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Ruth 2 "God in a Barley Field" **

Main Idea: God always takes care of His people, always. In Ruth 2 we see His care demonstrated in three ways in the life of Ruth through the person of Boaz.

- I. The Lord directed Ruth to Boaz (1-3).
 - A. God has a plan for His people.
 - B. God uses the decisions of His people to accomplish that plan.
 - 1. Ruth was looking for food.
 - 2. The Lord intended to give her something far greater.
- II. The Lord provided for Ruth through Boaz (4-16).
 - A. Boaz gave her the assurance of the Lord's presence (4).
 - 1. For some people God is real only in church.
 - 2. For others God is real wherever they go.
 - B. Boaz gave her a safe place to work (5-9).
 - C. Boaz gave her a blessing for her godly reputation (10-13).
 - 1. He saw beyond her past (10).
 - 2. He saw what God was doing in and through her in the present (11-12).
 - 3. He gave her hope for the future (13).
 - D. Boaz gave her a meal (14).
 - E. Boaz gave her a surplus of food for the future (15-16).
- III. The Lord prepared Ruth for Boaz (17-23).
 - A. Naomi blessed Boaz (17-19).
 - B. Naomi asked the Lord to bless Boaz (20).
 - 1. She reveals he is a kinsman-redeemer.
 - 2. She sees in him hope for the future.
 - C. Naomi encouraged Ruth to stay near Boaz (21-23).

Lessons from Ruth 2:

- 1. We learn that God is a providence-working God.
- 2. We learn that God is a prayer-hearing God.
- 3. We learn that God is a providing God.

Do you like the game-show *Jeopardy*? As you know, it's a game in which answers are provided for contestants who must then provide the corresponding questions. Let's try it. I'll give you a definition of a word from the *Living Webster Dictionary* and you determine which word fits the definition.

1. "Something which seems to go beyond the known laws of nature and is held to be the act of a supernatural being."

Question: What is a *miracle*?

2. "The care and supervision of God over His creatures."

Question: What is *providence*?

When you read the Bible you soon discover that God works in both ways. At times He does miracles—parting the Red Sea, sending manna from the sky, raising a dead man to life, making a leper clean, and so on. But for every page on which you see God working a miracle you will find *several* pages on which there is no miracle. That's not to say God isn't working, for He is. He is always at work behind the scenes, guiding, directing, moving, arranging, preparing events and people to accomplish His wise, good, and eternal plan. In other words, on every page we'll see, if we'll look for it, *God's providence*.

What about now? Did you see any miracles this week, any act that went beyond the known laws of nature that God alone could accomplish? Perhaps. But did you see God's providence? His providence occurred in all of our lives, again if we have eyes to see it.

We often associate God with church buildings. How about barley fields? In Ruth 2 we see God at work in a barley field. We must see Him there, just like we must learn to see Him in the 'barley fields' of our lives—on the ball court, in the lunch room, on the job floor, and in the back yard. God is at work everywhere. That's why we can trust Him.

Last week we saw God working in a series of losses in the life of a woman named Naomi. In Ruth 1, a famine hit Israel, a wakeup call from the Lord to turn His wayward people back to Himself. One family decided to leave the promised land in search for food. Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their sons Mahlon and Kilion moved to Moab. While there, Elimelch died. Naomi's sons both married Moabite women and then tragically both sons died. In one decade, Naomi lost her home, her husband, and her sons.

Yet God was at work, even in her losses. Naomi heard there was food back in Israel so she decided to return. Her daughters-in-law both tried to follow her. She convinced Orpah to remain in Moab, but she could not shake Ruth who gave this impassioned plea (Ruth 1:16) "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and *your God my God*."

That was Ruth chapter one. God was at work in a series of *losses*. Naomi lost her home, her husband, and her sons. But she gained something. Indeed, all Israel gained something that would play a significant role in the coming of the Messiah. *Ruth*.

That brings us to Ruth chapter two. In contrast to the losses in chapter one, in chapter two we see God's providence is a series of *gains*. God always takes care of His people, always. In Ruth 2 we see His care demonstrated in three ways in the life of Ruth through the person of Boaz.

I. The Lord directed Ruth to Boaz (1-3).

Verse 1 "Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose

name was Boaz." The writer of this short story, some feel it is Samuel but we don't know for sure, tells us this important piece of information to prepare us for what will happen later. The author is a great story teller. But his aim isn't to entertain. It's to teach us about God, namely this...

A. God has a plan for His people. Ruth is about to meet Boaz but even before she does, the writer introduces to him. The name 'Boaz' means 'in Him is strength.' Interestingly, Ruth's first husband, Mahlon, had a name that meant 'weakling.' What a contrast!

We're told that Boaz is related to Naomi on Elimelech's side. That's significant as we'll see later in the book. We're also told Boaz was an important man, just how important we'll also soon see.

It's vital to remember that nothing ever just *happens*, not in God's universe. God is in control. God is directing every situation down to the very details. God has a plan for His people.

"That leads to fatalism," doesn't it? No, not if we keep the biblical balance represented in Ruth. On the one hand God truly has a plan for His people. On the other hand...

- **B.** God uses the decisions of His people to accomplish that plan. In this case He used a decision made by Ruth. Verse 2— "And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, 'Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.' Naomi said to her, 'Go ahead, my daughter." Please note that...
- 1. Ruth was looking for food. It's hard for us to fathom how vulnerable the widows Ruth and Naomi were. There was no social security in Israel. There were, however, God-given stipulations that provided for them. Gleaning was a right of widows, as God instructed in the Law (Deut. 24:19). A farmer was to leave the edge of his field unharvested to provide for widows.

We need a little background concerning grain farming in Israel to make sense of the story. Harvesting grain involved the following steps:

- 1. Cutting the ripened standing grain with hand sickles, usually done by men
- 2. Binding the grain into sheaves, usually done by women
- 3. Gleaning, that is, gathering stalks of grain left behind
- 4. Transporting the sheaves to the threshing floor, often by donkey and sometimes by cart
- 5. Threshing, that is, loosening the grain from the straw, usually done by the treading of cattle, but sometimes by toothed threshing sledges or the wheels of carts
- 6. Winnowing, done by tossing the grain into the air with winnowing forks so that the wind, which usually came up for a few hours in the afternoon, blew away the straw and chaff, leaving the grain at the winnower's feet
- 7. Sifting the grain to remove any residual foreign matter
- 8. Bagging for transportation and storage

So Ruth decided to go looking for some grain. The KJV uses the word 'corn' which is the British equivalent of 'grain.' The particular grain Ruth is after is barley (1:22). The barley harvest began in late April.

Ruth didn't live on a farm. In fact, in that day no one did. People lived within the city walls for protection, but their farmland was located outside the city. Ruth intends to leave Bethlehem and go looking for food in a nearby barley field.

In verse 2 Ruth is referred to as 'the Moabitess,' one of five times in the book we're told that she is a *foreigner*, an *outsider*. That, too, is significant for it shows that God can use anyone to fulfill His amazing plan.

- Verse 3—"So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech." Remember, Ruth was looking for food, but the Lord had something else in mind...
- 2. The Lord intended to give her something far greater. It was a 'God-moment.' The NIV says, "As it turned out." The KJV uses the phrase, "Her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz." The Hebrew phrase reads "her hap happened," or "her chance chanced," or "she happened to happen on." From Ruth's perspective she just "happened" to end up in a field owned by Boaz. But this was no happenstance. God was at work, a fact that will become quite apparent by the time the story is done.

It's the same in your life and mine...

When I was eleven years old my dad just *happened* to take a different job, and we just *happened* to move to a town where there just *happened* to be a Bible-believing church where I just *happened* to hear the good news of Jesus Christ and just *happened* to believe in Him. Later another family just *happened* to move to that same farm town that just *happened* to have a teenage girl my age who just *happened* to accept my invitation to come to a youth group event who later just *happened* to accept my proposal to become my wife and life partner.

Think about how your *hap happened* in life. Where you were born, the people you have met, the experiences you've known, none of that just *happened*. Indeed, the Sovereign Lord was at work in every detail, in every *hap*!

You decided to come to church today. That's your *hap*! Maybe you came to satisfy a family member, or to hear a song, or meet a friend. Maybe you are searching. Whatever the reason *you* had, know this. God uses the decisions of His people to accomplish His plan. He is up to something in your life today.

So ends scene #1. The Lord directed Ruth to Boaz. In scene 2...

II. The Lord provided for Ruth through Boaz (4-16).

Keep in mind Ruth is after food but God has a bigger agenda for Ruth and through Ruth for the accomplishment of His redemptive plan for the world. And He intends to use Boaz to bring it about. Boaz gave Ruth five things in this scene...

A. Boaz gave her the assurance of the Lord's presence (4). "Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, 'The LORD be with you!' 'The LORD bless you!' they called back."

That's an interesting greeting. Remember this story is taking place during the time of the Judges (1:1). What was happening at that time? Not much good! The last verse of Judges declares in Judges 21:25, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." What happens to society when everybody does what they think is right and does their own thing? Read Judges and you'll find out. Religion is marketed. Sex is degraded. Justice is perverted. Marriage and the family is disintegrated. That's what happened during the time of the judges.

But so did this. There was a man that went to work and greeted his workers by saying, "The LORD be with you!" This is a godly man, a rarity it would seem from reading the book of Judges, but God has in own in any age. I can't help but see a contrast here...

- 1. For some people God is real only in church. Their Christianity shows up only on Sunday. Ask them if they love Jesus and they'll tell you...on Sunday. Ask them for evidence and they'll point to what they do...on Sunday...at church. That's reality for some people. God is real only in church. Conversely...
- 2. For others God is real wherever they go. "The LORD be with you!" Where did Boaz say those words? In a barley field with his employees. Boaz took the Lord to work with him. Some people talk about God at work but their

work doesn't match their talk and it turns people off. That wasn't the case with Boaz. He backed up his words by the way he treated his workers, as we'll soon see. And so his employees respond, "The LORD bless you!" Amazing. People are thinking about the Lord where they work.

Think of the impact this had on a newcomer to the faith like Ruth. By his actions, Boaz gave Ruth the assurance of the Lord's presence. Wow! Israel 's God goes to work with them!

It didn't take long for Boaz to notice a new face in his work crew. Verse 5—"Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, 'Whose young woman is that?'" That's quite a question, not who is that young woman, but whose young woman is that? In other words, who does she belong to? Does she have a master? How about a husband? Does she belong to anyone? There seems to be more behind Boaz's question than, "Who gives that woman a W-2 at the end of the year?"

Verses 6-7—"The foreman replied, 'She is the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi. She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.'"

Note the reputation Ruth is building for herself. The foreman says she is *polite and respectful* (she said 'please'), *hard-working* ("she has worked steadily from morning till now"), and *loyal to her mother-in-law* ("she came back from Moab with Naomi"). Know this. You build a reputation by how you live. It takes time to build a good reputation, but it can be lost in a moment of folly. Thankfully, by God's grace it can be restored.

Let me reiterate what caught this foreman's eye. Ruth *worked steadily*. There's something very attractive about being a *hard worker*. People notice, even when we don't think they're watching. As believers we ought to be the best workers on the job, not to gain attention for ourselves but for our Lord.

Titus 2:9-10 "Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive."

Matthew 5:16 "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

Ruth's hard work and reputation made an impact on Boaz. Which brings us to the second thing he gave her...

B. Boaz gave her a safe place to work (5-9). Verse 8—"So Boaz said to Ruth, 'My daughter, listen to me." His words 'my daughter' seem to indicate that Boaz was considerably older than Ruth (Goslinga suggests a middle aged man). Be that as it may, he has a proposal for Ruth...

Verses 8-9—"Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled."

Remember, Ruth left the house that morning looking for food, but God is giving her much more than she anticipated! A man has come into her life who, in spite of her background, offers to be her provider and protector.

Verse 10—"At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground [a gesture that shows reverence, honor, and appreciation]. She exclaimed, 'Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?'" We live in a day of entitlements where it's common for a person to think he *deserves* for people (and even God) to meet his needs. We *expect* good things to happen to us. Ruth didn't, but she truly appreciated the blessings.

Notice how she refers to herself. Why do you notice me—a foreigner? Goslinga observes, "There is a minor play on words here in that the Hebrew terms translated 'notice me' and 'foreigner' resemble each other; a rough English equivalent would be 'respect a reject." Ruth can't escape the fact that she is different but that doesn't matter. In the end the fact that she is different, a foreigner, will result in even greater glory to God because people will say, "God

works even through foreigners to accomplish His purposes!"

So much so that when we come to the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1, we see in addition to the listing of a host of men who were in Jesus' ancestry the names of three special women. Guess who one of them is? Matthew 1:5
—"Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth."

Boaz gave Ruth the assurance of the Lord's presence and a safe place to work. Notice his third gift...

C. Boaz gave her a blessing for her godly reputation (10-13). Verse 11—"Boaz replied, 'I've been told all about what you have done...'" Word gets around! People notice good deeds. They make an impression. Here's what impressed Boaz...

Verse 11—"I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before."

I learn three things about Boaz and his assessment of Ruth from those words...

- 1. He saw beyond her past (10). It's true that Ruth was a foreigner, a Moabitess. She used to worship Chemosh, the god of the Moabites. Boaz knew that. He knew that Ruth used to worship Chemosh. But that's the point. It was in her past.
- 2. He saw what God was doing in and through her in the present (11-12). Boaz mentions that Ruth's parents were still living. He knows that she could have gone back to them but chose instead to go with Naomi. That decision revealed that something was more important to Ruth than her family and the familiarity of her homeland, namely Naomi's God, the true God of Israel. Ruth had come to know Naomi's God and she wanted to know Him better! That's why she left Moab.

There may be a connection in Boaz's mind to Abraham who also left his homeland and relatives in obedience to God's command. Ruth like Abraham went out not knowing where she would end up.

Ruth had put her whole trust in Yahweh. That's why she moved to Israel. And that's why Boaz verbalizes two prayer requests for Ruth in verse 12, "May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge." The imagery speaks of a tiny bird snuggling under the wings of its mother for safety. It speaks of God as Protector. In coming to Israel Ruth was coming under Yahweh's wings, and that news thrilled Boaz!

Let that sink in. God chose Israel to be a means of spreading the truth about Himself to the world, and Israel was to rejoice in that honor. Sadly Israel began to hoard the Lord. By contrast, how refreshing to see the response of Boaz! Boaz is thrilled that a foreigner has come to believe in the true God of Israel. It brings him joy—and he says so —that Ruth has come under the wings of Yahweh. That's the way it was supposed to be in Israel.

And in the church. Does it thrill you when someone comes to know the salvation of your Lord? How do you respond when someone new comes to *your* church? Do you take the initiate to meet them? Do you tell them, "I'm so glad you have come here today, to get to know the truth God with us! What can I do to help you? Would you like to sit with me, and maybe come to my house for dinner?"? The Lord doesn't bless us so we can keep His goodness to ourselves. He blesses us so that we might in turn bless others, all to His glory.

Note the effect Boaz's words had on Ruth...

3. He gave her hope for the future (13). Verse 13—"'May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord,' she said. 'You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls."'

Some would say that Ruth had low self-esteem. That's not true. She's a very secure person. Her security is in the Lord. That's why she made the huge decision to leave her homeland. No, she doesn't have a poor self-esteem. She

just consistently puts the Lord and others ahead of herself, as the Savior would later do.

Boaz isn't done giving yet...

D. Boaz gave her a meal (14). "At mealtime Boaz said to her, 'Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.' When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over."

By Jesus' time the Jews refused to eat with Gentiles. But here Boaz initiates this interaction with Ruth. He invites her to eat with him. He gives her food, specifically some *roasted grain*.

W. M. Thompson describes the roasted grain: "A quantity of the best ears, not too ripe, are plucked with the stalks attached. These are tied into small parcels, a blazing fire is kindled with dry grass and thorn bushes, and the cornheads are held in it until the chaff is mostly burned off. The grain is thus sufficiently roasted to be eaten, and it is a favorite article all over the country." [4]

Do you see what's happening? Boaz doesn't see Ruth as a foreigner any longer. You don't offer hospitality to a foreigner, but to a *friend*. He is a godly man (and single) and she is a godly woman (and single). Boaz is initiating a *friendship*. Will it go further? You'll have to wait and see. But know this. Here's where a good male-female relationship begins, with *friendship*. Keep that in mind, young people. And keep that in mind those of you who've been married for years. Is your spouse your best friend? God created marriage for *companionship*.

Boaz still isn't finished, however. Notice verses 15-16, "As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, 'Even if she gathers among the sheaves, don't embarrass her. Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don't rebuke her." In other words...

E. Boaz gave her a surplus of food for the future (15-16). You can't help but admire Boaz. What a godly, giving man! He told his men to let Ruth gather grain among the sheaves which meant she could glean not only where the harvest was finished but also where the workers were presently cutting and binding the stalks into sheaves.

One commentator I read suggested it was love at first sight. I'm not sure about that, but something's brewing! Boaz keeps giving and giving to Ruth. What does she think about him? We don't know yet. So ends scene 2.

Keep in mind the story of Ruth is really a story about the Lord. What have we learned about the Lord thus far? First, the Lord directed Ruth to Boaz—He *directs* His people. Next, the Lord provided for Ruth through Boaz—He *provides for* His people.

III. The Lord prepared Ruth for Boaz (17-23).

Here's how He did it. Watch the sequence of events unfold.

A. Naomi blessed Boaz (17-19). Verse 17—"So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah." Huey suggests that a typical ration was one to two pounds of grain per day, meaning Ruth gathered enough to last Naomi and her for weeks. [5]

Verse 18—"She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough." Please note that Ruth, in contrast to what so often happens today in America, didn't waste her leftover food from lunch. She appreciates God's provision, and shares it, too.

Verse 19—"Her mother-in-law asked her, 'Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!'" At this point Naomi blesses but still doesn't know the identity of the kind man who showered Ruth with blessings that day. She's in for quite a shock…

Verse 19b—"Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. 'The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,' she said."

Upon hearing the name Boaz, Naomi can't contain her joy. Verse 20—"'The LORD bless him!' Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. 'He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.' She added, 'That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.'" Note that...

- **B.** Naomi asked the Lord to bless Boaz (20). The Lord is so real to Naomi that when tragedy struck in chapter one she affirmed the Lord's control and now when blessings come in chapter two she likewise attributes it to the Lord. She also reveals a couple of important insights about Boaz.
- 1. She reveals he is a kinsman-redeemer. What's that? In Israel God owned the land. As God's covenant people the Israelites were the caretakers of God's land. In the book of Joshua God divided and parceled out the land according to tribes, clans, and families. The land given to a family was to stay in that family. But what would happen if a man died without children to keep the land in the family? God addressed that possibility (Deut. 25:5-10). Some other extended family member could keep the family tree alive. That person was called a kinsman redeemer.

That's what Boaz is, Naomi tells Ruth. He is one of our kinsman redeemers. One of them? You mean there are others? Yes. We'll meet another in chapter four. But for now, it's Boaz. And suffice it to say that Naomi...

- 2. She sees in him hope for the future. Naomi's reference to 'the dead,' referring to their deceased spouses, indicates that her wheels are already turning with a developing plan. In the final verses...
- C. Naomi encouraged Ruth to stay near Boaz (21-23). "Then Ruth the Moabitess said, 'He even said to me, 'Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain." Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with his girls, because in someone else's field you might be harmed.' So Ruth stayed close to the servant girls of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law."

That final verse sums up what Ruth did for the next three months. She got up daily and went to work in the fields of Boaz. And she was never alone. God was there, right there in the barley field and in the wheat field.

Lessons from Ruth 2: I'll mention three lessons...

1. We learn that God is a providence-working God.

David Atkinson writes, "One of the most important features of faith in God's providence is that it teaches us that even our accidents are within his care." He's right.

J. Vernon McGee observes, "No accident can happen to a child of God. He may be in a car wreck or he may be killed instantly; but for the child of God that cannot be finally defined as an accident. Nothing can come to a Christian that does not first receive the permission of God. Chance is removed from the child of God, for he is like Job of whom Satan said, 'Hast not thou made an hedge about him?'"[8]

Yes, God is in control. You can trust Him.

2. We learn that God is a prayer-hearing God. It's worth noting that every prayer in the book of Ruth is answered. In 1:9 Naomi requested that the Lord bless Ruth's household, and He did. In 2:12 Boaz requested that the Lord reward Ruth's faithfulness, and He did. In fact, He did it through the one making the prayer request, Boaz himself!

The Lord hears when His people pray. And in His time and in His perfect way, He answers! In Ruth chapter two He provided two widows with food, but that's just the beginning.

3. We learn that God is a providing God. The man through whom He provided the food is also the man through whom He provided a link to the Messiah Jesus. In a sense, we are here today because Ruth went to that barley field, met Boaz, eventually had a son with Boaz, the great grandfather of King David, the ancestor of the King of kings, Jesus Christ.

And why did God go to all that trouble to send Jesus into the world? Because we are sinners who need a Savior. Jesus died on the cross for sinners, like the people living in the time of the judges and like us. He rose again and offers life eternal for those who believe in Him. Yes, our God is a providing God!

- As explained in *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 363.
- [2] Huey, p. 527.
- [3] Goslinga, pp. 531-2.
- [4] Quote taken from Leon Morris, *Ruth*, p. 278.
- [5] Huey, p. 532.
- [6] The two harvest seasons lasted about seven weeks, from late April to early June; Huey, p. 533.
- [7] D. Atkinson, p. 59.
- [8] J. Vernon McGee, p. 65.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.