

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker
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Ruth 2:1-23 “Bethlehem’s Redeemer”
(read vv.1-3, 5-12)

Intro. As I said in my last message from the book of Ruth, this little book is the Christmas story pictured centuries ahead of time. It is a love story that culminates in the birth of a baby in Bethlehem. It is also a beautiful story of redemption.

As chapter 1 closes, we find Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth moving from Moab to Israel. They both had experienced how difficult life can be. Both were widowed. Both were poor, with no land they could claim as their own. Both were women who lived in a day of few opportunities for single women. They would, in all likelihood, remain poor the rest of their lives. Both were defenseless. Frankly, in that day it was very dangerous for a woman who did not have a father, husband, or grown son to protect them. These were the days of the judges, when every man did what was right in his own eyes. Ruth’s position was even worse. She was a foreigner. She knew no one but Naomi.

How would you like to be in her position? Perhaps you feel a little like Naomi and Ruth. Have you experienced how difficult life can be? Have you experienced some of the great losses of life? Perhaps you have been widowed, or faced some other major loss. Do you feel that you are standing outside of happiness, looking in? Do you realize that for most of us, we *are* like Ruth in at least one respect? We are not Jews, but Gentiles. We are outside the covenants of God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their descendants. By nature, we have no claim to the promises of God.

Naomi and Ruth were facing similar difficult circumstances. Yet I believe their attitude toward their circumstances were different. As we see from vv.20-21 of chapter 1, Naomi looked at her condition and became bitter about it. Ruth, on the other hand, saw things differently. As someone has said, when life hands you a lemon, make lemonade! Instead of becoming bitter and defeated by the circumstances of life, she trusted in God, made the best of her situation, and discovered the secret of joy and blessing.

And so we are going to see from the life of Ruth how we can overcome the adversities of life, and discover the kind of life God wants us to have. After all, you are going to face difficulties in life, and you need to know how to respond in the right way. Furthermore, we are going to see how, as in Ruth’s case, God has provided a Redeemer for you. Now the first step to overcoming the adversities and losses of life is this:

I. FOCUS ON YOUR CHARACTER, NOT YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES

Most people just focus on changing their circumstances. Yet no matter how bad your circumstance may become, what matters most is your character. Two people can face the same bad circumstances, and yet the result can be very different. One person can be overcome by their circumstances, and yet the other person becomes victorious over their circumstances. Ruth and Naomi faced some difficult circumstances, but Ruth’s character made all the difference in the world. In chapter 3, v.11 Boaz will say of her, “...all the people of my town know that you are a

virtuous¹ woman.” So notice with me what character qualities prepared her to develop such a strong, virtuous character. These same character qualities will make a difference in anyone’s life. Now the starting point in the formation of a character that God can bless is this:

A. Experience Conversion – Back in 1:16, Ruth had turned from idolatry to trust in the living and true God. Ruth went to Israel to trust in the God of Israel. In v.12 of our text, Boaz said to Ruth, “a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.” Now Ruth had become a believer and follower of the God of Israel. This was the starting point for the kind of character she developed.

Even so, you need to be born again. You need to be converted to have the kind of character that will enable you to have faith, hope, and strength as you face the adversities of life. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

Another character quality we should develop is:

B. Care for Other People – Boaz said in v.11, “It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband....” The greatest commandment is to love. This is probably the main reason Ruth went to Israel, to help care and provide for Naomi, who had become a widow. So we see here in chapter 2 that with beautiful self-forgetfulness Ruth goes to the fields, works all day, and brings home a bountiful provision of food to share with Naomi. The last of v.18 says, “So she brought out and gave to her what she had kept back after she had been satisfied.” God will bless those who love as Ruth did.

If you have shown care for other people in their time of need, you will find that people will care for you in your time of adversity.

C. Be Industrious - All great men and women are diligent workers. You will not get ahead in life if you are lazy. Ruth was poor, but she took advantage of the Law of Gleaning.² God required that when the fields were harvested, the harvesters were to make only one pass, and leave the rest for the poor to come and freely glean what remained. So God didn’t provide the poor with welfare. He provided a way for them to work to obtain their food. God’s way of taking care of the poor preserved their dignity by giving them an opportunity to work for what they received. Work is honorable. It builds up a person’s self-esteem and self-respect.

Ruth was willing to work hard to overcome her situation. Ruth did not just sit around waiting on someone to come and give her a handout. She got out and worked. I can assure you that gleaning was hard work, bending over to collect any leftover grain. Most people had to work all day just to collect enough for a few meals. In v.7 we see Ruth’s diligence in working. She began work early. And except for a short break from the heat of the sun, she steadily worked all morning. Too many want to be on break more than work. In v.17 we see that she not only worked all morning but all day. Her work was fruitful. Even from the leftovers, she was able to gather and beat out a whole bushel of barley, or what was equivalent to 26 quarts! That wasn’t bad for a poor person. And in v.23 we see that she kept on working throughout the barley harvest and on through

¹ Heb., *chayil*, here meaning “strength.”

² Lev. 19:9-10 says, “And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not ... gather the gleanings of thy harvest... thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger...” Dt. 24:19 says, “When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it; it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow....”

the wheat harvest, which came later.

So work hard, and trust God to provide for all of your needs. If you will do both, you will do well.

D. Be Humble – The way up is down! The way to rise in God’s kingdom is to follow the path of humility. Ruth was a humble person. She was not cocky, thinking she deserved better. Instead, she humbly responded to any measure of favor and grace. In v.10 she said, “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?” Since she was a foreigner, she did not expect anything from Boaz.³ She didn’t even expect him to take notice of her. Today, too many people have a sense of entitlement. They expect you to just give support to them whether they work or not. Furthermore, she was not too proud to stoop to very lowly work. Gleaning was one of the lowest forms of work there was.

Ruth position is a picture of you and me today. You and I can ask Ruth’s question as we come to God, “Why have I found favor in Your eyes?” We cannot find the answer within ourselves; we’re not lovely to Him since we are sinners. Romans 5:8 says, “...While we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” We are saved, not because of any merit in us, but because of the grace of God.

God will bless such a humble person, and as we shall see, God begins to pour blessings upon Ruth far greater than she could have imagined. Will you cultivate such a character?

Not only do you need to focus on becoming a person of character, but you also need to:

II. TRUST IN THE PROVISION OF GOD’S REDEEMER

You are probably familiar with the New Testament concept of redemption. But do you understand the Old Testament background to that concept? Well here it is. We have seen one primary way that God provided for the poor under Old Testament law, and that was the law of gleaning. Now we are going to consider the second primary way God provided for the poor and needy: the Law of the Kinsman-redeemer, which is stated in Lev. 25. The Bible teaches that the primary responsibility for helping the poor rests with the family. Relatives are to help each other out in God’s plan. This is affirmed in the New Testament by the apostle Paul as well, according to 1 Timothy 5:4. So let’s try to understand better about God’s provision for a Kinsman-Redeemer. First, consider with me:

A. The Benefits of the Kinsman-Redeemer

1. He Is to Redeem Land. Concerning the land, God said, “The land shall not be sold permanently... you shall grant redemption of the land” (Lev. 25:23-24). And v.25 says, “...if his redeeming relative comes to redeem it, then he may redeem what his brother sold.” Probably Elimelech sold his land when he went off to Moab. Naomi and Ruth were too poor to buy it back. It would take a wealthy relative to get the land back into the family. V.23 says that God owned the land and He didn’t want it exploited by rich people who would take advantage of poor people and widows. So a relative of Elimelech had an obligation to buy the land back for the benefit of Elimelech’s widow and daughter-in-law.

2. He Is to Redeem Persons from Slavery. At times people would become so poor that family members would be sold into slavery to pay debts. So Lev. 25:47-48 gives the law of redemption concerning someone who sells himself into slavery. God required the purchaser to sell

³ His openness to Ruth, a foreigner, may be explained by the fact that his mother was a foreigner, Rahab! (Matt. 1:5).

him back if a relative was able and willing to redeem him or her from slavery.

3. He Is to Redeem Widows. This aspect of the law was found in Dt. 25:5-9. This law is quite unusual to us, and the book of Ruth provides us of the only illustration of this law being practiced. A brother was obligated to marry his widowed sister-in-law if she had not yet born a son. Not only did this law provide a son, who took the name of the widow's deceased husband, but this law provided a husband for the widow! By the way, if you were living under the Mosaic law, you would be interested in who your brother married, because you might have to marry her yourself some day!

B. The Qualifications of the Redeemer – The law of the redeemer is a nice concept, especially for the beneficiaries. But not just anyone could be the redeemer. There were three basic qualifications, and as we look at each, we will see how Boaz qualified to be Ruth's redeemer.

1. He Must Be a Kinsman – The closest kinsman was to be the redeemer, beginning with the brother of the deceased. If no brother was available or willing, an uncle, cousin or other relative could be the redeemer.

Well, chapter 2 begins to present Boaz as Ruth's redeemer. Actually, Boaz is the hero of this story. Here we see Ruth, a damsel in distress. And notice how Boaz qualifies to be her redeemer. Notice in v.1 the fact that Boaz qualifies as a kinsman: "There was a relative of Naomi's husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz." Likewise in the last of v.20 Naomi said, "This man is ... one of our close relatives." Any Jew who read this chapter would notice the significance of Boaz being a relative. Immediately, they would wonder if he would be Ruth's redeemer.

2. He Must Be Capable – To be a redeemer, you must have the financial means to pay the redemption price. That could be quite a bit for land, or to redeem a slave. Even the aspect of marrying a widow and fathering a child required the financial means to support a family.

Well, did Boaz meet this qualification? Indeed he did! Boaz means "strength" in Hebrew, and he lived up to his name. In v.1 he is called "a man of great wealth." That phrase is translated elsewhere a "mighty man of valor" (Judges 6:12, etc.). Perhaps Boaz was a mighty warrior for Israel. But in the context of Ruth, it is clear that he was wealthy, and the translators interpreted this phrase in that sense.⁴ Boaz would need to be wealthy enough to buy back the land that Elimelech had sold, and he certainly was.

3. He Must Be A Willing Redeemer – Though being the kinsman-redeemer was expected, God's law did allow a near kinsman to refuse to accept that role (3:13), as long as a certain ritual was followed in which he accepted a measure of public shame, as we shall see in chapter 4 (vv.7-8; Deut. 25:7-10). So Ruth not only needed a rich relative, but she also needed a loving relative. Only love would make a person willing to redeem a Moabite woman!

Would Boaz be willing? That is the big question at this point in the story.

C. The Prophetic Fulfillment of the Kinsman-Redeemer - The law of the Kinsman-Redeemer was given to prophesy and illustrate the work of the Messiah. That's one reason the word "redemption" is so often used in the New Testament. Adam and Eve lost paradise when they sinned against God. They became slaves of sin. Their descendants share in the curse of sin. Yet God has provided a Redeemer to restore what we have lost. Through Jesus paradise lost is paradise regained! (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7). Christ has redeemed us by His blood from the slavery of sin (Eph. 1:7; Rev. 5:9b; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 7:23). We have an eternal inheritance through

⁴ The word *chayil* is used 243 times in the Old Testament, and about 21 times it is translated in reference to wealth.

Him (Acts 20:32; Gal. 4:7; Eph. 1:14; 1 Pet. 1:4). Through Jesus we become the Bride of Christ, and we will have a love relationship with Him for all eternity. Let me show you why Jesus is the Redeemer God has provided for you:

1. Jesus Is Our Kinsman – I hope you can already see that Boaz is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. Did you realize that an angel could not come and save you from your sin? Only a kinsman could do so. The Son of God had to become the Son of Man, and to take on human flesh (cf. Heb. 2:14, 17). That’s a major theme of Christmas.

2. Jesus Is Capable – The Lord Jesus was a capable redeemer. He was strong in resisting temptation throughout His life. Thus, He was sinless. He had to live a sinless life if He were to offer His life as a sacrifice in our place (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26). Therefore, Jesus could pay the price for our redemption. 1 Peter 1:18-19 says, “knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, ...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” He was also a capable Redeemer because He conquered death, rising victoriously from the grave. Don’t worry, Jesus is able to save you. Hebrews 7:25 says, “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him....”

3. Jesus Is a Willing Redeemer - 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” He was willing to leave heaven, be born in Bethlehem, and live among us free of sin. Then after praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, we see that He was willing to die on the cross that we might have the benefits of redemption: freedom from the condemnation and power of sin, an eternal inheritance in heaven, and become His Bride for all eternity!

So the story of Ruth illustrates that fact that we should trust in our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus, to redeem and recover what we have lost due to sin. The last main lesson we see in our story is this. As you face adversity and losses:

III. TRUST IN THE SOVEREIGN PROVIDENCE OF GOD

When you are facing a big problem as Ruth was, it is so good to know that you can trust in God who is much bigger than your problem. He is sovereign. He is in control when things seem out of control. So you can trust God to work things out.

We are going to see how God will work things out for a person of character such as Ruth. Now Boaz was a kinsman. He was capable. But the big unknown at this point of the story is this: Would he be willing to redeem? There were two factors that could make this happen. And what was true of Ruth can be true in our own lives. Now let’s see first:

A. His Providence in Ruth’s Life - Just because God had laid down these laws does not mean that someone is going to benefit from these laws. For Ruth to benefit, God is going to have to do some “behind the scenes” work. He is going to have to bring Ruth and Boaz together. When Ruth set out to glean, she had no idea which field to go to. God had to work by His providence to get Ruth to the fields of Boaz, who would allow her to glean, and who would become a redeemer for her. So it would be very important for Ruth to get to Boaz’ field, not only for Ruth’s sake, but also because God has planned for Jesus to be born from the line of Boaz and Ruth. If God doesn’t get those two together, then you might as well tell the wise men not to come to Bethlehem. If those two don’t get together, then tell the shepherds to just stay there and tend their flock.

So how does He do it? Did He speak from heaven? Does He come to her in a dream or a

vision? No! The vast majority of the time He doesn't work that way. Look at v.3, "Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech." From Ruth's point of view, she just went to Boaz' field by chance. It was just a coincidence. But from heaven's point of view, she got there by the providence of God. God simply worked in an imperceptible manner to lead Ruth along. And I believe that's how He works most of the time. We should not expect it to be any other way.

God may have used Ruth's common sense. When she came to a fork in the road, she somehow was led to take the road leading by the field of Boaz. Then, she may have gone by one field because she did not see any poor people gleaning there. She could have supposed that the owner was a scrooge and disobedient to God. So she went on to the next field and saw many poor people gleaning there. She figured that the owner was a kind and God-fearing man. So that's where she went and she ended up in the field of Boaz.

I'm glad that God still works today by His providence. He has providentially worked in my life. After a long process of seeking God's will for my life, I decided I would announce my call to preach the Sunday after my 18th birthday. Well, we were without a pastor at that time and I had no idea who would be preaching that Sunday. As it turns out, the president of Criswell College was filling the pulpit that Sunday. Afterwards, Dr. Patterson invited me to come to Criswell College to prepare for the ministry there, and I have no doubt it was God's will. I do not think I would have received a better education anywhere else. Furthermore, I had no idea that David Drake was going to announce his call to preach the same Sunday. He also went to Criswell College by the providence of God.

When God is working in your life, things do not happen just by accident. God works in a providential way for the child of God. What a comfort it is to know that we can trust the providence of God. God leads us along and orders the events of the universe. Even the bad that He allows to come into our lives comes with His providential permission, because He is able to turn that bad into something good in our lives.

B. His Kindling of Love in Boaz's Life - Notice what God does to make him a willing Redeemer. The time would come when he would fall in love with Ruth, and as a result, he would willingly redeem Ruth. God is the greatest matchmaker, and He providentially worked to stir up love in the heart of Boaz. Notice:

1. The Beginning of His Interest - When Boaz first sees Ruth, I believe he is becoming interested in her. After first seeing her, he asks the foreman in v.5, "Whose young woman is this?" In other words, "Is she already taken?" When Boaz saw Ruth, it was love at first sight! Boaz heart started pumping just a little faster. He is getting interested! I'm sure that Ruth was in humble dress, but she was still attractive to Boaz. Notice how he shows his interest in her in vv. 8-9, "...Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women. Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn." Boy, is he interested or what? He doesn't want this girl to get away. He told her that all of her needs would be provided for from his field.

2. The Reason for His Interest - I believe v.11 explains why Boaz became interested in Ruth. There Boaz says, "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." He had heard of Ruth's virtuous character. Even the Israelites were saying good things about her. And Boaz just

couldn't believe that in addition to all he had heard about her character, she was attractive as well. Now when he sees her and finds out that all of these qualities are wrapped up in one person, I'll tell you, that's the reason that he has fallen for her.

This is why it is important to be a person of character. God can open more doors for you to people's hearts if you are. So young people, let me give you some advice. If you are interested in getting just anyone for a mate, then major on your outward appearance. But if you are interested in getting a good, godly spouse, who will love you and be good to you for a lifetime, you had better pay attention to your inner beauty, a virtuous character. A man of virtue wants a woman of virtue and vice versa. The apostle Peter wrote to Christian wives in 3:3-4, "Do not let your adornment be merely outward ...rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit...." This world puts too much emphasis on outward looks, and we have too many girls even in elementary school trying to imitate the hottest female stars. Some even become suicidal when they feel they don't measure up! We need to put more emphasis on character development. Looks will certainly help attract the attention of a possible mate, but character is what is more important.

When I was a young man I was looking for a woman of Christian character. Well, I found one, and her outer beauty is just the icing on the cake. But what really matters is inner beauty.

3. The Blossoming of Interest into Love - The interest of Boaz blossomed into love. Beginning in v.9 we see Boaz showing love and kindness toward Ruth. I have already pointed out that he provided protection (cf. v.12) and refreshment for Ruth (from the water drawn from the well, perhaps 1/2 mile away). Then in v.14 we see that he invites her to lunch. He's moving quickly isn't he! I believe that he has already decided to marry her if he can. Notice that she eats to the point of satisfaction. In v.15 he allows her to glean even among the sheaves of gathered grain, where she would be able to find loose grain in greater abundance. In v.16 he goes a step further and actually commands his reapers to purposely allow some of the sheaves to fall for her to pick up. I can just imagine Ruth out there gleaning, and upon finding a loose bunch of sheaves calling out, "Yoo-hoo, you dropped a sheaf." Isn't that a picture of God? Sometimes God gives us some "extras" on purpose. I could give you many examples of extra blessings that God has given to my family and me.

Conclusion: The only example of a kinsman redeemer is that of Boaz. The book of Ruth reveals the love side of redemption. As we shall see, there was a nearer kinsman who could have redeemed Ruth and the land of Elimelech. He had the money but he refused. That's because he didn't care for Ruth; he didn't love her. But Boaz did. And so he was not only a capable redeemer, but a willing redeemer because of his love for Ruth. That makes the difference.

Now God didn't have to redeem what we have lost because of sin. We were condemned by our sin and enslaved to our sin. But because of God's love for us, He has redeemed us. Because of love, Jesus was willing to leave the glories of heaven to be born in Bethlehem, where the first love story of redemption took place. And then, because of His love for us, Jesus Christ ascended the hill of Calvary, and suffered and died for you and for me. That is what Christmas is all about. It is the story of God sending Jesus into this world to save us and redeem us. You see, salvation by redemption is a love story. And now, we can be set free from our sin. We can share in a glorious inheritance. And the Bible says that we become part of the bride of Christ by faith in Him, and we will live forever with Him.

I hope you can see from this story that God loves you. By His Providence you are here today. Jesus was willing to save you. Are you willing to trust Him as your Redeemer?

Sources: J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960); Matthew Henry *Unabridged Commentary* (accessed through *Online Bible*); Dr. Harley Howard (a few notes from his sermon on this text); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 2 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text; he took a different approach). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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