



God's Heart for the Marginalized and the Outsider

Summary and Goal

As a Moabite woman now living in the land of Judah, it would seem that Ruth would have a difficult time finding favor or success in a potentially hostile environment. However, God has always been concerned about the poor, the downcast, and those who feel like outsiders. Although Ruth was proactive and demonstrated a tremendous work ethic, God provided a man named Boaz to be her advocate of protection and provision. While we may not always see the hand of God in our circumstances, He never loses sight of us and is always working to extend His love to us.

Main Passages

Ruth 2:1-22

Session Outline

1. Ruth's Humility and Industry (Ruth 2:1-3)
2. God's Providence (Ruth 2:4-7)
3. Boaz's Favor (Ruth 2:8-22)

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.

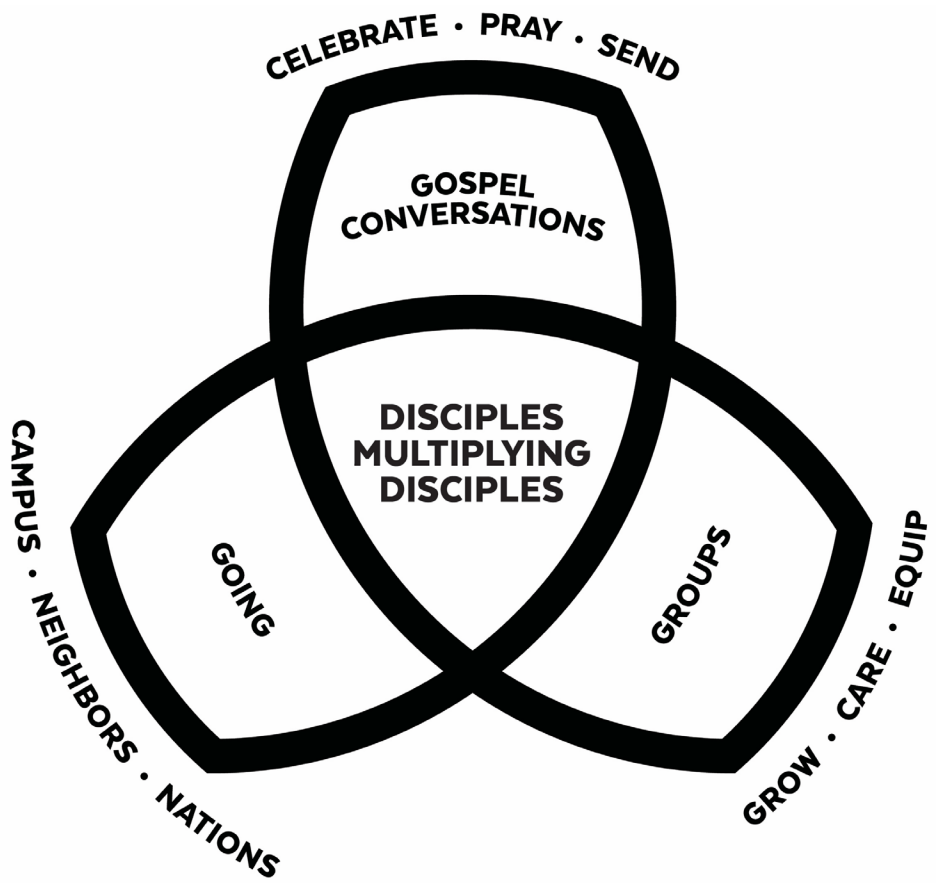
Christ Connection

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.

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



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Session Plan

God's Heart for the Marginalized and the Outsider

Introduction

- ❓ 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?

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). 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 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.

- ❓ 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?
- ❓ What was the means by which the Lord blessed Ruth?
- ❓ 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)

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?
- ❓ 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?
- ❓ 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?
- ❓ 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

- ❓ 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?

❓ For Further Discussion

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?



Expanded Session Content

God's Heart for the Marginalized and the Outsider

Introduction

- ❓ 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.

Benevolence

God made provision for the vulnerable in his economy, particularly the alien, the widow, and the orphan (Lev. 23:22; Deut. 10:18-19; 24:17-21; 27:19). Benevolence to any of these is taken as piety rendered to God himself. One reason is that by definition none of these can do anything in return for their benefactor, so that our motives for helping them must be pure and not reciprocal (Matt. 5:46-47). That is, we do not give in order to receive; we give because God told us to give, and because he is the greatest of all givers (John 3:16; 2 Cor. 9:15; Jas. 1:27).


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?

Prayer of Response

Give thanks to God for His mercy and kindness toward the spiritually bankrupt, including you. Ask the Lord to impress upon our congregation the depth of God's mercy toward those who are in Christ. Pray especially that the pastors of our church would revel in the grace of Christ and lead the congregation to do the same. Finally, ask the Lord to give the church a burning desire to preach the gospel of God's grace to people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

Additional Resources

- *Judges and Ruth* by Mary J. Evans
- *Ruth* by J. Vernon McGee
- *Ruth & Esther* by Frederic Bush

For Next Week

Session Title

- 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

Daily Readings

- Monday - Ruth 2:1-3
- Tuesday - Ruth 2:4-7
- Wednesday - Ruth 2:8-12
- Thursday - Ruth 2:13-18
- Friday - Ruth 2:19-20
- Saturday - Ruth 2:21-23

Historical Context of Ruth

Purpose

Ruth's covenantal faithfulness to her mother-in-law Naomi and her God provided a model showing that those who were not ethnic Israelites could be incorporated into the people of God through faith. If Moabites who joined themselves to the Lord could be accepted, there was hope for other Gentiles as well (Is 56:3–7). The book also effectively answered questions that may have been raised over the legitimacy of the Davidic line, given his Moabite roots.

Author

The Talmud attributes the authorship of Ruth to Samuel, but the book itself offers no hint of the identity of its author. We can only speculate about who might have written the book of Ruth, and its provenance and date must be deduced from the internal evidence—language and style, historical allusions, and themes. The family records at the end and the explanation of archaic customs requires a date during or later than the reign of King David (1011–971 BC), though it could have been written as late as after the exile, when the issue of the inclusion of Gentiles once again became pressing.

Setting

The book of Ruth is set “during the time of the judges” (1:1), a period of social and religious disorder when “everyone did whatever seemed right to him” (Jdg 17:6). Historically, this era bridged the time between the conquest of the land under Joshua and the rise of King David, whose family records form the conclusion of the book. It is not clear exactly when during the time of the judges the book belongs, but it opens with a famine in the land, which may have been the result of Israel's idolatry.

Special Features

The book of Ruth gets its name from one of its principal characters, a Moabite woman named Ruth who was the ancestor of David and Jesus. After reading the book of Judges, which paints a dark and depressing picture of Israel, the reader is relieved to encounter Ruth. Although the book is relatively short, it is rich in examples of kindness, faith, and patience. It is one of the five scrolls that was to be read during the Jewish festivals, in particular the Festival of Weeks.

Extended Commentary

Ruth 2:1-23

2:1-3 The practice of gleaning allowed the poor to go through the fields after the harvesters, picking up the grain that was left behind, along with the grain that landowners were required to leave at the edges of their fields (Lv 19:9-10). The phrase translated man of noble character could designate Boaz as possessing wealth and property, but it becomes clear as the story unfolds that Boaz is also a man of integrity. The family connection was unknown to Ruth. Humanly speaking, she just happened to end up gleaning in his field; but there are no coincidences in God's program, and this divine appointment proved that the Lord was not against Naomi, as she thought (1:20-21).

2:4-7 Boaz's noble character was displayed in his care for his workers. Even his greeting to them was in the name of the Lord, and he knew them well enough to recognize a stranger in their midst. His question did not seek Ruth's name but her relationships: Whose young woman is this? The servant's answer twice highlighted her foreignness. He also offered an unsolicited testimony to her diligent hard work in the hot sun.

2:8-10 Boaz's noble character is again on display in his kind words to Ruth. Gleaning could be dangerous, especially for a young foreign woman; thus, Boaz issued instructions to ensure her safety. He also allowed her to drink the water his young men had brought, saving her the lengthy trip to the well. Ruth's response was to prostrate herself as a mark of respect for a social superior. As a Moabitess, she could easily have been ignored by Boaz, but he had noticed her and shown kindness to her.

2:11-13 The death of a husband exhausted a daughter-in-law's obligations, as Naomi herself had made clear (1:11). Yet Ruth had remained with Naomi, leaving her own land and people, which meant entrusting her future to the favor of what she would perceive as the deity of the new land. Boaz asked the Lord, the God of Israel, to reward Ruth's faithfulness to Naomi and to shelter her under his protecting wings, as a mother bird shelters her young. Ruth responded with an expression of thanks for Boaz's kind and encouraging words to her, even though she had no claim on him, not even that of a maidservant in his employment.

2:14-16 As an impoverished gleaner, Ruth would normally have had little or nothing to eat while out in the fields. Boaz, however, invited her to eat with him and his harvesters. In contrast to Naomi's declaration in 1:21 that she went out full and came back empty, Ruth went out empty and came back full. There is no hint of romantic interest in Boaz's actions. He was simply demonstrating his compassion and generosity to Ruth who, even though an alien, was linked to him through Naomi. He went so far as to instruct his harvesters deliberately to leave some grain for her to pick up, an action that went far beyond the demands of the law of Moses.

2:17-20 The measure of Boaz's generosity and Ruth's hard work is demonstrated in the remarkable quantity of grain that she gathered—an ephah (about twenty-six quarts) of barley. This was enough grain to feed a working man for several weeks. Boaz's generosity was evidence

for Naomi that the Lord has not abandoned his kindness to the living or the dead. This represents a change in Naomi's attitude toward the Lord from 1:21. The judgment that the family had experienced was not his final word for them.

Family redeemers (Hb *go'el*; v. 20) were relatives obliged to buy back family members from debt-slavery or to redeem their fields if they had to sell them (Lv 25:25-30). The family redeemer would also receive restitution on behalf of a deceased family member or pursue his killer to ensure that justice was served (Nm 5:8; 35:12). He might also raise up a child for the deceased relative in order to maintain the connection between the clan and the relative's hereditary property (Dt 25:5-10), though Boaz had no legal obligation to act in this way.

2:21-23 Naomi's approval of Boaz's invitation for Ruth to remain until the end of the harvest demonstrates a concern for Ruth's safety not evident in v. 2. However, the concern may also reflect Naomi's growing awareness of her own culpability in the fate of her own family. Her earlier journey to the fields of Moab was an attempt to glean food "in another field" instead of seeking refuge under the wings of the Lord as she should have done. Boaz's generosity may have provided food, but Ruth's need of a home with a husband of her own is still real.¹

References

1. *CSB Study Bible: Christian Standard Bible*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017.

Author Bio

Mary J. Evans (Judges and Ruth)

Mary J. Evans is a visiting lecturer in Old Testament and former academic dean at the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology, Addis Ababa, and a former lecturer at the London School of Theology.

Ruth (J. Vernon McGee)

Dr. J. Vernon McGee (1904-1988) spent more than 50 years teaching the Bible on his “Thru the Bible” radio broadcast. He pastored for more than 40 years and has authored many best-selling books, including *Doctrine for Difficult Days*.

Ruth & Esther (Frederic Bush)

Frederic Bush is the D. Wilson Moore Professor of Ancient Near Eastern Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary in California. He holds an M.Div. and M.Th. from Fuller Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. from Brandeis University.