

Chapter 5: A Picture of Grace
Ruth 2:4-16

This Week's Prayer
Requests:

Memory Verse: "The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge." Ruth 4:12

Text: "Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, 'The LORD *be* with you!' And they answered him, 'The LORD bless you!' ⁵ Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, 'Whose young woman *is* this?' So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, 'It *is* the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. And she said, "Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves." So she came and has continued from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house.' Then Boaz said to Ruth, 'You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women. '*Let* your eyes *be* on the field which they reap, and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.' So she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground, and said to him, 'Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I *am* a foreigner?' And Boaz answered and said to her, 'It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and *how* you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before. The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.' Then she said, 'Let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you have comforted me, and have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants.' Now Boaz said to her at mealtime, 'Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.' So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed parched *grain* to her; and she ate and was satisfied, and kept some back. And when she rose up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, 'Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. Also let *grain* from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave *it* that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.'"

What is a person with initiative like?

Monday

Last week we looked at verses 1-3 of this chapter and we saw how we as believers are to seek favor from God in all circumstances, whether it be as simple as finding our daily bread, as big as deciding what job to take, or as life altering as deciding whom to marry. We saw in the example of Ruth that as we seek God's favor we are to:

1. Put our faith in the word of God (v. 2),
2. Exercise honest efforts (v.2),
3. Give respect to whom respect is due (v. 2),
4. Move out in humility rather than pride (v. 2),
5. Listen to the sensible advice of those who care for you most (v. 2), and
6. Trust in God's providence to direct your steps (vv. 1, 3).

What is the difference between initiative born of love and initiative born of something else?

So here we see Ruth in all her marvelous quality. **We see her initiative born of love** and a desire to care for her mother-in-law. Notice in verse two, Naomi does not command Ruth to get out and work. Ruth says, "Let me go to the field, and glean." Ruth has committed herself to Naomi with amazing devotion and she takes the initiative to work and provide for her.

How important do you find humility, graciousness and common courtesy to be in your daily walk?

We see Ruth's humility. She knows how to take initiative without being presumptuous. In verse 2 she says, "Please" to her mother-in-law. In verse 7 the servants report to Boaz how she had approached them that morning. She said, "Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves." She does not demand a handout. She does not presume the right even to glean, though God had given her that right. All she wants to do is gather up the leftovers after the reapers are done, and she asks permission even to do that. She is like another foreign woman who came to Jesus and said, "Lord, even the little dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." To which, Jesus responded with that wonderful statement, "O Woman, Great is your faith." Ruth knows how to take initiative, and yet she is not pushy or presumptuous but humble, gracious and polite.

We see Ruth's industry. She is an amazing worker. Verse 7 continues, "So she came and has continued from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house." She has continued faithfully from early morning until now. Verse 17 will tell us that she gleaned until evening and then before she quit, she beat out what she gleaned, measured it and took it home to Naomi. There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit wants us to admire and copy Ruth's industry. She took initiative because of love

What are the marks of an industrious person?

to care for her destitute mother-in-law. She was humble and meek and did not put herself forward presumptuously. And she worked hard from sun up to sundown. Initiative, lowliness of heart and mind, industry, worthy traits.

How different would the story have been had Boaz's servant been forced to give an account of laziness concerning Ruth rather than industry?

And what is happening as she moves out seeking favor? Do you sense the merciful providence behind all this? Notice verse 3: "Then she left, 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 of the family of Elimelech." She "happened to come?" You don't have to write your theology in every line. Sometimes the Holy Spirit deems it good to leave something ambiguous and give us opportunity to really listen and fill in the blank. The answer can be given later. It will be. In fact, Naomi, with her grand theology of God's sovereignty is the one who will give the answer. And the answer is God - the merciful providence of God guiding Ruth as she gleans. Ruth "happened" to come to Boaz's field because God is gracious and sovereign even when He is silent. As the proverb (16:9) says, "A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps."

So Ruth sets out that morning to glean in the fields. She was looking for someone who would show her grace. Grace is favor bestowed on someone who doesn't deserve it and cannot earn it. As a woman, a poor widow, and an alien, Ruth had no claims on anyone. She was at the lowest rung of the social ladder. For all of her worthy qualities, she is a beggar and we will see very clearly in verse 12 that she is blessed, not because she has earned blessing through her love, humility or industry. Her relationship to God is not that of employer and employee. She is not coming out this morning in the hope of doing some work that will allow her to demand wages of Him. There is an altogether different reason for her blessing and indeed it was this underlying truth and reality that gave birth to all of these other qualities of Ruth.

But before we get there, we must see grace in operation. Grace in action. Bible students and scholars have long seen in Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer, a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ in His relationship to His bride, the church. Like Ruth, the lost sinner is outside the covenant family of God, bankrupt, destitute, beggars with no claim on God's mercy whatsoever. But God took the initiative and provided a way for us to enter His family through faith in Jesus Christ. We will have more to say about this picture in Boaz and our relationship to Christ as we consider the law of the "kinsman-redeemer" in the next chapter. So let's just let that sort of dangle there for a couple of weeks

and this week let's consider the actions of Boaz and see if we can't better understand the grace of God Himself as it worked through this man to bless Ruth. What does grace do for those like Ruth, who is a child of God and have taken her refuge beneath the wings of God? What does grace do for the children of God? These are the questions we want to answer this week

Tuesday

What can we tell about Boaz from the way He greets his workers?

The first operation of grace is this:

1. Grace makes the first move (vv. 4-7).

Boaz comes out to the field that morning and verse 4 shows that he is a man of God. Why else would the author pause to record the way Boaz greeted his servants? "Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, 'The Lord be with you!' And they answered him, 'The Lord bless you.'" If you want to know a man's relation to God, you need to find out how far God has penetrated into and saturated the details of his everyday life, even his simple greetings and way of addressing his employees. Evidently Boaz was such a God-saturated man that his farming business and his relationship to his employees was shot through with God. He greeted them with God and they so respected him that they greeted him back accordingly. And we will see in the weeks ahead that this is definitely not hypocrisy or simply pious platitudes, but there is a real devotion and depth in this man's heart.

How does Boaz take the initiative in granting favor to Ruth?

So he sees Ruth and asks, "Whose young woman is this?" His foreman over the reapers tells him and Boaz immediately recalls the story that he has heard around the town as he indicates in verse 11, "It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband."

This leads to everything that follows after. Grace means that God makes the first move to come to our aid, not because we deserve anything, but because He loves us and wants us for Himself. "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). God took the initiative in salvation when we were spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1-10), without strength (Rom. 5:6), sinners (Rom. 5:8), and even His enemies (Rom. 5:10). Salvation was not an afterthought of God but that which He planned from eternity. And though we are not talking about steps toward Ruth's salvation here - she has already been saved by her faith at some unspecified time in the past, she has already come to know the Lord personally as is evident from verse 12 in this chapter and verses 16 and 17 in chapter one - we

How does God take the initiative towards us?

still see that God's grace is the same as He continues to work blessing and sanctification in our lives after we come to know Him. He makes the first move.

Jesus prayed to the Father, "Sanctify them by Your truth." The Scripture says, "He who has begun a good work in you, will be faithful to complete it" (Phil. 1:16). Jesus is the "author and finisher" of our faith (Heb. 12:2). "Having begun in the Spirit, are we now being made perfect by the flesh?" The answer is "No" according to Galatians chapter 3. And though we walk in the Spirit and do what we know to do to put ourselves in the path of God's favor even as Ruth did with all diligence, we are still unworthy and undeserving as Ruth acknowledges in verse 10. It is God who must act and take the initiative with us. He continues to do so. He continues to give, even as He gave to Ruth initially that she might have the heart to do what she did. God is ever the giver. He is never our debtor that He should owe us anything. So Ruth understanding this says in a kind of shocked and humble wonder, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"

Wednesday

How does God speak to us? What Scripture supports your answer?

A second operation of grace that we see in this text:

2. Grace speaks to us (v. 8).

It was Boaz who first spoke to Ruth. In fact, she would not have dared to speak to such a man. Not only was he a stranger but he was "the lord of the harvest" and a great man. What right would she as a widow, a beggar and a stranger have to address a man like Boaz?

But then in verse 8 a surprising and delightful thing happens. He approaches her and says, "You will listen, my daughter, will you not?" That is a very good and interesting question isn't it. God in His grace often comes to us and asks us, "You will listen my son, will you not?" "You will listen my daughter, will you not?" "Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women."

When God calls us to "listen" to Him today, how should we respond?

What are the consequences of listening to Him today? Consider Proverbs 19:16 and 19:20 in giving your answer.

The next act of grace in this passage is this:

How does an employer normally treat his employees?

3. Grace promises to protect and provide for our needs (vv. 9, 14-16).

The account of Boaz's generosity is simply incredible here. In Verse 8, he calls Ruth, "my daughter" which is a great term of endearment. The significance is that he is intent on treating her like a member of his own family. He instructs his young men to protect her in verse 9 and the young women to work with her. She was to walk with the female servants who followed immediately after the reapers. In other words, Ruth had first chance at the best of the gleanings. Boaz even instructed his workers to allow her to glean among the sheaves and told them to deliberately drop some of the harvest so she could pick it up in verses 15 and 16. Ruth is also given access to his own resources that his men have provided to satisfy her thirst in verse 9.

How does a landowner normally treat beggars?

This is not treatment given to a normal beggar and gleaner, who comes to the fields after the harvest. In fact, - and this is amazing - in verse 14 Boaz asks her to come and eat at his table with his servants. Then he becomes a personal servant to her, personally waiting on and handing her the food. That is astonishing, Beloved. She came to this field as a beggar and what has God done through this man!?

What does Boaz do?

What a marvelous picture of the grace of God. The master became like the servants that he might show his love to this foreigner and outcast. He takes every possible step to protect and provide for her needs, some that she is not even aware of, such as the command to his young men to be generous and let bundles of grain fall purposely for her.

The Lord Jesus came to this earth as a servant (Phil. 2:1-11) that He might save us and make us a part of His family, that He might in amazing generosity share with us, the undeserving, His riches. He has shared with us the riches of His mercy and love (Eph. 2:4), the riches of His wisdom and knowledge (Rom. 11:33), His riches in glory (Phil.

4:19), even His “unsearchable riches” that are to come (Eph. 3:8). He has even shared with us the infinite riches of Himself, He who is a treasure beyond comprehension. We, undeserving sinners and foreigners, are now members of His family and have all of His inheritance at our disposal.

Thursday

What else does grace do:

How should we respond to the grace God provides?

4. Grace encourages our hearts (vv. 10-13).

Ruth’s response to Boaz was one of humility and gratitude. She acknowledge her own unworthiness and received his grace. She believed his promises and rejoiced in them. There was no need for Ruth to worry, for the wealthy lord of the harvest would care for her and Naomi. How did she know he would care for her? He gave her his promise, and she knew he could be trusted.

Ruth neither looked back at her tragic past, nor did she look at herself and consider her difficult plight. She fell at the feet of the master and submitted herself to him. She looked away from her poverty and focused on his riches. She forgot her fears and rested on his promise. This is an example for us all.

Many people are miserable because they don’t obey the command of Hebrews 12:2 to fix their eyes on Jesus. They spend so much time looking at themselves, their circumstances, and other people that they fail to do what Ruth did, namely center their attention on their Master. Instead of resting in His perfections, they focus on their own imperfections. Instead of seeing His spiritual riches, they complain about their bankruptcy. They go to church “to get their needs met” instead of going to church to worship the God who is greater than any need.

Now look at Ruth’s response to Boaz for a moment in verse 13. “Then she said, ‘Let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you have comforted me, and have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants.’”

The word for “comfort” is nacham. In this verb tense it is a word that speaks of a powerful unyielding tender affection. It is the word that appears in the 23rd psalm, “your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” It

How does God encourage our hearts by His word?

is the word that begins the book of consolation from the prophet Isaiah, ““Comfort, yes, comfort My people!’ says your God” (Isaiah 40:1). It is the word used in Is. 66:13, “As one whom his mother comforts, So I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.” The prophet Hosea says that God’s comfort grows warm and tender towards His children and His heart actually churns within Him (Hos. 11:8).

The phrase “spoken kindly” in verse 13 means literally, “spoken to the heart.” The word of God comes to us and speaks right into the hearts of His people to give us encouragement and hope (Romans 15:4). If we will listen, as Ruth listened to Boaz, what a tremendous source of comfort and encouragement for us. If you listen to the voices of the world, however, you will be discouraged and drawn down into anxiety and despair. Listen to the voice of God from His word and let your heart be encouraged.

What are the different effects of the world’s voice, versus God’s voice?

Friday

Today we consider one final operation of grace seen in this passage:

5. Grace sees to it that we are satisfied (v. 14, 18).

Ruth did not come away from that day hungry according to verse 14 tells us; and neither did Naomi according to verse 18. Why?

In order to answer that question, let’s go back to verse 12, which is, rightly understood as the centerpiece of this entire book, “The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.”

What is the relationship between thanksgiving and humility?

To fully understand this verse, let's back up a little further still. Ruth raises a very important and profound question in verse 10, which is one that we all need to ask God. "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me?" Hardly anything in our life is more important than the answer we get.

Ruth knows that she is a Moabitess. From a natural viewpoint she has three strikes against her. She's a widow, an outsider, and a poor beggar. She does not resent this, but accepts it. As a non-Israelite she does not expect any special treatment. Her response to Boaz's kindness is astonishment. She is very different from most people today. We expect kindness and are astonished and resentful, if we don't get our perceived rights. But Ruth expresses her sense of unworthiness by falling on her face and bowing to the ground.

Is grace ever intended to make us proud? Why or why not?

Thanksgiving and humility are in bed together. Humble people are thankful people. Thankful people are humble people. Humble people are surprised when others remember their birthday and amazed at all gifts, even hand-me-down socks, because they sense their own unworthiness. Proud people don't say thanks and are resentful when people forget their birthday or give them things that don't measure up to their perceived sense of worth. Humble people are made even more humble by being treated graciously. Proud people think they are just getting what they deserve and make themselves into fools before God. Grace is never intended to lift us out of lowliness or heart for even our God in all of His magnificence is "lowly of heart" (Matt. 11:29), and if that phrase describing God has never in your life grabbed your mind, sent you into a tailspin of fascination and astonishment, then you have quite frankly been asleep at the switch. No, grace is intended not to make us proud but to keep us lowly in heart and yet at the same time make us very, very happy in God;

So, Ruth asks why Boaz has treated her so graciously. She really wants to know. Verses 11 and 12 are crucial. Boaz answers by saying, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know. The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge."

Now notice: When Ruth asks why she is being shown grace, Boaz does not answer: "Grace has no conditions." He answers her question. How?

What is the relationship between grace and works?

By saying, “Because you have loved Naomi so much that you were willing to leave father and mother to serve her in a strange land.”

This raises the question: Does this mean that the Holy Spirit wants us to think of Ruth’s love for Naomi as a work that merits Boaz’s favor and the favor of God? Does He want us to think of grace as a kindness we earn? I don't think so. If Ruth has earned the favor of Boaz, then we must think of her as a kind of employee rendering service to Boaz, her employer, which is so valuable that he is indebted to repay her. That is not the image the Holy Spirit wants to create in our minds here. Verse 12 gives us another image that makes this kind of employer-employee image impossible.

Why does God reward Ruth?

Boaz says in verse 12 that God is really the one who is rewarding Ruth for her love to Naomi. Boaz recognizes that he is only the instrument of God (as we will learn from Naomi also next week). But now notice the words, “under whose wings you have come for refuge.” These words do not encourage us to picture Ruth as an employee of God providing needed labor which He then as employer rewards with a good wage. The picture is of God as a great winged Eagle and Ruth as a threatened little child running to find safety under the Eagle's wings. The implication of verse 12 is that God rewards Ruth because she has sought refuge under his wings.

This is a very common teaching in the Old Testament. For example, Psalm 57:1 says, “Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge.” Did you hear the word “for.” Be merciful to me, for my soul trusts in You and in You I take refuge.

Why should God show mercy to Ruth? Simply because she has sought refuge under his wings. Get this, Beloved, she has counted his protection better than all others, including the protection of her own father and mother’s house and her own homeland. She has set her heart on God for hope and joy above all others and to the exclusion of all others. When a person does this, suddenly God’s honor is at stake and He will be merciful. If you plead God’s value as the source of your hope instead of pleading your own value as the source of God’s hope, then you glorify Him, not yourself, and His unwavering commitment to His own glory and His own value engages all His heart for your protection and joy.

How does Ruth give glory to God?

But now having said that, we must ask how Ruth's love for Naomi and her leaving her own family relate to her seeking refuge under the wings of God. The most likely suggestion is that Ruth was able to leave the refuge of her father and mother in Moab because she had found a refuge under the wings of God which was far superior. Evidently she saw a need in Naomi's life and sensed God calling her to meet that need. The Eagle moved toward Naomi and in order to keep enjoying the refuge of God's wings Ruth moves too, and commits herself to care for Naomi with the very same care and comfort she is receiving from her Eagle.

How does Ruth taking refuge under God's wings turn into a blessing for Naomi?

So the relation between taking refuge under God's wings on the one hand and leaving home to care for Naomi on the other hand, is that being under God's wings enabled Ruth to forsake human refuge and give herself in love to Naomi. Or another way to say it is that leaving home and loving Naomi are the result and evidence of Ruth having truly taken refuge in God.

Now back to Ruth's question in verse 10, "Why have I found favor?" The answer is that she has taken refuge under the wings of God and this has given her the freedom and desire to leave home and love Naomi. She has not earned mercy from God or Boaz. She is not their employee. They are not paying her wages for her work. And that word "work" in verse 12 is simply עָמַל (*poal*), deed, what you have done. On the contrary, she has honored them by admitting her need for their work and simply taken refuge in their generosity.

This is the message of the gospel in the Old Testament and the New Testament. God will have mercy on anyone (Palestinian or Israelite or American) who humbles himself like Ruth and takes refuge under the wings of God. Jesus said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate."

All the Pharisees had to do was to take refuge under the wings of Jesus: stop justifying themselves; stop relying on themselves; stop glorifying themselves; stop treating God like an employer obligated to give them wages; recognize that salvation is by grace through faith and live with the astonished humility of Ruth. But they would not. Ruth was not their model. No falling on their face before Jesus for them. No bowing down. No astonishment at grace. They kept their pride and entered hell.

Don't be like the Pharisees, Beloved. Be like Ruth. God is not an employer looking for employees. He is an Eagle looking for people who will take refuge under His wings. He is looking for people who will leave father and mother and homeland or anything else that may hold us back from treasuring Him and living a life of love under the wings of Jesus.

Hymn: Safe In The Arms Of Jesus

Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on His gentle breast;
There by His love o'ershaded,
Sweetly my soul shall rest.
Hark! 'tis the voice of angels
Borne in a song to me,
Over the fields of glory,
Over the jasper sea.

Refrain:

Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on His gentle breast;
There by His love o'ershaded,
Sweetly my soul shall rest.

Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe from corroding care,
Safe from the world's temptations;
Sin cannot harm me there.
Free from the blight of sorrow,
Free from my doubts and fears;
Only a few more trials,
Only a few more tears!

Jesus, my heart's dear Refuge,
Jesus has died for me;
Firm on the Rock of Ages
Ever my trust shall be.
Here let me wait with patience,
Wait till the night is o'er;
Wait till I see the morning
Break on the golden shore.

Words and Music: Frances J. Crosby, 1868