

# Ruth

## Lesson Two – Ruth's Lowly Service

### "Let Me Glean" (2:1-23)

#### INTRODUCTION

- I. Last week we began taking a brief interlude from our studies in the life and teachings of Jesus, to take a look at one of the most beautiful stories in the Old Testament.
  - A. As we said in the introduction of that lesson, this story is set in a time of Israel's history that was marked by immorality, idolatry and war – a time when, according to the book of Judges, *“everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”* (**Judges 17:6; 21:25**)
    1. It's the story of the devotion and faithfulness of a Moabite woman by the name of Ruth who leaves her homeland in Moab after the death of her husband and goes to live in the land of Israel with her Jewish mother-in-law Naomi.
    2. As this story unfolds, we see God blessing Ruth for her devotion to Naomi by leading Ruth to become the wife of a wealthy landowner named of Boaz, and eventually become one of the women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.
  - B. In our previous study, we saw how Ruth made a noble choice and came to be the daughter-in-law to Naomi.
    1. The first chapter of the book of Ruth tells of the journey of Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons from Israel during the time of a famine to the land of Moab – a land characterized by idolatry.

2. But sometime after arriving in Moab, we learned, “Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons.” (Ruth 1:3)
  3. Soon after the death of their father these two young men married two Moabite women by the names of Orpah and Ruth.
    - a. Jewish tradition not only claims Ruth and Orpah were sisters, but that Ruth was also the daughter of Eglon, King of Moab.
    - b. Neither of these assertions have any basis in Scripture.
  4. Then suddenly, the two sons of Naomi die, leaving behind their widowed mother and leaving their young wives as widows also.
  5. When word that the famine in Israel had ended, Naomi decided to return to her home in Bethlehem and was accompanied by her two daughters-in-law.
  5. Naomi urged both young women to return to their own homes in Moab. Orpah did return, but Ruth pleaded with Naomi to allow her to stay.
    - a. **Ruth 1:16-17** – *"Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. 17 Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."*
- C. As we move into the second chapter of Ruth, the story continues where it left off with Ruth and Naomi arriving in Bethlehem at the time of barley harvest.
1. Last week we noticed the "**noble choice**" that Ruth made by leaving her home and religion of Moab to adopt Naomi's home and God as her own.

2. What stands out throughout this story is Ruth's devotion toward her mother-in-law.
  - a. We saw it in her "**noble choice**"
  - b. And now we will see it again in her "**lowly service**"

**BODY:**

- I. As the chapter opens we are introduced to a man by the name of Boaz.
  - A. The Scriptures tell us he was related to Naomi's husband Elimelech, and that he was a man of great wealth.
    1. According to Jewish tradition, Boaz was the nephew of Elimelech.
    2. Although Ruth was unaware of Boaz and the relationship between him and Naomi, Ruth knows she needs to do something to provide for the two of them.
    3. Therefore, hoping to find favor with some landowner who will allow her to glean after his reapers, Ruth asks her mother-in-law for her permission to, *"Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor."* (**Ruth 2:2**)
    4. As she went, the Scriptures tell us she happened to go to the field owned by Boaz – the Hebrew wording suggests that it was the providence of God that led her to that particular field.
  - B. The Law of Moses made provisions for the poor and the stranger to glean the harvest fields.
    1. The term "**glean**" pertains to gathering the extra grain or other produce that still remained in the fields after workers had gone through the fields and harvested the crop.
      - a. In fact, the Law of Moses specifically forbade land owners from completely harvesting the corners of their fields, or from

going back into the fields and gleaning the leftovers themselves.

2. The poor of the land were entitled to that portion left over in the fields after the harvest.
  - a. **Lev 19:9-10** – *"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the LORD your God."*
  - b. **Deut 24:19-22** – *"When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20 When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. 21 When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. 22 And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this thing."*
3. And so, since Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth were both widows and poor, Ruth decides to work with her own hands in gathering up whatever is left in the fields of Boaz so that she and Naomi will not have to depend on the generosity of others for food.
4. Since not all landowners strictly followed this aspect of the Law of Moses, and actually violated the law by gleaning their own fields, Ruth was hoping that the owner of this field would be more

generous and graciously allow his fields to be gleaned by this Moabite woman.

- II. While Ruth is busy gleaning behind the harvesters, Boaz arrives to greet his reapers and extend to them God's blessings, and they return the same to him – obviously a sign of dignity and great mutual respect between this wealthy landowner and his hired servants.
  - A. However, it was also at this moment that Boaz noticed a young woman busily gathering up the leftovers from the harvest.
    1. **Ruth 2:6-7** – When Boaz inquires about who she is, he is told by the servant in charge of the reapers that, *"It is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. 7 And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.' So she came and has continued from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house."*
    2. Ruth's humble and godly character is shown by several things we read here.
      - a. First, she didn't just presume she had the right to go into the field of Boaz and glean – she asked for permission from the servant in charge of the reapers.
      - b. Second, she worked hard at gleaning the field – from early in the morning until that moment – taking only a brief time to rest before going back into the field.
      - c. And third, she was not one who would ask for charity in the face of adversity. She was not only willing to work to support her own needs, but those of her mother-in-law Naomi as well.

3. No doubt, Boaz was immediately impressed with this young woman who was willing to give up returning to her home in Moab to remain with and care for the widow of his kinsman, Elimelech.
- B. And so Boaz approaches the young Moabite woman.
1. To reward her for her faithful care and compassion toward Naomi, Boaz proposes several things to Ruth.
    - a. First, he urges her to remain in his field to glean behind his own reapers, and to not go to other fields. Going to glean in other fields might increase the possibility that she could be mistreated by the harvesters or other gleaners.
    - b. Second, he urges her to work close behind his own women reapers – which would be fitting company for this young woman.
    - c. Third, he urges her to keep her eyes on the field where his women reapers are working, and gather after them.  
(1). In a moment we'll see why Boaz asked her to do this.
    - d. Fourth, he assures her that she will not be harmed in any way since he has given word to the young men to leave her alone.
    - e. And finally, he urges her to drink from the water that has been drawn from the well by the young men – water drawn for the reapers – and not worry about having to draw her own water.
  2. In essence, Boaz provides for her the same protection and accommodations all his reapers would receive, with only one exception – Ruth was not gathering the harvest for the benefit of Boaz, but for herself and her mother-in-law Naomi.
  3. Unlike the reapers, Ruth would be allowed to keep all she gathered – a monetary value which, according to some

commentators, would be more than the wages received by the reapers for their day-long labor.

C. In her great appreciation and humility for all Boaz was doing for her, she bows down before him and asks why she has found favor in his sight.

1. **Ruth 2:11-12** – *And Boaz answered and said to her, "It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before. 12 The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge."*
2. Ruth is overwhelmed with the kindness and generosity of Boaz, especially since she is not related to him as is Naomi.
3. She acknowledges that he has treated her as kindly as he would treat his own maidservants – even though she isn't his maidservant at all, but just a stranger in the land of Israel.

III. As the reapers of Boaz break for a noon-time meal, Ruth is invited by Boaz to join with the others and share the meal.

A. Boaz shows great kindness to Ruth.

1. In everything he does, Boaz treats Ruth with the same dignity and respect he has toward his own servants – even though she is a stranger in the land of Israel.
  - a. In fact, she is served more than she needed for herself, and intentionally kept back some to share later with Naomi.
2. But Boaz does even more for Ruth. He speaks to his young men (apparently without her knowledge) that she is to be given

privileges in gleaning that go beyond what is required by the Law of Moses.

- a. **Ruth 2:15-16** – Boaz instructs his young men, "*Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. 16 Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.*"
  - b. While gleaners were permitted to harvest what had been passed over by the reapers, Boaz goes one step further.
  - c. He not only wants his servants to allow Ruth to glean from among the sheaves (the stalks of grain that had already been gathered and dropped before they could be bundled), he tells his servants to intentionally drop some bundled sheaves and leave them for Ruth.
3. Almost universally, commentators see this as being both a reward for her faithfulness in caring for Naomi, as well as a reward for her sincere gentleness and humility – qualities that seem to have led Boaz to take a special interest in the young Moabite woman.

IV. Ruth continued to glean until evening.

A. The Scriptures tell us Ruth gleaned "*about an ephah of barley.*" (**Ruth 2:17**) An ephah is a Hebrew unit of weight.

1. To put this in perspective that we can understand, consider the following from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary:
  - a. We're told a homer is the equivalent of about 220 liters (6 1/4 bushels). It was a large measure weighing the equivalent of the normal load a donkey could carry.

- b. An ephah is a unit of weight equal to one-tenth of a homer, or approximately 22 liters or 9 US gallons – just about as much as a person could carry.
  - c. In monetary terms we're told in **Leviticus 27:16** that a homer of barley is worth 50 shekels of silver, which means an ephah of barley would be worth about 5 shekels of silver – which, according to some sources, would be the equivalent of about 20 days wages.
2. The fact that Boaz told his servants TWICE to NOT rebuke Ruth for what she was gleaning is further indication that she was being allowed to keep enough barley to clearly make his servants very jealous.
    - a. But they could also see that Boaz was clearly rewarding Ruth.
- B. When she returns home to Naomi, Ruth shares with her the extra food she had saved from the noontime meal with Boaz.
1. When Naomi asked Ruth with whom had been working, and learned that it was Boaz, Naomi praised God for His providential blessings and care.
  2. **Ruth 2:20** – Naomi told Ruth, *"This man is a relation of ours, one of our close relatives."*
  3. Ruth then realized why Boaz had asked her to stay in his field and glean along with the women reapers who worked for Boaz. In fact, Boaz wanted her to glean in his field until the harvest had been completed.
  4. As we learn from the last verse of chapter two, Ruth not only remained gleaning in the field of Boaz through the end of Barley harvest, but through the end of wheat harvest as well.

5. And through all this time, Ruth continued to stay with Naomi – even though she was making enough from her labor to do QUITE well for herself.
- V. So, as we look back over this second chapter of Ruth, we see the righteous character of two remarkable persons.
- A. First, take notice of the examples of righteous character we see in the life of Ruth.
    1. In this chapter we see Ruth’s humility and her willingness to minister to the needs of her mother-in-law.
      - a. Ruth displays a gentle and quiet spirit, and great humility.
      - b. Even though she MAY have been the daughter of a king, according to Jewish tradition, she was more than willing to take upon herself the role of a servant to the mother-in-law whom she had come to love so very deeply.
    2. We also see Ruth’s genuine self-sacrificing love and devotion toward Naomi.
      - a. We have no idea how long these two women had been associated with each other before Naomi’s sons died.
      - b. But whatever that amount of time may have been, it was enough for Ruth to see in Naomi a genuine godly character of gentleness and of love for the God whom she felt was punishing her.
    3. We also saw Ruth’s faith in the God of Israel being reassured.
      - a. Even though she had been brought up to worship the gods of her fathers, and even though she may have believed that the loss of her husband was due to God's discipline, Ruth could now be reassured that the God of Israel is a God of mercy

and kindness – He had not forsaken His kindness toward her and her mother-in-law.

- B. Look at the example of righteous character in the actions of Boaz.
1. First, we see the kindness and generosity of Boaz toward Ruth.
    - a. When he learned that Ruth was caring for Naomi, and that she had asked permission to glean in the field to provide for her and her mother-in-law, Boaz did everything he could to be generous toward her.
    - b. Although he could have simply given Ruth or Naomi money to take care of their immediate need, he probably saw that Ruth was not the kind of person to ask for charity.
    - c. Her attitude seemed to be that if she could work, she would earn whatever she needed to care for herself and Naomi.
    - d. Therefore, Boaz had respect for her sense of dignity and did all he could to accommodate her desire to earn from her own labor.
    - e. The fact that he commanded his reapers to leave behind extra for Ruth would have been seen by her as an act of kindness in providing a bonus for her labor.
  2. We also see his sense of moral integrity in the way he conducted himself toward Ruth, and in the way he commanded his young men and his women reapers to treat her.
    - a. Boaz apparently sees the godly character of Ruth, and does everything he can do to protect her from any harm, ridicule or slander by warning his young men to do her no harm.
    - b. He also urges her to remain close to his women reapers so that no one could question Ruth's moral character if they saw

her working by herself where she would be alone and vulnerable.

- C. So, what lessons can we learn from this?
1. First we learn that God always honors a gentle and quiet spirit that displays itself in genuine humility. These qualities are seen in the character of Jesus, and are urged to be in the life of everyone who would be a disciple of Christ.
    - a. **Matt 11:28-30** – *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*
    - b. **Phil 2:1-4** – *Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*
  2. Second, we learn that God rewards those who care for the needs of others.
    - a. The Scriptures make it clear that children are to “requite” their parents – meaning they are to “pay back in kind.” This is especially true in caring for widows.
    - b. **1 Tim 5:3-4** – *Honor widows who are really widows. 4 But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn*

*to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God.*

- c. However, technically, Ruth had no obligation to care for Naomi. She chose to do so out of the goodness and generosity of her heart. Ruth truly loved Naomi as she would have loved her own mother, and cared for her as a daughter.
  - d. As a result, God providentially rewards Ruth by leading her to the field of Boaz who would show kindness and generosity toward the Moabite woman for her devotion and care of a relative of Boaz – especially when she was not obligated to do so.
3. Third, we learn the value of a good days work and of earning our own way through life. The Scriptures are filled with admonitions against laziness and against failing to provide for one's family when we have the ability and the health to do so.
- a. **Eccl 10:18** – *Because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness of hands the house leaks.*
  - b. **2 Thess 3:10-12** – *For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. 11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. 12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.*
  - c. **Eph 4:28** – *Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.*

- d. **Prov 21:25-26** – *The desire of the lazy man kills him, for his hands refuse to labor. 26 He covets greedily all day long, but the righteous gives and does not spare.*
- 4. Finally, we learn the need to maintain our moral integrity.
  - a. **1 Tim 5:1-2** – *Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.*
  - b. **Titus 2:1-8** – *But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: 2 that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; 3 the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things — 4 that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. 6 Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, 7 in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, 8 sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.*
  - c. **1 Peter 2:11-12** – *Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

- d. **1 Peter 3:1-4** – *Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. 3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward — arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel — 4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.*

## **CONCLUSION:**

- I. In this chapter, where we've see "**Ruth's Lowly Service**," we've also seen how God rewards.
- A. Specifically, we see God blessing both Ruth and Boaz.
1. We see how God rewards humility and the willingness to minister to the needs of others.
    - a. He blessed Ruth by providentially bringing her into the field of Boaz, a man of great wealth who will one day become her husband.
    - b. And through Ruth, God also providentially blesses Naomi.
  2. And we see how God rewards kindness and moral integrity.
    - a. While Ruth will be blessed by a husband who will provide for all her material needs, she and Boaz will both be blessed by God bring each into the life of the other.
    - b. Ruth will be blessed by having a husband like Boaz, and he will be blessed by God leading such a wonderful young woman into his life – a woman of gentleness, tenderness, faithfulness, and moral integrity.

- B. In this story of "**Ruth's Lowly Service**," we also see another truth displayed, in that God gives grace to the humble.
  - 1. **1 Peter 5:5-7** – *Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.*
  
- II. Are there blessings that God would willingly give to you, but arrogant pride, or greediness, or worldliness are standing in the way?
  - A. The greatest reward and blessing of all is the reward of heaven.
    - 1. However, heaven is not a place for the proud, the arrogant, the greedy, or the worldly.
    - 2. Heaven is a place for those who willingly give their life to Jesus Christ, because He willingly gave His life for us.