

Ruth 2

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Date: 28 September 2025

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[0 : 00] Let's take our seats. If you can turn back to Ruth chapter 2, page 222, the Black Church Bible. Black Church Bibles. Once upon a time, there was a king who had three sons.

Now, what do you know? With that information, what do you now know? There's a good chance that one of the sons is a waster, some kind, destructive, do crazy stuff.

Probably one of the sons is a bit of a non-event. He doesn't really feature. Maybe. What you know for sure is this, that the youngest son is going to do something heroic in the story, and he's going to marry the girl.

You know that's the way it goes. Once upon a time, there was a king with three sons. That's where the story will end. You've seen it countless times. We don't know from that one line exactly how we're going to get to that conclusion, but we know that that is the conclusion that we're headed to. That is how stories work. And the difference between a good story and a bad story is the journey between those points. There's something of that going on in Ruth chapter 2 this morning.

[1 : 18] If you were here a couple of weeks ago, we left Naomi and Ruth. Ruth, they had just arrived back in Bethlehem from Moab, and Naomi is full of bitterness. Naomi means pleasant.

Her name means pleasant. The women say to her, is this Naomi? She'd been gone for ten years. Is that her? Is she back? She said, don't call me pleasant. Call me bitter, because the Lord has made my life very bitter.

Ruth, on the other hand, is resolutely committed to her mother-in-law, to her mother-in-law's God, and to her people. And there was, at the end of chapter 1, a bit of a crack in the dark clouds, in the very last verse, with the mention of a barley harvest.

They arrived back in Bethlehem just as the barley harvest was beginning. God is bringing bread back to Bethlehem, the house of bread. But the women at the beginning, at the end of chapter 1, beginning of chapter 2, the women are still in a bad way.

However, chapter 2, verse 1, Now, Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

[2 : 28] Where did that come from in the story? Well, as soon as we read it, we realize here is our hero. Boaz is going to be the focus of this chapter. He's mentioned at least ten times in the chapter that the spotlight is being turned from the situation that Ruth and Naomi are in to this man, because he's going to be central to the story as it goes forward.

And we're told in that first verse that he is a relative of Naomi's husband. Very significant, because he is qualified to take on leveret marriage, what the law required. We'll talk about that a little bit later.

We're told he's a man of worth. That word worthy man, it has connotations of wealth and of might and of heroism. His name, Boaz, it means strength.

Wealth, might, heroism, strength. In contrast to what we had in chapter 1 with Elimelech, who showed himself to be weak by heading off and not trusting God, and Elimelech's sons, Melon and Kilion, which mean sickly and whinging.

So here we have this great contrast. Strength has been risen up. A worthy man. Here is a man who is both strong and suitable. And we see his character in action.

[3 : 43] Verse 4. You see that? When he greets his workers, he said to the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered, The Lord bless you. The CEO arrives at the factory and he says to the workplace, Morning all, God be with you.

He blesses his workers as he greets them. And how do we know that he's not just a hypocrite? Somebody who would take that kind of thing on their lips. You know, I remember working in a previous life, I worked for a Christian boss, and one of his critics, somebody else that was in the

business that criticized him, said, Oh, you work for him.

He's a Christian. You always know a Christian. One hand on their Bible, one hand in your pocket. They thought he was a hypocrite. He wasn't, but that was just the way this person characterized him.

How do we know that Boaz is not like that? Well, because of the way that his workers respond. They didn't. He said, The Lord be with you. They didn't say, Blow it out your ear with all this talk about God.

You treat us like dirt, you hypocrite. No, they reply in kind. The Lord bless you. We're supposed to see in Boaz, this man described as worthy in verse 1 as a faithful Israelite.

[4 : 54] He is a godly man in contrast to his relative Elimelech. So, we're pretty sure at this point in the story that this man is going to put things right.

We don't know how he's going to do it yet, and there is still quite a way to go in chapters 3 and 4. But this impressive man, appearing as it were out of nowhere, chapter 2, verse 1, he is our hope of a happy ending.

Now, with that said, before we look more closely at Boaz, we need to see that while he has appeared out of nowhere in the story, our author wants us to see that God's hand is behind it all. God is orchestrating the whole thing. You see, on the surface, we're just told about what happened. So, Ruth knows that if she and Naomi will eat, she needs to work. And the one way that the poor were provided for in these times was through something called gleaning laws.

This was where landowners would leave some of the crops. When they went through and reaped the crops, they would leave some in their field for the poor to come along and pick and eat for themselves.

[6 : 00] It's there in Leviticus 19 and Leviticus 23. And it's also picked up in Deuteronomy where there's a connection made to God providing for His people in their history.

So, just as Israel had once been destitute in Egypt and God had provided for them, so they, through these gleaning laws, are to imitate that grace and provide for others.

It is a form of social care. The haves are to provide for the have-nots because they were once have-nots themselves. So, verse 2, Ruth says, Here, Naomi, right, I'm going to go out and glean some sheaves so that we can eat.

Actually, she's probably not Northern Irish. She wouldn't start her sentence with here. But she says, I'll go and glean. And Naomi replies. She says, Sure, that's a great idea.

Probably not. She says, Good, off you go. But the way things unfold is deliberately presented as a series of coincidences. That's what the author is doing.

[7 : 03] He's playing with us as we read here to make a point. Verse 3, She happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz.

She happened to, literally that word is, she chanced by chance. It's like saying, and as luck would have it, she stumbled into Boaz's field.

The field of the relative of Naomi's, if you remember. The one who is worthy. And then verse 4, can you see it begins, Behold, another way of saying, Ah, and look, well, well, well.

Wasn't Boaz just coming in from Bethlehem at that point? Can you see verse 4? And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and he said to his reapers. And isn't it just such a stroke of luck that he looked left instead of right and noticed Ruth among those that were gleaning?

What a stroke of luck. That's the way we could read the story. But of course, the author is playing with us. There's no luck at all, is there? There's no such thing as a coincidence.

[8 : 20] There's no such thing as luck would have it in God's world. He is orchestrating every move. He is getting our women who are in need into the orbit of this man who will care for them.

God decides every step. We saw last time he brought Naomi back to Bethlehem. He left Orpah in Moab. Ruth, he brought her back as well.

He brought Ruth to himself. He brought bread back to the house of bread. He superintends all of the details.

And here he brings Ruth into the field of Boaz. He has Boaz notice her, and he has Boaz take her into his care. God is sovereign over every square inch.

Nothing, nothing is outside his control. When the dice are rolled in the casinos in Vegas, God chooses the numbers that come up.

[9 : 34] He chooses which stocks rise and which fall. He determines who gets made redundant and who keeps their job. If you are here this morning from another country, you are here because God has brought you here.

A week on to push this right out to the corners. A week on from Charlie Kirk's memorial, he even determines where the assassin's bullet lands. There are no accidents in God's world. He is in complete control of the joys and the sorrows, of the ups and the downs. Now, Naomi made the choice to return to Bethlehem.

Orpah made her choice to stay in Moab. Ruth chose to trust the God of the covenant and to come to Bethlehem with Naomi. Boaz made the choice to choose to look this way and not that way. The wicked choose their wickedness. We have agency in our lives. Of course we do, but none of that, none of those decisions are incompatible with God's sovereign control over it all.

[10 : 42] The book of Ruth, Ruth chapter 2, is a portrait of the sovereignty of God.

So he's brought all this together. But this chapter, as I said, the spotlight is on this man, Boaz. So let's look at him. He is portrayed in three very particular ways.

First of all, he shows himself as a protector. Point number one, he is a protector. Going to glean in a context like this, as a Gentile woman, as Ruth is, would make her very vulnerable.

Naomi recognizes this. Did you notice that detail in verse 22? When she says, stick around with those people because if you're in another field, you might get assaulted. I think we might assume that it was commonplace for a woman in her position to have been assaulted.

An outsider, a foreigner coming in, she could easily have been assaulted by the men that were there, and probably nobody would have batted an eyelid. But look at how Boaz treats her. Look at verse 8.

[11 : 46] Now, listen, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but 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? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn. Boaz is a man of worth.

He is powerful. He is successful. He is influential. He uses all of that power and influence and authority to protect this needy woman.

He uses his power for good. That's surprising, isn't it, when you think about the world that we live in. A very rich and powerful man uses his status for what do we expect to follow?

A very powerful and rich and influential man uses his authority and his status for corruption. Peter Mandelson was in the news recently. Exploitation.

[12 : 51] He was in the news because of Jeffrey Epstein. Abuse. Abuse. Think of Hugh Edwards and his profile in the BBC and all of that, and yet that is how he used his influence.

That's what we expect. Corruption, exploitation, abuse. Not Boaz. Boaz uses his power and his authority to protect. So first, he shows himself as a protector.

Secondly, he shows himself as a provider. Point number two, a provider. We see this the whole way through the passage. It's really the kind of the main chunk of what's going on here.

He has already made provision in allowing Ruth to glean in the first place. In verse 9, he's giving her water to sustain her in the heat of the day. That is generous provision in and of itself. But look at verse 14.

He goes next level. Boaz gives Ruth a meal.

[14 : 01] And not just a few scraps from the great man's table. She ate until she was full. She even had leftovers. She was given a doggy bag to take away with her when she went home.

And then if that wasn't enough, look at verse 15. When she goes back to glean, he ensures that his men then make it even easier for her. Let her glean among the sheaves. The stuff that's already been bundled up.

Also pull some of those out from the bundles and leave it for her to glean and do not rebuke her. He's saying, go ahead of her and just put good stuff in her way so that she can pick it up as she goes.

Make it as easy for her as possible. And she goes back. She beats it all out. And she's got this incredible amount of stuff to take with her in order to go and make bread.

It is grace upon grace. But more than that, the provision goes even deeper than just the basic stuff in and of itself. Because in opening up his table, what is Boaz doing but bringing Ruth into his family?

[15:01] And not only her, but also the fact that when we get to verse 18, Ruth goes back to Naomi and she says, here's the stuff that I have for us. Boaz knows that he's also providing for Naomi as well.

Now, Boaz didn't need to do any of this, actually. So, gleaning laws were commanded by God's Word, but there was no civil penalty attached to them.

So, there would have been no punishment for not doing this. This is an expression of straight-up godliness. See, basic provision would have been deemed to be kind.

And if Boaz wanted, as some people do, the philanthropic sector is full of people doing their bit for the poor. That's great, but lots of it is so that people will see you doing your bit for the poor.

If Boaz had wanted to do that, well, he could have done that. He could have given her a few bits. He could have let her glean in the field. But he doesn't just provide, does he?

[16:07] He says, eat your fill. Take all of this. Come to my table. Join my family. It is abundant, generous provision. What is it that makes him able to do this?

Where does this come from? Using your authority to serve and to bless others. Where does that come from? It comes at root from humility. You see, at root, Boaz, despite all of his greatness, all of his worthiness, all of his power and authority, he is a humble man who puts others before himself.

And in that sense, he is a model for all of us how to use any authority that the Lord has given us.

Whether it is as a husband or a parent or a boss or a civil role that you might have, where you have authority over others, he is a model for us to use that authority as an opportunity to serve.

It is an opportunity for you to serve those that are under your authority and not just to serve them, but to do so with huge generosity. Clothe your service with generosity.

Whether it is with your time or kindness or provision of some kind or another. Ask yourself, could you be a more generous boss?

[17:33] Could you be a more generous parent? And I am not talking simply about buying more stuff for your children. Actually, to be generous is to be a blessing to people in a way that they will feel that generosity.

So, if that is giving somebody a pay rise in the workplace, that might be something that they need. But for lots of us, we could be more generous parents, not by giving more to our children in terms of material things, but giving them more of ourselves.

More of our time. Being more present. That is a way to be generous to those in our home who are under our authority. Generous people are humble people because they see that they are there to serve and to make other people's lives better than their own.

So, let's try and grow in generosity. But the way that we do that is by getting ourselves out of the way. By praying that God would help us to cultivate a heart for others.

And do you see, Boaz here is especially pointing us in the direction of the poor. Don't forget that Ruth is a penniless outcast who's in desperate need.

[18:51] And she doesn't come asking for a handout. Verse 7, she asked if she could follow the regular reapers and pick up what they left. Can I just come and work in this field and take whatever is there?

I'm going to trust the Lord that He'll provide. Like the foreign woman in Matthew 15, she'll take the crumbs that fall from the master's table. In that sense, she is to be highly commended. But she is destitute.

I know it's hard in a context where the welfare state has confused how we think about caring for the poor. But that doesn't remove our responsibility to this kind of personal, generous care for those who the Lord brings into our fields.

I see loads of this going on in our church and it's hugely encouraging. People opening their home. You get people around your dining table. I know many of you are quietly giving money to help people here and there.

Providing transport for those who need it. Help with filling in forms in order that people can access what they're entitled to through the state. On it goes. But let's not think that because the state keeps helping itself to more of our taxes in order to fund a broken benefit system, that we're helping the poor.

[20:03] Let me ask you, do you have poor people in your life in a meaningful way? You see on the notices this morning, the Winter Night Shelter is being run again this year.

The Winter Night Shelter is a great place to start. Actually, face-to-face, personal care of people who are in need. We should be pursuing that. Boaz shows himself as a protector, as a provider. But we should see he also then, thirdly, plays the role of a priest king. You might miss this, but it's an important point. Look again at the table. Verse 14.

Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine. The significance of the elements of this meal should not be missed. Bread and wine.

Now our minds immediately go to the Lord's Supper. But before we even get to the Lord's Supper, there is an important connection to see. Did you notice verse 11? Boaz has already described Ruth in a way that sounds familiar.

[21 : 11] She has been described in Abrahamic terms. I've heard how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. Like Abraham, she left the land of her parents and went to the land of promise.

And in this meal, there is an allusion to the meal that Melchizedek, the priest king, served Abraham in Genesis 14, 18. So what we're supposed to see here is that Ruth is a new Sarah.

Do you remember? She said in chapter 1 she wanted to be buried in the land like Sarah had said.

And so here she is carrying on Abraham's role in the story as a new Sarah.

And in that sense, we're supposed to see Boaz as a priest king figure like Melchizedek serving Ruth in this way. It is in this capacity as priest king that he protects her and provides for her.

And this will also inform how he carries out his role, verse 20, as a redeemer. We'll come to that later. So our author is shining a spotlight onto this man who is a protector, a provider, and a priest king.

[22 : 24] He's doing all of this. Do you remember? Do you remember in the chaos of the days when the judges ruled? Here is a man who is, in the context of great ungodliness, acting in a profoundly godly way.

And he's doing that so that we will see in Boaz that we have a new Adam. Adam, in the beginning, was called to protect and provide and to sacrifice and intercede as a priest king for his wife.

That was what he was supposed to do for Eve. But he catastrophically failed and dragged us all with him into that failure. And Elimelech followed that example.

Elimelech misled his wife. He didn't protect or provide for his family, and he certainly didn't serve them as a priest king. And so, like Adam being cast out of God's presence in the garden, Elimelech and his family were cast out of God's presence in the land.

Adam and Elimelech brought death. But here, Boaz stepped in, and with generous grace, he has restored what was lost. And he will, we hope, we know, he'll bring redemption to this family and to their line.

[23 : 37] We read this and we say, hooray for Boaz. But of course, as we hear this, we're looking over Boaz's shoulder. We're looking over his shoulder into the distance at someone who is there, not just a new Adam, but the second Adam.

Boaz's great descendant, the Lord Jesus. Boaz is a great example of godly virtue. He is the star, or one of the stars of this lovely love story, the book of Ruth. But that is not enough for us.

We need more than that. His story is in the past. We need the better Boaz to come as our protector, our provider, and our priest king, and ultimately to redeem us from our spiritual destitution.

The first Adam widowed us, and he squandered everything that we had. The Lord Jesus meets us at our point of need, and he protects us from Satan and sin. He forgives us.

He brings us into his family. He provides for us with abundant grace, and he welcomes us around his table to share in his presence and to nourish our souls. Every time we share the Lord's Supper, this is what is happening.

[24 : 46] Our priest king, the one who sacrifices and intercedes for us, reminds us, verse 12, can you see, if we have taken shelter under his wings, that is, if we have put our faith in the Lord Jesus, we are in his family, and we are welcome there.

Despite all that we have done, despite all of our Adamic qualities, the way we have followed our first father, Adam, he covers our sin. He forgives us.

He restores us. He provides generously for us in Christ. We're not just merely forgiven, but we are given Christ. And in him, we are welcome at the Father's table.

Jesus is the better Boaz who showers us with grace upon grace upon grace upon grace upon grace. Have you experienced this for yourself?

Have you put your faith in the Lord Jesus and experienced the forgiveness for sins that comes from him? You can tell if you've done that.

[25 : 50] You see that in the story here. Because if you have received his grace, it does something to you the way that it did for Ruth and Naomi. Two things to see. First of all, grace humbles us.

Verse 10. Look at what happens to Ruth when she experiences Boaz's generosity. She fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, Why have I found favor in your eyes that you should take care of notice of me since I am a foreigner?

Who is the him there? She bowed on the ground and said to him, Is it God or is it Boaz?

Was it God who took notice of her or Boaz? The answer is yes. God showed his grace and favor through Boaz. Boaz is the means by which God is gracious to Ruth.

Any kindness that we are shown by anyone is always ultimately from God. But this is the effect that true grace has on the heart of any true believer.

[26 : 55] It humbles us. We know that we haven't done anything to deserve this favor. We haven't earned any of his gifts. You can't earn a gift.

All we can do is fall on our face with thankfulness. That is the only right response to the grace of God. Grace humbles us.

But can you see it also transforms? Grace transforms. Verse 20. Look at Naomi. Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, When we left her at the end of chapter 1, she was in this cycle of bitterness.

Call me Mara for the Almighty. Not Yahweh. Not the covenant name. The Almighty. The cold, fatalistic God that I think is doing this to me to make me sad.

He has made me bitter. He's being unfairly harsh. Look at the change. She's seen what God has done through Boaz. What He's done for both her and for Ruth.

[28 : 13] And she speaks of the Lord's covenant kindness. His hesed. She's found joy in the Lord again. She can now see His covenant faithfulness to her in this generous provision that she has received.

In many ways, in many ways, her circumstances haven't changed one bit. She's still homeless. She still doesn't have an heir. But her heart that had been hardened towards God has been softened.

Her faith has been restored. In short, through God's grace, she has been transformed. And again, we need to see that that is what true grace does to the human heart.

It transforms us from looking at ourselves, navel-gazing, self-obsessed, thinking life's all about me. It turns us from being people like that to people that look up and praise and glorify our God. In many ways, that is the mark of genuine faith.

Your circumstances haven't changed, but you can see that God is for you. Whatever is going on, you recognize that He is worthy of your praise, and you praise Him for all that you have.

[29 : 30] You don't despise Him for what you don't have. You can experience even great loss, and you can still trust that God is gracious beyond measure.

A heart that is captured by the grace of the Lord Jesus will always be changed, sometimes slowly, but always unmistakably. So, look up.

Look up. See what you have in Christ. He has been so kind to you. Even in the darkest struggle that you may be going through, look up, because you can rejoice in what you have in Christ.

Well, the remarkable Boaz is central to this part of the story, but he's really pointing us to the one who would come after him, and has now come, the Lord Jesus, the one who is our better protector, provider, and redeemer.

The Lord Jesus has taken notice of you. The Lord Jesus' kindness has not forsaken you. And whatever you're going through, the Lord Jesus will comfort you.

[30 : 40] His love is very deep. Let's pray together.