



Ruth 2
A Hollywood Love Story: Ruth
Generosity

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This morning we continue on our journey through the book of Ruth. It's an amazing slice of history through which we see the providence of God bringing two people together to make an important link in history that still impacts us today. And so through the lives of Ruth and Boaz – and we'll be introduced to him in just a moment in the passage – we see God's love demonstrated as he works out his purposes through these two people.

Last week we saw Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, coming back to Israel as grieving women, especially Naomi. They came to Bethlehem, the town where Naomi and her husband had met and gotten married and gave birth to their boys, before leaving for a decade. So these two women have rolled into town, and the last words of chapter one tell us that they arrived in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning. So everyone is gearing up for harvest season, which is a sign of good things to come. And that gets us into chapter two of Ruth. This is God's Word to you and me today. **Ruth 2 Here.**

As with last week, you may want to keep your Bibles open for your own notes, or to follow along with what we're looking at. Let's dive in. **Jewish law provided for the care of the poor by allowing people to follow along behind the harvesters and pick up leftover grain for themselves.** This is called "gleaning" and the law allowing it comes straight from Leviticus and is reiterated in Deuteronomy. Ruth says she's going to do this behind "anyone in whose eyes [she] gains favor." In reality, she didn't need that kind of permission. She could just show up and start going to work looking for leftovers. Being a foreigner, she might not have been completely aware of what was acceptable, or maybe she thought that as a foreigner she didn't have that right automatically, or maybe she was just trying to be extra cautious and appreciative of the opportunity. Regardless, she and Naomi have very little after they left Moab and have now returned here, and so she goes to provide for herself and for Naomi. She takes initiative as she follows God's leading.

Now, in our culture, we would probably translate the second sentence of verse three "As luck would have it, she ended up in her relative's field" but

we're going to see that this is anything but luck. By the providence of God, Ruth finds herself gleaning in the field that belongs to Boaz, a relative of Naomi's on her deceased husband's side of the family.

And soon after she arrives, Boaz shows up to check on how things are going. Coincidence? No. It's providence. He's a Godly man, and he looks out over the field as folks are working, and he greets them with a blessing, and they return the blessing to him. But as he's looking out over the field, he notices that something is a little different. We read in the next verse: **Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, "Whose young woman is that?" (Ruth 2:5).** Someone is out there who hasn't been there before, and she catches Boaz's eye. The question he asks of the supervisor, or foreman, seems a little odd to us, "Whose young woman is that?" but it would have not been unusual in their day. We would simply say, "Who's that?" He is simply recognizing that Ruth is not normally working here, and in his mind, she must normally work for someone else, whom he probably knows. Boaz wants to know who that is.

In verses 6-7, the conversation between the two guys continues, with the foreman explaining that she's from Moab, that she's come here with Naomi, how she asked for permission to work, how diligently she's worked, and so forth. **Then we read of Boaz's conversation with Ruth, his extension of provision and protection to her, and more in verses 8-16.**

He doesn't have to do any of this. This is all grace. He's looking out for her safety (as a foreigner and woman on her own, her safety would be a concern), he invites her to join in at the meal, and he helps her to provide for herself. He's rolling out the red carpet. Yes, he's grateful for how she has helped Naomi...but he's going way beyond the call of duty here as he orders his men to even leave some grain stalks for her to pick up, and that even if she pulls some grain out of the bundles that they've gathered – which gleaners weren't supposed to do – he's saying, "even if she does that, let her go. Don't embarrass her even if she gathers grain there."

When she's done at the end of the day, she's gathered a lot of grain. Verse 17 tells us how much she gathered – about an ephah. Do you know how

much that is? Neither do I. Actually, the NIV's footnote says it's about 22 liters. Since I'm American, that footnote is worthless. Other translations note that an ephah was equal to about 20 quarts. For me, "20 quarts" is about as helpful as "22 liters." Probably you all know that four quarts equals a gallon, but I learned it this week – and not for the first time. Why they don't just say an ephah is equal to about 5 gallons, I have no idea. Everyone knows how big a gallon jug of milk is, and I can envision what five of them filled with grain would look like.

Anyway, Naomi notices that it's a lot, and it's her response that indicates that she had a lot of grain. I mean, she's like, "Wow, girlfriend! Where did you go today? Whose field were you in? Blessed be the man who noticed you!" Apparently, when Ruth headed out in the morning, Naomi didn't give her any advice on where to go, other than perhaps, "follow the workers out of town and find a good field to work in." It really was the hand of the Lord that brought her to Boaz, who had heard about the big help Ruth had been to Naomi. And so he blessed her in return. So it's not like Naomi is scheming and orchestrating this herself – she's as clueless as anyone. But she's happy for Ruth, and for herself, that they've been so blessed.

In the last half of verse 19, Ruth shares then who's plot it was she was gleaning from, and Naomi tells her that Boaz is one of Naomi's relatives. Actually, she says, "our" close relative – letting Ruth know that she's fully a part of Naomi's family as far as Naomi is concerned. **But not only is Boaz a relative, he's a Kinsman-Redeemer (guardian-redeemer in the NIV).** We're going to see this phrase come up a few times the rest of the way through Ruth. We talked briefly last week about how a brother of a deceased man would marry the widow if there weren't any children. We've got that going on here in the book of Ruth. But there's also this kinsman-redeemer thing going on, which isn't about marriage, but about property and finances. Essentially, when a person sold property out of economic necessity – which had probably happened 10 years earlier when Naomi and Elimelech left for Moab – a kinsman, which is a relative, had the responsibility of helping out that person by re-buying their land and restoring it back to them when they were able to do that. In other words, it was re-purchased and given back to the original owners. By doing this, the original owner is brought back into

their right place, or redeemed. Hence the English phrase “kinsman-redeemer” (and the NIV’s “guardian-redeemer” helps convey their protective role in this, as well). Boaz falls into this category of relative, which Naomi shares with Ruth. You can see the puzzle pieces beginning to be put together. And then chapter 2 closes out by letting us know that Ruth kept gleaning until not only the barley harvest was finished, but also the wheat harvest, too. This would have been about 7 or 8 weeks total that the harvest time lasted.

OK, this is a lengthy passage, and hopefully I've helped explain some of the cultural and religious things going on that are foreign to us and made it a little more understandable for us all.

There are three things I want to highlight for us. **The first is the strong work ethic that Ruth has.** God has plans, and God orchestrates all of this...but if Ruth didn't go out with the other workers, if she didn't walk out onto a field and start working, God's purposes would have had to come to fruition a different way or not at all. She had to get off her rear and go knock on some doors and see which ones God was going to open. And God guided her to Boaz's field. So thanks to Ruth's initiative, her willingness to step out and take a risk, the Lord led her and blessed her and opened up doors of blessing for her that had ramifications that still impact us today. And it's the same for us. We can step into the opportunities God seems to be providing, and see where they go and see where God leads us.

About 4 ½ years ago I found out that this church was looking for a new pastor. I didn't know then what God's will would be for my life or for this church, but I took the initiative and went to work putting my name in the hat, going through the interview process, spent a lot of time in prayer, and ultimately God opened the door for me as pastor. And on the first Sunday in November, four years ago, I led my first worship service here at Rose Hill. It wouldn't have happened if I hadn't taken that initiative/done that hard work.

And now, as a congregation, one of the things we're doing is looking at our facilities and asking some questions about them, our use of them, asking if there are there things we could do so that our facilities would serve us better as a church, and help us to bear witness to the world around us so the

Kingdom of God would grow here at Rose Hill. And who knows where these conversations with the architects, and among ourselves will lead. But we're taking that initiative, doing the hard work, stepping out and seeing where God leads, much like Ruth did, to explore the possibilities and see what God brings to fruition...and sometimes God has more in store for us than we think possible, which happens with Ruth.

Second, we see that we really ought to take a long, hard look at the “coincidences” of life, and discern if maybe God isn't speaking to us through them. A couple months ago or so, I mentioned that I like to call “potluck” meals “pot-blessed” meals. You can call it trivial. But it's a way for us to be reminded of God's continual presence with us and provision for us. God is not distant and hands-off in this world and in our lives. **“Luck” and “coincidence” are not the language of the Bible.** I've heard people say, “A coincidence is actually a God-incidence.” They are the times that God moves in our lives and there's a happening that's attributable to him. And through those things God is speaking to us, leading us, correcting us, and nurturing us. So look closely at things that seem like coincidence, and see what God might be saying to you or where he might be leading you through them.

Lastly, we see incredible generosity from Boaz to Ruth. First, he shows generous hospitality as he's welcomed her, blessed her, and bent over backwards to help her, going beyond what the Old Testament called him to do. He's a model for us in our own hospitality here at the church and in our communities. This is the kind of hospitality that makes people sit up and take notice, and say, “Wow, that person, that family, that church, really went the extra mile. They blessed my socks off.”

You know, every church on the face of the planet thinks they're warm and friendly. And all of them are...to themselves. *Not* all of them are warm and friendly to others. The true test of whether or not the love of God is present in a church is not how well Christians care for one another (though that is important and is one way to see the love of God), but how they care for other people. How are people welcomed on Sunday morning and impacted the rest of the week as well, by people who follow Jesus? Do we roll out the red carpet? Do we engage them in conversation over coffee during fellowship

hour? Maybe introduce them to another person here at the church? Or what happens when someone moves into the neighborhood, or into the apartment complex? Do we take that opportunity to welcome them, to get to know them a bit, maybe bring them a meal or a housewarming gift or offer a hand moving furniture? I'm not going to say we're a perfect model of this...we've missed more opportunities than we've done...but we took a housewarming gift to our next-door-neighbors when they moved in, and when they had a baby a few months ago, we brought a gift over...they're fairly devout Jews and so when their baby boy had his circumcision ceremony on the 8th day of his life, we went to that...we've invited our neighbors to our kids birthdays, we've gone out to meals with an elderly man who lives across the street from us. We've tried to be hospitable and kind to the people in our community.

The point is: Boaz was generous in his hospitality, and he's a model for us to follow. And then, second, he was also generous financially, when we recognize that the grain being harvested is like money in the flour jar to him – it feeds his family, it's a tradable commodity for other things, and could be sold at the market. He encouraged his laborers to let Ruth glean – including in places she wasn't supposed to, and he even encouraged them to intentionally leave stuff for her to pick up for herself. So he's not just fulfilling the obligation he has as a devout Jew, but he's going above and beyond, in an act of generosity. Like Boaz, we have a myriad of ways to be generous in our own lives as well: in our hospitality as Boaz did as well, in our service to people in the community, in our service to people in the church, and in other ways too. **And like Boaz, we have the opportunity to be generous is in our financial giving.**

This past week the members and friends of Rose Hill received in the mail a letter from me accompanied by a card on which we're all encouraged to make a financial pledge in support of the ministries of Rose Hill for 2017. If you didn't get one and you'd like to participate, you can pick one up at the Info Center in the lobby. This is a pledge of our financial generosity. The actual giving is where we live that out. And things can change over time – for the better or for the worse. Regardless: This is an opportunity to take a step of faith, and pledge generously. What that looks like is different for everyone, because: **Generosity isn't defined so much by the need that exists, but by**

the manner in which the giver gives. For instance: In Mark 12, Jesus highlighted a woman who put two pennies in the offering box as a woman who gave with great generosity compared to those who put in larger amounts because it was all she had. What she gave was unexpected. Boaz was generous, as he did the unexpected. And I'm asking each of us to consider our level of generosity as we prayerfully make our financial pledge for 2017, and bring those cards back next Sunday, where we'll give them as an act of worship.

Your pledge helps our board of elders to set a budget for the coming year – for everything from salaries to utilities to funding ministries to facilities maintenance, and more. **We give away the gospel message in everything that we do as a church, but it still costs something.** One of those costs is financial, and the only support we have for it comes from people like ourselves, who consider Rose Hill their home church, who give generously. And through your generous giving...and through our collective generosity in ministry, in service, and more, we bless one another and the community around us with help, hope, and the Good News of Jesus Christ

For Boaz: **His generosity blessed Ruth and Naomi.** They're overwhelmed with what Ruth collected in the field. It brings them joy, it lets them know they are cared for and loved as they have this large quantity of grain from Ruth's gleaning. It's like buying flowers for your spouse: What guy gets his wife one rose on their anniversary or Valentine's Day? No one. You get a dozen, or more. It shows generosity and it lifts the spirits of the one who receives them. And it's the same with these ladies here with all this grain they've gotten. And when we give generously in our hospitality and financially, and in other ways as well...when we live generous lives, go above and beyond what's expected, the people we interact with will feel equally blessed, loved, and encouraged all in the name of Jesus Christ, who generously gave his whole life for us. So let's be generous like Boaz...like Jesus...in all facets of faith and life. Let's Pray...Amen.