of Ruth is about.

Do you see what Naomi says in verse 20 when she hears about Boaz's kindness to Ruth? Ruth is coming home now. No doubt she's been out in the morning. She didn't know whether she'd be able

to scrape together enough grain for them to live through another day.

There'd been a famine in the land. There was no one to help them. She didn't know whether she'd have enough food and then here she comes. She comes home late at night and she is staggering under the weight of the bag of grain that she's carrying.

And Boaz has not only been kind in allowing her to sort of glean in her field but he said to his men just drop some corn. Pick a few stalks out. Leave them behind for her.

And she's allowed to follow the reapers. She's not sent to the margins. She's allowed to go behind the reapers and pick up the leftovers and there's much more than leftovers than there would be normally because Boaz has said leave them.

[26 : 39] And she comes home staggering under this massive sack of grain. We're not told exactly how much but it's a huge amount and Naomi can't believe it. Where did you get all that from she says?

And Ruth begins to tell her and you can almost hear the cogs turning over in Naomi's mind. As soon as the name Boaz is mentioned she says verse 20 the Lord bless him.

He's not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead. I think verse 20 in the ESV they've tried to tidy it up a little bit the version that you've got in front of you.

But it's a little bit more ambiguous than it reads in the ESV. Because in verse 20 we're not absolutely certain is she talking about Boaz?

Now Boaz has shown kindness to the living he's shown kindness to Ruth but it seems that there's something more going on in verse 20. I think the penny is beginning to drop for her.

[27 : 48] In verse 20 it's this and Naomi said to her daughter-in-law may you be blessed by the Lord whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead.

Whose kindness? Do you know who that man is Ruth? He's our kinsman redeemer. He is a close relative.

Go to the hospital you have to fill out a form before you have an operation and it talks about the next of kin. And you have to put a phone number down. And then you stop to think don't you? Well if I'm in a spot of trouble will that person be actually able to help me? If you find yourself in an American hospital somebody's going to have to pay the bills. Or you find yourself in a spot of trouble your next of kin is who you would turn to and they've got to be able to help you.

And there's a kind of provision in that. But it's codified in the law of Israel as we'll see next week. It turns out that this guy Boaz is not just a good bloke not just a wealthy guy but he's their next of kin.

[28 : 55] He's their closest relative or one of their closest relatives. And as such under the law he's got a privilege to help them and he's able to do that. He's got the wherewithal to do it.

He's wealthy and he's willing. In fact we'll see next week he's more than willing. He goes out of his way and most important of all he is godly.

And they can entrust themselves to him. What a friend we have in Boaz. All our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry.

Everything to Boaz. What a difference a day can make in someone's life. I don't know what you came here today expecting to find.

you are here aren't you? At least in body. And I don't know what you're struggling with. It is true that most of the major events of life happen when you're doing something else.

[30 : 01] And the biggest things that happen to us in life don't normally give you an announcement before. And I don't know what Naomi and Ruth expected that morning when Ruth said goodbye to Naomi.

When she went out into the fields to glean. But guess what? She found a redeemer. There is a redeemer. If you forget everything that I've said this morning remember that. There is a redeemer that God in his kindness has given us a kinsman redeemer.

And the writer to the Hebrews tells us about him. He tells us that he has voluntarily and deliberately related to himself. That's what's going on in the incarnation. The second person of the blessed trinity who made the world.

The world was made through him came into the world and the world didn't recognize him. And he came to his own, his very own, but his own didn't recognize him. The creator stepped into his creation and he took to himself a human psyche, a human body.

He entered into our humanity. He deliberately and voluntarily became one of us so that he's not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. And that's what the writer to the Hebrews says.

[31 : 17] The writer to the Hebrews says he came to pay our debts. He came to pay the debts that separate you from a loving God and he came to defeat our enemy, the one who holds us in our lifetime in fear of death.

The one who has the power to do that. And there is a redeemer who is able to fix all that is broken in your life and to put it all back together again.

To give you the future and the hope that you thought you would never have in a land flowing with milk and honey. There is a redeemer, Jesus, God's own son.

And you can trust yourself to him, can't you? Won't you? Won't you? Let's pray.