

Human Freedom and Divine Causality (Ruth 2:1-7)

1. Virtue and Resourcefulness of Ruth (v.1-7)

- Ruth exercises her verbal oath of commitment to Naomi on the road from Moab to Bethlehem by kindly informing/requesting Naomi's blessing to glean someone's field in whose sight she would "find favor" (v.2).
- Naomi utters two words in the Hebrew: "Go, (my) daughter." Why isn't Naomi attending with Ruth? Why is she sending Ruth alone during that time of the judges in a country where she has never been before? Where are they staying? How long does it take until Ruth stumbles on Boaz' field? The narrator is silent.
- Naomi is defeated and downcast in soul. She is living without hope. She has already acknowledged God's sovereignty (1:9, 13, 20-21) but has not accepted her lot. Naomi has digressed into a season of grief and is of no practical usefulness in relieving their present hunger.
- Gleaning: Under Mosaic legislation, the poor and sojourner were granted exclusive rights to reap/gather from the edges of a field during harvest time, as well as gleaning after the harvest (Ex. 23:11; Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut. 24:19-21). Special privileges were given to widows (Ex. 22:2-24; 10:18; 14:29): on a yearly basis (Deut. 24:19-22) and on the third-year tithe (Deut. 14:28-29).
- Some, however, did not always provide a gleaning opportunity for the poor, sojourner, and widow (Deut. 27:19; Isa. 1:17, 23; 10:2; Jer. 7:6; Mal. 3:5). Ruth is not sure "who she will find favor with" (v.2). Nevertheless, she departs in faith.

2. The Virtue and Responsibility to Work and Labor

- Creation mandate (Gen. 1:28-30; 2:15): Adam and Eve were charged to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, subdue it (bring it to bondage) and have dominion (explore and cultivate). God tasked Adam to work and labor.
- God:
 - is concerned with the mindset and quality of work that His image bearers exude as they labor under the sun (Eccl. 9:10).
 - wants His image bearers to enjoy the fruit of their labor (Ps. 128:2).
 - wants His people to joyfully contribute to the needs of one another by extending hospitality (Romans 12:11-12).
 - wants His people to give cheerfully, not begrudgingly (2 Cor. 9).
 - does not want His people to adopt the worldly mindset of burdening others unnecessarily in refusing to provide for one's own needs (Prov. 26:14; 1 Thess. 4:9-12). The problem is not inability but unwillingness.
- Scripture nowhere endows, or relies on any form of government, or centralization of power to distribute or redistribute wealth. Instead, Jesus commanded his followers to choose to give it up freely (Mk. 10:17-27; Luke 9:59) while still rendering to Caesar what was his. What belongs to Caesar (Mark 12:17) must not deface, devalue, or diminish His image bearers.
- Scripture does not, in any way, support or endorse a welfare state that takes from the rich and gives to the poor. In God's economy, while there are equal opportunities for the poor to provide for themselves, there is no guaranteed equal outcome. He offered opportunities for the poor to work and provide for their own needs and those dependent on them.
- Ruth is the prime example of a virtuous woman who exercised her full rights as a sojourner and widow to their utmost extent.

3. The Virtue and Righteousness of Boaz (v.1, 4-7)

- The narrator introduces this man, Boaz (v.1) as a relative of Elimelech, not Naomi. Both Elimelech and Boaz are from the same clan (mishpahah). The narrator garners suspense to the reader by giving every detail of this man before revealing his name.
- He is described as a "worthy" man. This is a difficult word in the Hebrew to put in the English: it can mean "strength, power, ability" (2 Kgs. 7:21; 11:28) or "capable or wealthy" (2 Kgs. 15:20). Boaz is a man of substance, virtue, and integrity.
- As Boaz arrives late morning, he greets his workers (v. 4). The greeting itself is not prescriptive, but instead describes his mindset.
- On Boaz' field, he would have a mixture of company: workers who were harvesting and paid daily (Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:15; Matt. 20:8), and the poor, sojourners and widows. The location of each group was indicative of their cultural, social, or financial standing.
- The details of Ruth's departure and arrival on Boaz' land are not provided by the narrator. All we know is that she arrived early in the morning before Boaz.
- Boaz checks in with his foreman (v.5) on the harvesting of the reapers. As he does this, he inquires "whose", not "who" is the "young woman." Boaz wants to know who the "newcomer" is. He wants to know who has "authority" over her. His foreman educates him "who she is." She came with Naomi from Moab.
- The foreman also informs the reader (along with Boaz) the bold request of Ruth: to gather the sheaves that are not collected (v.6-7).
- While harvesting, the reaper would grasp a handful of standing grain with one hand (Ps. 129:7) and cut it with a sickle (Jer. 50:16) held in the other hand. This handful of cut grain (which had the ears attached with the stubs of stalks) was laid on the ground behind them. These handfuls were then turned into bundles. These bundles were then turned into sheaves (although sheaves and bundles can be synonymous).
- What is Ruth asking? She is asking if she can collect the remains of the grain which has been cut that was not gathered in bundles. Ruth is not making any demands but is requesting this allowance from an industrious heart.
- We are not privy to the conversation she had with the foreman, but there was some form of communication between the two where she requested to collect what otherwise would be wasted in a location that the Mosaic Law had not specifically granted her. Her request is beyond the foreman's paygrade.
- There is good indication in the text that Ruth was harassed by some of the workers (v.7). It is not present in the ESV, but in the Hebrew a "hut" or "dwelling" is mentioned. Ruth has rested temporarily because of this. This is reinforced by Boaz' pleading for Ruth not to leave his field and his warnings to his workers to leave her alone (v.8). Boaz fosters a work environment that is pleasing to the LORD: he does not divorce his faith and virtue from his place of employment.

The narrator has masterfully built suspense as Ruth "just happened" to stumble upon Boaz' field (v.3). In the Hebrew, it reads "chance, chance." After this "chance, chance" look who arrives. Boaz! Is Boaz the man with whom she will find favor (v.2)?

Ruth only wanted to find a field where a righteous man will permit her to glean. Boaz just checked in on his workers that late morning. God is ordering and orchestrating all of this, and much more, though no one in the story is aware.