

Session 2

GOD'S HEART FOR THE MARGINALIZED AND THE OUTSIDER

Ruth 2:1-22

Memory Verse

May the Lord reward you for what you have done, and may you receive a full reward from the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.

– RUTH 2:12, CSB

God's Heart for the Marginalized and the Outsider

THEOLOGICAL THEME: God's providence and grace are beautifully displayed in the story of Ruth. Further, Ruth prefigures the engrafting of the Gentiles into the church through the preaching of the gospel to all nations.

? What does benevolence mean? If you had to give a short definition, what would you say?

? Do you have a category for benevolence in your personal or family budget? Why or why not?

? How do you see benevolence practiced through our church?

Benevolence means kindness, goodwill, benignity, or compassion. Benevolence funds are typically used for the purpose of helping those who are unable to help themselves or are in a desperate situation. These funds can be a great help to those in need. Sometimes those who must make use of benevolent funds are looked down upon by those who have no need of them. When it comes to our spiritual state, however, every human being is in the same boat. We are all in desperate need of the benevolence of God.

Benevolence funds are an imperfect, scaled-down glimpse of the gospel because benevolence is the kind of grace that has been shown to those who are in Christ. From the beginning to end in the Scriptures we see God's benevolent heart toward people. In our text today, we will consider God's benevolent favor toward a woman from Moab called Ruth. Further, we will see how her case is a picture of God's loving-kindness toward sinners today.

Session Summary

The action of Ruth 2 centers on an aspect of the Mosaic Law which decreed that landowners must not harvest the full extent of their fields. The part of the crop that grew in hard-to-reach areas was to be left for the poor and foreigners who were dwelling in the land (Lev. 19:9-10, Deut. 24:19-22). It was on account of this law that Naomi and Ruth hoped to find some way by which they could live. After all, they had no husbands to look to for provision.

This gracious Law that was a help to these two widows is a picture of the grace of God in Ruth's life and also a picture of the grace of God for all those who are in Christ Jesus. In our passage today, we will consider Ruth's humility and industry, God's providence, and the favor of Boaz.

1. Ruth's Humility and Industry (Ruth 2:1-3)

Ruth's condition and status were almost as low as one could be during her time in Israel. She was a widow. This meant that she had no one to care for her and protect her. She was no longer able to live with her parents so that her father could provide for her because she had left them behind in Moab. Secondly, she was a Moabite. She was not counted among the children of Abraham—those born into the covenant people of God. These two factors placed Ruth and Naomi in a very precarious position. They arrived in Israel with nothing.



What did Ruth have to do in order for both she and Naomi to survive? When was a time you took initiative out of desperation?

Ruth's desperate status led to desperate measures. Mosaic Law dictated that farmers should leave a bit of the harvest in the field so that there would be some provision for those dwelling in the land that were poor and destitute. Thus, Ruth took up the work of the most downtrodden among the people of Israel. She started picking up the scraps in the field of a landowner.

We may be tempted to make a connection between Ruth and the prodigal son. After all, they both ended up hungry, in a foreign land, surviving off the kindness of others. Their cases are completely different, however. The prodigal son ended up in his situation because of his sin and rebellion. He was reaping the consequences of his actions. Ruth, on the other hand, was in her situation because of her devotion to Naomi and the God of Israel. She was reaping the rewards of her faithfulness. Hers is a story of the grace of the Lord.



What was the means by which the Lord blessed Ruth?

Ruth's story is all about grace, but that doesn't mean she sat idly by waiting for God's kindness to come knocking. Ruth was an industrious woman. She was obedient to the instruction of Naomi and a hard worker in the field of Boaz. Ruth exemplified characteristics of the virtuous woman: "She rises while it is still night and provides food for her household and portions for her female servants" (Prov. 31:15).

While hard work and industrious living should never be viewed as a way to force God's hand to bless or prosper, it is a means by which God regularly blesses those who love and trust in Him. The Scriptures commend hard work and condemn laziness and inactivity. Those who seek to walk in obedience to God also work hard because they know that diligence in honest work with a heart of faith is pleasing to their heavenly Father. They work at whatever the Lord has given their hand to do for His glory, trusting in His provision.




Application: What has the Lord given you to do? Have you brought glory to God by being industrious in it?

2. God's Providence (Ruth 2:4-7)

We must be careful not to turn Ruth's story into a man-centered parable about how hard work can get a person where they want to be. Ruth's case is an account of the grace of God in the life of a person. In this case, it is the story of the kindness and grace of God toward someone who was generally looked upon with pity or contempt. Ruth was a nobody, but God's favor was upon her.

 How did God provide for Ruth even before she met Boaz?

 What about God's provision might have been unexpected in Ruth's life?

God's provision is unmistakable, yet if we aren't careful we might take it for granted. Nothing happened in Ruth's life apart from the sovereign, providential hand of God. When Christians recognize God's workings in Ruth's life they ought to be moved to worship. When they are able to see God's providence in their own lives by way of Ruth's story, then their worship becomes even more fervent and joyous.

God provided Ruth with a husband from a family that worshiped the one true living God. It is doubtful that when Ruth first met Naomi's son that she had considered the possibility of leaving her father and mother (and their gods) behind in order to join a new nation and worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet, she did. Some may chalk this up to coincidence. Ruth just happened to live at the right place at the right time. Those who follow Christ and believe the Scriptures, however, know that this point of view is erroneous. Proverbs 16:9 says, "A person's heart plans his way, but the Lord determines his steps."

God provided a Hebrew husband for Ruth for her good and for His glory. Furthermore, God provided for Naomi and Ruth's preservation and security. He did this first of all by instructing Moses to enact laws that would protect the

downtrodden and the outcast that were living in Israel. Of course, this law helped many people, but it also was pivotal in the life of Ruth, and God knew this would be. God provided for Ruth through the civil code of Israel. Not only that but God provided Ruth with an able body that was able to make use of that law by going into the field to glean.

Finally, God provided a friendly field in which Ruth could glean. Israel existed and Boaz had prospered due to God's provision. God's provision for Boaz made the way for His provision for Ruth. Some might say that God had dealt harshly with Ruth, pointing to the fact that her husband had died and that now she was living in a strange land among whom she was the least. These things are true, but this point of view neglects the astoundingly gracious and kind provision that the Lord made for this poor widow. Should one so abundantly blessed scold their Maker because the provision includes some hardship?

? Application: How has God provided for you? Was His provision mixed with some hardship? Which do you allow to dictate your view of God: His provision or the hardship?

3. Boaz's Favor (Ruth 2:8-22)

The Lord continued to bless and provide for Ruth through Boaz's favor. The Scriptures tell us that Boaz took note of Ruth because of her industry and faithfulness to her mother-in-law, Naomi. However, we must remember that Ruth was from Moab and had nothing to offer Boaz. She brought very little, if anything, as repayment to Boaz for his kindness. She had no other option as she arrived in Israel with nothing and was a foreigner who was looked down upon for her bloodline.

? What did Boaz do to show Ruth favor? In what ways does Boaz's kindness toward Ruth reflect God's kindness toward sinners?

Boaz looked upon Ruth with favor. He told Ruth to stay in his field among his reapers. He also assured her of his protection (2:9). When mealtime came, he invited her to eat with the workers, not cast aside with the gleaners (2:14). Then, Boaz instructed his workers to allow her to glean among the sheaves and pull some grain out from the bundles (2:15-16).

God shows His mercy and kindness to all people on earth whether they love and fear Him or not. He sends the rain and the sunshine to all people. God's common grace among His creation is evident (Matt. 5:45). That grace isn't earned or deserved. He simply gives it because of His love and care for that which He has made and governs.

However, God shows a special love and favor toward those who are in Christ. Indeed, He gently and lovingly leads many sinners to His Son Jesus Christ so that they might look upon Him for salvation, just as Ruth looked upon Boaz.

Consider the fact that God prepared the way for Ruth to meet Boaz many years in advance. Furthermore, that Ruth had to pass through difficult trials to get there. In the same way, God often prepares people to come to Christ through difficult trials. Many Christians can look back over their lives before coming to Christ and marvel at how the Lord prepared the way for them to come to Him for salvation.

We must also draw a parallel between Ruth's condition and the sinner's condition. Ruth was outside of the covenant community and had nothing to bring to the table, no bargaining chips. Just so, the lost are outside of the family of God and they bring nothing to offer Christ but their many and grievous sins. They have nothing with which to bargain in order to convince Christ to save them. Their salvation is all of grace and none of merit.



How do we separate the importance of taking initiative as we are given opportunity while also accepting God's grace as a gift and not something we earn? How do we learn about this through Ruth and Boaz?

Boaz certainly took notice of certain attributes in Ruth, but we would be mistaken if we claimed that Ruth pulled herself up by her own bootstraps by working hard in Boaz's field. She had hardly worked at all before Boaz began to bless her. Furthermore, it is likely that Boaz had permitted many other hard-working women to glean in his fields. His favor didn't fall on them but on Ruth.

For those who are in Christ, their great comfort is this: God's loving-kindness has fallen on them, and He has brought them into His family. Because they did nothing to merit this favor and mercy, they don't have to maintain it by their good works. They are free to enjoy it and serve God without fear.

? Application: In what ways has God's favor fallen upon you? Has His favor led you to a life of contented worship and obedience to Him or do you believe that God owes you? What needs to change in light of today's study?

Conclusion

Ruth prefigures all those who would find salvation in Jesus Christ. God's grace and providence for Ruth remind Christians today of His grace and providence in their own lives to lead them to salvation in Christ.

? Are you industrious for the glory of God? Do you work for God's glory out of a sense of guilt and penance or with joy and contentment because of God's great work of salvation in your soul?



When you look back over your life, how can you see God's providence there? What are some specific examples of God's providence that prepared the way for your salvation?



In what ways, according to the Scriptures, does God's favor fall on His children? What privileges do they enjoy that others do not? Who is God calling you to tell about Him that they might become His child?

CHRIST CONNECTION: Ruth's redemption formed a link in the lineage of Christ. Ruth serves as a picture of the redeeming work of Christ to those who are estranged from God because of their sinfulness.

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: Stories of God's redeeming work among those outside the lineage of Abraham (i.e., Ruth, Rahab, etc.) remind Christians today of their commission to take the gospel to all nations.



FOR NEXT WEEK

Waiting Patiently for Redemption

Main Passages

- Ruth 3:1-18

Session Outline

1. Ruth's Great Need (Ruth 3:1-9)
2. Boaz's Response to Ruth (Ruth 3:10-13)
3. Ruth's Wait (Ruth 3:14-18)

Memorize

May the Lord reward you for what you have done, and may you receive a full reward from the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.

- Ruth 2:12, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - Ruth 2:1-3
- Tuesday - Ruth 2:4-7
- Wednesday - Ruth 2:8-12
- Thursday - Ruth 2:19-20
- Friday - Ruth 2:21-23
- Saturday - Ruth 2:1-23