

# God's Secret Weapon: The Beauty and Power of Grace

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*Book of Ruth*

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**Bible Text:** Ruth 2:1-16

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The book of Ruth, Ruth 2. We're moving into chapter 2 today. The title of the message is "The Beauty and Power of Grace." One of the things that is striking about the book of Ruth is that something tremendous is happening, something bigger than life, in a sense, in that we know, as we know when we step back from it, we know the end of the book that what God is doing is restoring a family line and continuing the movement of history toward the coming of his Son because though we don't realize it at the beginning where we are in the story, we find a woman who is bereft of her husband and her two sons and this family line is about to be extinguished and this woman in her misery, Naomi, in her agony, in her pain, as we saw last week in her anger with God, she is all of emptiness; her life is characterized by emptiness and bitterness. The Lord is going to work in a miraculous way to make her life transformed so that she has fullness but the bigger picture is, and the surprise ending in chapter 4, that this woman's problem, this woman's predicament and God's answer to her need was actually the Lord fulfilling his promise of giving the Messiah because this woman, Naomi, is the ancestor of David and had God not moved as he did in these circumstances, David would not have been born, and if David had not been born, Jesus would not have been born.

So these events are of the highest magnitude and yet what is so extraordinary is that these amazing events, the way the author unfolds the story, we get with that surprise ending where we don't know at the beginning, that this is David's great-grandmother. We don't know that at the beginning, we hit at the end, we're caught up in the narrative of just the ebb and flow of life in a fallen world where tragedy strikes and where people are just trying to get by, day by day being faithful to God. And what the larger message we see is, that in those day by day moments of obedience, the kingdom of God, something much larger is happening than we tend to think or tend to see. God's glory is being revealed.

So in this particular chapter, the author puts before us a new character, Boaz, and really Boaz and Ruth become portraits in this chapter. He kind of moves back and forth, "Look at Boaz. Look at Ruth. Look at Boaz. Look at Ruth," and what we see in that is two people whose lives have been shaped by grace and who are walking in grace and because they're walking in grace, their lives have that kind of impact. So for you and me, do you want your life to make a difference? Do you want to be a part of bringing true real

transformation to the world? To your corner of the world? Well, what's the secret? It's grace. You need grace and the amazing thing is that God is a God who loves to display his grace in people's lives like you and me.

So let's read Ruth 2. We'll read all the way, verses 1 to 18, and we're going to be focusing really on just that part of the story today and probably again next week. Chapter 2, verse 1,

1 Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. 2 And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." 3 So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. 4 Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, "May the LORD be with you." And they said to him, "May the LORD bless you." 5 Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" 6 The servant in charge of the reapers replied, "She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab." 7 And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.' Thus she came and has remained from the morning until now; she has been sitting in the house for a little while." 8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen carefully, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field; furthermore, do not go on from this one, but stay here with my maids. 9 Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Indeed, I have commanded the servants not to touch you. When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the servants draw." 10 Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" 11 Boaz replied to her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know. 12 May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge." 13 Then she said, "I have found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants." 14 At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here, that you may eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar." So she sat beside the reapers; and he served her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied and had some left. 15 When she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her. 16 Also you shall purposely pull out for her some grain from the bundles and leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her." 17 So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had

gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. 18 She took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took it out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we thank you for the preciousness of your word. We thank you that your Spirit who inspired your word is with us now and we ask that you might illuminate these words for us today, that you might work in our hearts, that you might do that which only you can do, apply the written word to our hearts so that we might see the living word, the Lord Jesus Christ. And we pray this in his name. Amen.*

Now, the beauty and power of God's grace. The title and the focus of the message is really on grace because that is one of the key words in this passage. We see it repeated three times. First of all, in verse 2 when Ruth says to her mother-in-law, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I might find favor." The key word is "favor," that is the Hebrew word which is often in other contexts translated "grace" and you could do it here, "in whose eyes I might find grace." The verb that this noun comes from means "to be gracious; to show pity." It's the heartfelt response by someone who has something to give to someone who has great need. That is the essence of this word "grace."

So Ruth realizes that she needs grace and so we see that in verse 2, and then you see that she receives the grace through Boaz in his kindness to her. After he hears about her, he goes to her and tells her, "Listen, don't go anywhere else. You stay in this field and we will provide for you." And she says in verse 10 when she falls on her face, bowing down to the ground and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" It's using that same word, "favor in your sight." Then in verse 13 after he then talks to her about what he had heard about her and how she obviously was a woman who showed grace to her mother-in-law. Then in verse 13, she says again, "I have found favor in your sight, my lord."

So the key thing, Ruth needs favor or grace. She and Naomi desperately need that and the Lord works in these circumstances to grant that and what we see is two lives who are characterized and shaped by grace and so the outline is essentially three points: the nature of grace; the beauty of grace; and the power of grace. The nature of grace; secondly, the beauty of grace; and then the power of grace.

To the nature of grace, the first major point in the outline, the nature of grace. What is it? Well, as I said a moment ago, it's in the sense of unmerited favor. It is when someone in a greater position out of the goodness of their heart blesses someone who is in need with no ulterior motive; no fish hook in it; it's given out of the bounty of one's heart. That's grace. It is that which only ultimately comes from God. So grace, unmerited favor.

How do you get it? How do you receive grace? Grace comes to those who know they need it and you see this embodied in Ruth's attitude throughout. She is going to go to the

field and glean among the ears and she knows she needs to find favor. She said that in verse 2 and then in verse 10 when she receives the favor, when Boaz shows kindness to her, she says, "Why have I found favor in your sight?" She's amazed at it. You see this humility.

Grace, how do you get it? You're humble. She is a humble woman and she is particularly humbled by the fact that she is a foreigner. She says, "Why would you show favor to me since I am a foreigner?" She realizes she is a Moabite and the author is careful to remind us of that again and again. Verse 2, "And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi." The end of the chapter when Ruth speaks again to Naomi, the conversation, verse 21, "Then Ruth the Moabitess said."

Grace operates in the context of those who need grace and know they need grace and the Moabites need grace and she knew that so in verse 13, after he speaks kindly to her, she says again, "I found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants." She says, "I am not even equal to your maidservants and yet you have shown favor to me." Grace is richly poured out on the humble. God resists the proud but he gives grace to the humble.

So how do you get it? You humble yourself and you acknowledge that there is no other hope but grace. In fact, someone has said, "Grace only operates," this is a pretty good statement, "Grace only operates in the context of a realization on the part of the recipient that there is no other option but grace." Now, that's kind of a complicated sentence. I'll repeat that. Grace only operates in the context of a realization on the part of the recipient of grace that there is no other option but grace. Basically you have to come to the end of yourself to find grace. That's how you get it, you come to the end of yourself. So Ruth and Naomi are at the end of themselves in verse 2. There is no hope for them. We mentioned before that to be a widow, to have no man, to have no son, to have no man is to have no future at this point in time in history. For these three widows, Ruth, Orpah and Naomi, and now of course these two, Naomi and Ruth, both widowed without sons. There is no hope. How are they going to eat? They can only depend upon God's grace. So how do you get it? You humble yourself. You realize there is no other hope but grace.

Where does it work? Where does it operate? Where do you find grace at work, working mightily? You find it in the everyday ordinary circumstances of people who are just trying to make it through the day. God's grace, God's transforming power that comes down from heaven into our lives when we're humble, it comes down in the midst of the most mundane, everyday circumstances, contrary to our natural thought process. If I were to say, "Do you want to make a difference for God today? Do you want to make a difference for the kingdom in your life?" we automatically think of grandiose things. We think of, you know, the mission field or being an evangelist or something like that, but do you want to make a difference for God, a profound difference for the kingdom of God, he works in the most surprising places in the smallest things, we would say are small and insignificant, inconsequential.

That's where God works. He doesn't have a lot of fanfare around his great working. I mean, Jesus himself, were you to look at Jesus walking down the street as we're told in Isaiah the prophet, he had no stately form or majesty that we should be drawn to him. You would not have been impressed by the outward appearance of Jesus, this is the Son of God, just by looking at him. And if you looked at the guys around him, the 12 disciples, you certainly would not have been impressed. They would have looked like the most unlikely 13 guys to be about to change the world but it's people like that, that God uses. He uses the weak, he uses the base, he uses those, the foolish to confound the wise. So he works in the most surprising ways and in the most surprising circumstances.

So the beautiful truth of that is that it lifts up the mundane and ought to give us a great joy in doing just little acts of obedience for God. I mean, what you have in this story is Ruth is hungry, she and Naomi are hungry, and she goes out to work in the way that she could work at that time, to go glean behind the reapers who are reaping a harvest. She just does what she can do. That's all she can do. And she goes and she works hard. She's there from morning until evening and she comes home with quite...she's going to end up coming home with quite a bit of grain. In fact, an ephah of barley, which we're told about in verse 17, an ephah of barley actually is about probably between 5 and 8 gallons of barley so it's like a 5 gallon bucket and then some of barley grains, probably enough food for 10 days for the two of them.

So one day's work has given her ten day's of food. That's a good start and she's going to come back tomorrow, the next day, to work again. He says, "Keep coming back to this field." Then we're told at the end of the chapter that she gets to work, not only the barley harvest, but the wheat harvest that comes two months later. In Israel, the barley harvest happened around Passover so March/April. The wheat harvest happened two months later at Pentecost in May/June. So she's going to have the opportunity to work and provide for these two widows, they're going to have the food they need. That's a pretty mundane thing, just going to work, eking out a living. That's what she does.

Then you have Boaz who just shows kindness to her, "Yes, you can come and do it. You can work." Isn't it interesting too, he didn't just give her the grain. It kind of says a lot about how we should care for the poor. God had a great plan. In fact, this is pointed out in Leviticus 19 and chapter 23. In fact, turn over there and I'll show you the Lord's plan because apparently Ruth understood this passage or she had received this teaching. Leviticus 19:9, God's law. He says, "Now when you reap the harvest of your land," Leviticus 19:9, "you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God." The Lord had planned that, "Listen, you go plant your fields but you allow the borders to stay there and you let the poor pick that. And while you're picking what you're picking, if it's grapes or if it's olives or if it's wheat, when you are gathering it up, if you drop something, leave it. Don't pick it up. That's for the poor."

Now what's beautiful about this really when you look at the whole context of Scripture, this is teaching the landowner to have compassion on the poor but ultimately who's the

true landowner in the first place? Who does Canaan belong to? Canaan belongs to God and God is going to take care of his people with his land. But he doesn't say, "Take the grapes that you picked and leave them at the door of the poor." He says, "Allow them to come and to work, but allow them to do it joyfully. Don't begrudge the fact that you just dropped a bucket of grapes." No, that's the sovereign hand of God providing for that other family over there.

So, but anyway, Ruth is doing just the mundane things of making a living. She's taking initiative to make a living, then Boaz shows kindness to her, and what is he doing? He sees a woman who is in need. His heart is moved with compassion and he says, "You can continue doing this. Don't go anywhere else. You stay here." She's so overwhelmed by that she falls down before him and says, "Why have you shown favor to me?" After their conversation, he fixes lunch for her, the amazing kindness of that. Then we're told back in Ruth that after lunch he gives some special instructions to his workers basically saying, "Listen, guys, I want you to be careful to not be careful. I want you to see that you drop some extra stuff. That's your instruction from me." He goes out of his way and he says, "Listen, don't you give her a hassle at all when she's coming up around you." Because what would happen sometimes is the workers are working and here are the poor, they're ready to get something you dropped so at times they would get irritated with them, and especially the fact that she's a Moabitess. So Boaz goes out of his way to say, "You shall not in any way speak harshly to her and you basically are going to be careful to provide for her, but not in a way that is seen as charity. She's still going to work."

So she spends all day working and it was a hard day of work. I mean, this is something we just can't relate to anymore because for us, a hard day of work getting food, I mean, we have to work our jobs, right, but getting food itself, you just go to the store and you buy the food or you even, better than that, you drive through, right? And the food is ready to eat. "Man, I had to wait in a four car line. Phew." But for them, I mean, this process, what would happen in the field of grain is the reapers would go along and they have a sickle and they're cutting. They're holding the grain and cutting it and basically holding it in their hand, cutting it and then they would get bundles together, drop the bundles and then other workers would come behind them and tie those bundles up into tied up bundles which we would know as sheaves. A sheaf would be a big bundle of like the barley grains and then those big bundles would all be taken to a threshing area and they would spend time threshing. As we hear, Ruth does this, she beat out it says in verse 17, what she had gleaned. Beating it out, they would sit there and hit the grain with a stick or with some kind of special instrument, and hitting it and hitting it and hitting it and hitting it to try to separate the grain from the stalk. And after they have done that, then they take it and they try to filter it, and then if they still have time, at some point then they winnow it, which is they hold it up in the wind, throw it up in the air. They've got to do all of this before they then have the grains and kernels that then they grind up to make into flour, that then they've got to bake into bread. That's hard work. She spends the whole day doing it. She does a yeoman's kind of day. She's there in the morning and she's not done until evening. She beats out what she has and she has, like I said, at least a 5 gallon bucket of grain, somewhere between 5 and 8 gallons depending on exactly the measurement of the

Hebrew ephah. Different folks have different opinions about how much that is, but she's got at least 10 days of food.

But it's this simple circumstance, her doing what she needs to do to make a living, not dealing with the big ultimate questions, "Where am I going to find a husband?" Not sitting there fretting, she just does what she's supposed to do. Boaz, there is no awareness that redemptive history is hanging in the balance. They're just living their lives. Boaz sees a woman, a Moabitess woman he's heard about, and he walks up and he shows kindness to her. She responds in an appropriate way. This man showing kindness to her, she humbles herself and shows kindness back to him. Then he takes the step of instructing his servants and through this she gets the grain, through this a relationship begins to happen, and this is one step towards what's going to happen in the next chapter which is a marriage proposal and then in chapter 4 a marriage and a child, the grandfather of David.

So it all happens though through small everyday opportunities. Where does grace work? It operates in the midst of the mundane in our life. So this should lift up the mundane. Changing diapers is holy work. When you do it with the Spirit of God working through you for the glory of God, you are blessing and you are manifesting the glory of God. Your work, your job, even if you don't like your job and some of us have jobs...I certainly like my job but some of us have jobs, I don't want to imply the wrong thing, but some of us have maybe jobs right now that aren't really exactly what we'd like to do and it's a chore to go to work, but when you pick it up into the right perspective, this is an opportunity. I mean, it's not fun to thresh wheat but in doing what God has put before you for his glory, his kingdom is advancing and sometimes the Lord puts us in places with difficult people, difficult circumstances because his kingdom, he's doing something big in his kingdom in that place through you if you will put away your anger with him, your frustration with him, humble yourself and be a conduit of his grace.

So the nature of grace. What is it? How do you get it? Where does it work? The beauty of grace. Really, this chapter, I think the author is just like painting a portrait of two people, Boaz and Ruth, and he lets us just see the beauty of their character which is really a testimony to the beauty of grace and what grace does. Grace beautifies.

He starts off talking about Boaz. It's interesting how he even introduces this verse in the middle of the narrative. Remember, if you forget that the chapter divisions weren't there in the original and you read from chapter 1 into chapter 2, you have in verses 19 to 21, we focused on these verses last week, Naomi saying, you know, "Don't call me Naomi. Don't call me pleasant one." Remember, Naomi means "pleasant one." "Don't call me pleasant, call me bitter." She's angry with God. Then the summary though of verse 22, "So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest." That's a very hopeful and exciting verse there as the reader knows that they're hungry, that they don't have hope, they're home now in Bethlehem and, boy, they got there at a great time, the beginning of the harvest.

Now, think about how it would flow better if you just went right to verse 2, if you skipped over verse 1, "And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest," and you skipped to 2:2, "And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, 'Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain.'" That's really the flow of this story. So what the author does is he interrupts the flow of the story to give us some information; the narrator steps on the stage, as it were, and says, "I've got to tell you something," and he tells us about this man, Boaz. It's almost like you could think of you're watching a play, and this is obviously...these are the events that happened but God is presenting them, these true historical events, in a certain way to capture our hearts and as he does, you can think of it this way: center stage are Ruth and Naomi and we're about to hear them have a dialogue about going into the field but the Lord has the author stop and say, "I want to talk to you about a guy named Boaz."

So the spotlight goes over off to the center stage, to this guy over here, that we didn't even know was standing there, and we're told about him, and in this telling, the author is foreshadowing and creating a sense of anticipation on the part of his readers, especially the original readers because they would have interpreted these phrases about Boaz in a very rich way.

There are four things he says about, the author says about Boaz in verse 1. First of all, he's a kinsman of her husband. Naomi had a kinsman of her husband. Now, notice, let me show you one thing too: he gives the name at the very end of the verse which is contrary to the way that I would do it normally. "There's this guy named Boaz who was Naomi's kinsman," is what I would have said probably. The name just seems to go first to me. But he doesn't do that, he makes the name last. She had a kinsman of her husband. It creates a sense of suspense. Kinsman of her husband, a relative on her husband's side. Now the reader is hearing that, the Jewish readers who knew their Old Testament knew also, not only about the rights of the poor to glean in the fields, but they also knew about the requirements of Levirate marriage, that a man's offspring, his inheritance, if it was endangered, then a near kinsman could marry his wife; if he died without an heir, then she would marry someone else in the family and that would then keep the inheritance, that piece of land, in the family. So when they hear a kinsman of her husband, the reader naturally begins to think, "This could be a potential suitor for Ruth. This could be the answer to their problem."

Then we're told, secondly, "a man of great wealth." It's a rich phrase here, a man of great wealth. A man really mighty. The word "great" could be translated "mighty." A man mighty in wealth. And the word "wealth" could mean even more than that. A man mighty in power. A man mighty in ability. That's what this phrase means. A man mighty in honor. So this man that's a family member of Naomi who might be a suitor of Ruth, is a man of great strength.

We're reminded again he's "of the family of Elimelech." So it's kind of a redundant thing. He's a kinsman of her husband but now he's of the family of Elimelech. Do you see how that's redundant? I already knew that this man is a kinsman of Naomi through her husband and you're telling me again that he's of the family of Elimelech. Why is that?



Because he is emphasizing that and he's going to emphasize it so much, he's going to say in verse 3 after she comes to the field belong to Boaz, look at the end of verse 3, the author says, "who was of the family of Elimelech." "Did you get that?" he's saying. "Don't miss this."

So Boaz, a kinsman of Naomi, a man of great power and wealth and dignity, of the family of Elimelech, "whose name was Boaz." And his name actually is significant. We've seen in Ruth that the names and the meanings of the names. Naomi, we just got through the passage where she makes a point, "Don't call me Naomi," because remember the names in ancient Israel, the name actually was a word; it wasn't just a collection of letters that make a sound like our names. Ty, what does that mean? Whoever thinks about that? It's just the name. It's a tag. But no, Naomi meant "pleasant." It was like you saying, naming your child "pleasant" so that when people hear the name, that word, that adjective, that noun comes across, that adjective comes across, pleasant. She says, "Don't call me pleasant, call me Mara, which means bitter. Don't call me pleasant, call me bitter."

Well, what did Boaz's name mean? Boaz's name meant "strength." And what's happening here is a real contrast between Boaz and Elimelech and Elimelech's son that Ruth had been married to. Remember Mahlon and Chilion, the two boys. Mahlon meant "weakling," and Chilion meant "to come to an end." So the author is giving us great hope. This kinsman of her husband, a man of great or mighty in wealth, of that family, his name was Boaz, strength and power. In fact, it's interesting, one of the things that one of the commentators pointed out that Solomon when he built the temple, the two pillars of the temple he named and one of the names of the pillar of the temple, one of the pillars is Boaz. What was he doing? He was saying something, wasn't he? He was saying that Boaz was the strength that has lifted up the house of my father, David. God used Boaz. So even in the meaning, the Hebrew reader would have heard, "whose name was mighty."

So there at the beginning we see this wonderful man contrasted against Elimelech and his sons, and then we have Ruth the Moabitess and Naomi contrasted in verse 2 and you see again, so the beauty of grace in Boaz's life. Boaz, now we don't see grace yet, we see strength in verse 1. He's a man of great wealth. His name is Boaz. But what we come to find out as we go along is that he's a man who has received...he's able to give grace because he's received grace. You can't give grace unless you've received grace. He's a very gracious man, a humble man. I mean, he serves the Moabitess her meal. How amazing. She feels like she's not even worthy to be considered among the servants that are there and he comes and says, "Sit down," and he serves her grain and he says, "Here, dip it in the vinegar." What love. What grace.

One of the things, now we don't have this here but when we read this in the context of Scripture, Matthew 1 tells us something really interesting about Boaz, his mother. Do you know who Boaz's mother was? Rahab the harlot. This man was born to Rahab the harlot who God redeemed from the people of Jericho, remember? A harlot in Jericho who hid the spies that were spying out the land, protected them from the people of Jericho, the king of Jericho, who wanted to kill them. She hid them and then lowered them down

through the wall and they told her, "Put this scarlet thread in the window of your house and you will be spared." So God spared her and she came under, she took refuge under Yahweh's wings. Then she had to live a life as a former Canaanite living now, a husband, a godly husband in Israel. She's a godly woman but she is one who used to be a foreigner. You wonder how that impacted the young man Boaz growing up. He realized that he had been a recipient of grace. "If God had not shown great grace in saving my mother, I would not be here."

So we see the glory of God's grace in him, but we also see it in Ruth and there is this back and forth movement in the text. "Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, 'Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor.'" I mentioned she seems to know of the teaching of Leviticus 19 and also echoed again in chapter 23 where we're told that the Israelites can go and glean and pick up the gleanings, that is, the things that have fallen, and they can gather them and they can find food. But I think the reader would have thought to himself, especially with the introduction "Ruth the Moabitess said," why did Naomi not say that? It's astonishing that Naomi isn't the one saying, "Hey, Ruth, the law says that we can go and if you will go and I'm too old, but if you will go and glean today." But it's Ruth the Moabitess who says. And not only does she say, "Let's go do this," but she says, "I need to find favor." Her theology, God has done such a work of grace in her life she knows she needs grace on an ongoing way. One of the things about, one of the great marks of true saving faith, the person who has received grace truly knows that they always always always need grace. You never just receive grace and stop needing grace. You need grace everyday and so she's a woman like that. She understands that.

So Naomi says, "'Go, my daughter.' So she departed and she went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz." She happened to come to that. This is the author tongue-in-cheek, in fact in the Hebrew it's actually more emphatic. It's two words together that are translated "happened"; one English word translates two Hebrew words and it almost has the...a literal translation would be "she happened in her happening to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz." And this idea is certainly it's unintentional, accidental. The word itself connotes chance but, of course, the author, it's a tongue-in-cheek comment. She just happened to come to the portion of the field. And this was something extraordinary because the way that they would farm in Israel, the people lived in the town in the walls of the city but they would go outside and the land was apportioned and it was a patchwork of different fields. So she just went out to a field that she began to want to glean in and she asked for permission and it just happened to be the field belonging to this wonderful man Boaz. God's hand is at work in the most mundane ordinary circumstances.

So we see Ruth, the recipient of grace, and now in verses 4 and 5, we see Boaz's character, again, as a gracious man. He comes from Bethlehem and says to the reapers, he's a wealthy man, a mighty man, as it were, but a kind man. He comes to the reapers and he doesn't say, "Hey, what's going on here? Why are you guys not working?" I mean, obviously they were working but he's not a harsh man. The first thing he says to them is,

"May the LORD be with you." He's a godly man. And they reply back to him, "May the LORD bless you." Now, this is where the author is giving us information that normally you wouldn't necessarily expect.

If I was telling you a story of, you know, something that happened, I'm probably not going to report very often the greeting that I gave to someone. You know, I went to this amazing happening yesterday and I was talking to this person and I was able to share this and they said this. I wouldn't start off with when I saw them, I said, "Hello, how are you?" And they said, "Hi. Fine, how are you?" That's not normally part of what's reported but here it's reported because it's reminding us of Boaz's faith but also it's reminding us of the Lord's presence. Boaz knows he needs the blessing of God and his reapers know they need the blessing of God. In fact, for them, one of the things when you again think back in the context of it, Naomi we're told in chapter 1, verse 6, decided to come back to Bethlehem. Remember, they went away from Bethlehem to Moab because of why? A famine in the land. They decided to come back, we're told in chapter 1, verse 6, because she had heard that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread. Apparently she got word that the barley harvest was coming in really nicely. God had finally given his people blessing. So Boaz and his reapers, the people there, they've been through hard times and they know they need the blessing of God.

So then you see the beauty of Ruth again, though when Boaz walks up, he sees this young woman sitting over there with the other workers who were taking a break in the shade, and he says, "Whose young woman is this?" Kind of discreet, gentle. "Who are you?" didn't want to say that? "Whose young woman is this? The servant in charge of the reapers replied," and look here at the emphasis again, "She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab." The author doesn't want us to miss the fact that she is a Moabite.

And he goes on though, "She came and said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers.'" She didn't have to ask but she did. "Thus she came and has remained from the morning until now; she has been sitting in the house for a little while." She's been working hard all day. She's just taking a brief break over there. She's just been sitting there for a little while. This idea of her ethnic identity being emphasized again and again and again. This is really one of the real striking things that shows the grace of God because as a Moabite, you go back to Deuteronomy 23, a passage that we looked at a few weeks ago but I want you to look at it again with me. In chapter 23 of Deuteronomy, the Lord is giving guidelines for exclusion from the assembly, exclusion from the assembly of worship of the people of God and he says in verse 3, "No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD, because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. Nevertheless, the LORD your God was not willing to listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you because the LORD your God loves you. You shall never seek their peace or their prosperity all your days." You're not supposed to bless them and they are, according to this, to the tenth generation not to come into the house of the Lord

and the idea is that if a Moabite is to become a proselyte to Israel, if a Moabite or a Moabite like Ruth is to leave the land of her people and her god and come to Yahweh, this prohibition in Deuteronomy 23 says she cannot come into the assembly of God and her descendants cannot until the tenth generation.

Now, what you see here is how God's law highlights the riches of his grace because David is not ten generations after Ruth and David was seen as a man after God's heart. Solomon is not ten generations after Ruth and he built the place of assembly. What is that? That is the riches of God's grace. God when he gives commandments like this, even like before when he says, "No man who is emasculated can come in. Or no one of illegitimate birth," verse 2, "shall enter the assembly." Remember, we mentioned the Ammonites and the Moabites come up in the mind of Moses at that point because the Ammonites and the Moabites were of illegitimate birth, remember? Ammon, the father of the Ammonites, Moab, the father of the Moabites, were both born to Lot's daughters through their father's intercourse. They seduced their father and gave birth to these two boys, Ammon and Moab. And then to add insult to injury, the Moabites were so harsh and evil in their response to the people of God so God says, "This is how it ought to be." But in so many ways, isn't it true for all of us that we should not be able to enter the kingdom of God? Based on what I've done today in my own heart, I should never be able to enter into the assembly of the Lord.

But our God is a God of grace and he delights to show the riches of his grace and this is why so much emphasis on Moabite, Moabite and you look at this woman and you see the beauty of God's grace. His handiwork is all over her. Fingerprints. She is a trophy of his grace; a piece of artwork that he's forming and shaping as is Boaz. The beauty of God's grace. You see these two people who have given their hearts to God, who have seen their great need of grace, submitted to the Lord, stopped fighting him, and God draws them to himself and he makes them exemplary people, models of how we should all be.

That tells us we need to stop kicking against the goads and the contrast, as I said earlier, Ruth versus Naomi. Naomi is angry with God and embittered and right now she's fruitless, but Ruth in exactly the same circumstances, without a man and, in fact, in some ways, even worse. I mean, she left the hope that she would have of remarrying in Moab to go with her mother-in-law, this angry, bitter woman, to serve her. She goes to Israel where it's very unlikely she'll be able to remarry because what Israelite is going to want to marry a Moabite? But she does that because God is at work in her heart and she is seeking Yahweh and she knows that she needs grace and the Lord is showing this contrast: the beauty of Ruth and look at her character, and it's as if a relief. Naomi even though I think she is a believer, her theology is sound, she's just not living it out. She's going to come around at the end but the Lord is letting us see, "Look at this contrast: Ruth versus Naomi." What a godly woman looks like, a godly woman is a woman whose life is characterized by grace; who humbles herself before God; receives what the Lord gives her, good and bad; and seeks to be faithful; and the Lord shines his beauty through her.

It's interesting that...I mentioned a while back when we were talking about the canonical order of the Bible, that in our Bibles, Ruth follows Judges in the historical book section, and I think that's significant. It happened, we follow the Septuagint which was the Greek translation of the Old Testament which was done about 150 BC. But in the Hebrew Bibles, the two major ways that the Canon was ordered and the most prominent way the Canon was ordered, the book of Ruth followed right after Proverbs in the writing section. Why did they put Ruth after Proverbs? That's what theologians have speculated about through the centuries. Why is Ruth after Proverbs? As you read through Proverbs into Ruth, what do you read out of? The Proverbs 31 woman and then you read into Ruth.

Look what God has done. He took a Moabitess and he made her the exemplary woman of God. This means that none of us are beyond the reach of God's grace. This ought to make us reflect on where we were when Jesus found you. Where were you when Jesus found you? And this ought to make us confident that no matter, the people that we're trying to minister to may seem so hopeless, so far from grace, and yet that's just the kind of person that God loves to save. So be faithful and do the things that you can to glorify him, to show his love, and to lift up Christ.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Father, we thank you for the riches of your grace which you have lavished on us in Christ Jesus. We thank you that you are a God who, though your law and your holiness and your righteousness as your word tells us, you cannot look upon evil, evil cannot dwell with you, no sinner can enter into your presence, that even the angels have to cover their eyes in your presence, so great is your holiness, how can we ever imagine that we could and yet we come rejoicing that you have made a way, that the Redeemer that you sent, the near kinsman, Jesus, his work is so perfect that he truly makes us spotless in your sight that so that we truly are, even now through faith in Christ, spotless before you, able to dwell in your presence, able to come behind the veil. We praise you, O God. We thank you for the riches of your grace and we pray that you would make us people who never cease to be amazed and never cease to be so overwhelmed with joy that our hearts not only receive grace but dispense it. Make us people who shine with your light and your kindness to so many people in such great need in this world. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*