

MESSAGE TITLE: Grace in a Grain Field

SCRIPTURE: Ruth 2

KEY TRUTH: *Ruth is a hungry and hurting widow whose only hope is finding grace in the sight of someone who can help her. Little does she know that God has already been planning to pour out grace upon her in ways she could never imagine.*

GETTING STARTED (pick any of these as potential discussion starters)

While you may not always see or feel it, the truth is that God cares for you. Being in the middle of a bustling crowd doesn't hide you from His eye. Not being able to hear yourself amid a crowded conversation doesn't make Him deaf toward your words. Even when you may not realize it, the Lord is working all the time to accomplish His purpose in your life. In Ruth 2, we see God's providence at work, and the result is that Ruth, an outsider in the community, was welcomed in.

What are some of the reasons why you know God cares for you? Keep a list of your group's responses.

Why do people sometimes doubt whether God cares about them?

Looking back across your life, in what ways would you say that God has blessed you with providential guidance and/or protection?

OBSERVATION

READ Ruth 2:1-23.

What sorts of trials might Ruth and Naomi have faced as widows living in Bethlehem?

What was Ruth hoping to accomplish by gleaning "among the reapers" (v. 2)? What does this tell us about her?

The initiative to confront their problem came from Ruth (v. 2). We read in Leviticus 19:9-10 that landowners were required to leave the edges of their fields unharvested. Neither were they to go back and pick up excess heads of grain that had fallen to the ground or had been missed by the harvesters. This grain was to be left as food for the poor to gather. Not everyone obeyed the law, of course, and Ruth had to seek a field in which she would be allowed to glean. Yet she faced up to whatever embarrassment that entailed and found a field where she was allowed to work.

What do we learn about Boaz from verse 4?

How did Boaz respond to Ruth's request to glean in his field (vv. 7-9, v. 14)? What does that tell us about his character?

The first words out of Boaz's mouth to his servants were about the Lord and were words of blessing. This tells us that Boaz loved the Lord and was kind to his servants. Furthermore, we see Boaz showed kindness to Ruth by feeding her, allowing her to freely glean in his field, and promising her protection.

What did Boaz recognize about Ruth (vv. 11-12)? How did his actions provide for Ruth's physical needs?

What did Boaz ask the Lord to do for Ruth? Why is this significant, and what does it teach us about him?

Boaz also desired that God show favor to Ruth. He pronounced a blessing on her. Boaz viewed Ruth's turn to the Lord as fully genuine, a faith demonstrated by her devotion to Naomi. Boaz understood that Ruth had cast herself into the hands of One who was previously a foreign deity. Boaz affirmed that, in his view, Ruth was now part of the covenant people and thus was under God's protection.

Think about everything we have discussed today from Ruth 2. How do you see God's providential hand at work in Ruth's life?

Hebrews 2:10 tells us that God is in the business of "bringing many sons to glory." What are some key moments in your life when you know that God was drawing you to Himself?

APPLICATION

What is one truth about God that you can take away from this story?

What does Boaz's example teach us about how we are to treat the "outsiders" in our lives—people we know who don't know Jesus, but who we might generally tend to avoid?

What actions can you take to ensure that your relationship with Christ takes precedence over all else? What might this demonstration of faithfulness cost you?

How does faithfulness in relationships require us to invest emotionally, socially, physically, mentally, and spiritually?

In whose story is God using you? Are you allowing God to use you to welcome in the outsider?

As a class, brainstorm some ideas of way you reach out to people this week?

PRAYER

For your closing prayer time, have your group split up into pairs or small groups of 3-4 people. Share the names of people who you feel led to reach out to. Pray that even now God would be drawing them to Him and preparing them for your initiation.

COMMENTARY NOTES

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 (Lev. 19:9-10). The phrase translated a worthy man 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, and 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 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 a foreigner, 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 26 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 forsaken 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 (v. 20) were relatives who were obliged to buy back family members from debt-slavery or to redeem their field if they had to sell it (Lev. 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 (Num. 5:8; 35:12). He might also raise up a child for the dead relative in order to maintain the connection between the clan and its hereditary property (Deut. 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 verse 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 the field of another" 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.