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# How Faithful Is Your God?

Ruth 2:1–23

*The Second Sermon on Ruth*

Advent 2013

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God is faithful! Amen? He makes promises and he keeps promises. He creates and he provides. But Israel was languishing under a famine as chapter 1 mentioned. According to the Word of God this was the result of Israel's disobedience and sin. But God made promises to his people. How would he be true to himself if his people continued in this situation? That's what's before us this morning.

I want you to go back with me to chapter 1:8. Here Naomi prayed for Orpah and Ruth, whom she was trying to get to leave her alone. Notice what she prayed: "May the LORD deal *kindly* with you." That word *kindly* is the Hebrew word *chesed*. It's the word that describes God as being faithful to his own promises. Naomi prayed that Ruth would experience the faithfulness of the Lord. But what Naomi didn't realize was that when Ruth did experience it, it would affect not only Ruth, and not only Naomi, but all Israel. And as we turn to chapter 2 we see that this chapter demonstrates the answer to Naomi's prayer as the Lord begins to show his faithfulness to Ruth and through her to Israel. *How Faithful Is Your God?*

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How is the Lord's faithfulness demonstrated here? Look at how this next scene in the story begins: **Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz** (v. 1). This is the narrator's "teaser trailer." He begins where he left off in scene one in chapter 1 here with Naomi, but then he introduces us to the third major character in the story: **Boaz, a worthy man**, a godly man. In Boaz the Lord shows *his* faithfulness. How?

1. *In Providing for Ruth and Naomi's Stomach*
2. *In Providing for Ruth and Israel's Soul*

May the Holy Spirit lead our heart and minds this morning!

## **In Providing for Ruth and Naomi's Stomach**

How faithful is your God? He was faithful *in providing for Ruth and Naomi's stomachs*. The action begins wherever Naomi and Ruth are living, but especially when they were poor and in need of food. We read that **Ruth the Moabite**—notice, again, that the narrator highlights here Gentile status—**said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor"** (v. 2). There's that word "favor" again, which we saw in 1:8, emphasizing the Lord's faithfulness to his promises.

Then the scene shifts to a field as Ruth **set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers** (v. 3). How faithful is your God? The Lord is now providing for Naomi and Ruth through a provision in his law to Israel. Turn with me to Leviticus 19:9–10 (cf. Deut. 24:19–20). Here we read that the Lord

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commanded those with fields to leave the edges of their fields for the poor, who could then harvest and provide for themselves.

Now back to our story, notice where Ruth is: **the field**. Something extraordinary is happening: **she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech** (v. 3). Out of all the fields in Bethlehem, she just “happened” to come to this field! How faithful is your God? Literally the phrase is, “her chance chanced.” By “chance” she came? We know this is the Old Testament’s way of describing the secret and surprising providence of God for his people.<sup>1</sup> Sinclair Ferguson describes how we see what was hidden to the characters themselves as “the divine autograph.” He says this: “in Scripture God writes in block capital letters the principles of his providence so that when he rewrites them in our lives in small, sometimes microscopic, writing, we see that he is the same God.”<sup>2</sup> The narrator is writing *after* all this happened, interpreting for us the wonderful significance. As John Flavel said, “Sometimes providences, like Hebrew letters, must be read backward.”<sup>3</sup> We can only see the hand of God *after* we’ve gone through a difficult period of our lives.

Enter Boaz: **And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem** (v. 4). He was described as a **worthy man** back in verse 1 and now we see that in action: **And he said to the reapers, “The LORD be with you!” And they answered,**

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<sup>1</sup> Ferguson gives the illustration of a split screen. On the one we see the sovereignty of God and on the other our lives with all their surprise and “just happenedness.” “What is unpredictable to us is already predictable to him.” *Faithful God*, 57.

<sup>2</sup> Ferguson, *Faithful God*, 55.

<sup>3</sup> John Flavel, “Navigation Spiritualized: or, A New Compass for Seamen,” in *Works*, 5:284.

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**“The LORD bless you”** (v. 4). How faithful is your God? Boaz was not just an absentee landlord, but was close to them all so much so that they exchanged well wishes. The first words we read on the lips of Bible characters sometime tell us something significant about them, and Boaz is evidence of that.<sup>4</sup> Boaz notices someone out of the ordinary in his field says **to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, “Whose young woman is this?”** (v. 5) Then he tells Boaz, **“She is the young Moabite woman—notice that again—who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab”** (v. 6). The foreman mentions Ruth’s respect, **“She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers,’”** and her diligence in work, **“So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest”** (v. 7).

How faithful is your God? Listen to how Boaz cares for Ruth. He tells her, **“Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women”** (v. 8). That phrase “keep close” is the same used in 1:14 of Ruth “clinging” to Naomi. Boaz wanted Ruth to cling again, this time to his female workers. Boaz says again, **“Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you?”** (v. 9) Ruth would be safe in Boaz’s field. Further, Ruth would be cared for when she was hot and exhausted: **“And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn”** (v. 9). In response Ruth **fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I**

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<sup>4</sup> Duguid, *Esther & Ruth*, 158.

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**found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"** (v. 10) There's that word *favor* again. Ruth is recognizing the astonishing provision of the Lord through Boaz, although it was hard to imagine why given their cultural differences. How faithful is your God? **Boaz answered her** and told her, first, that he was showing her faithfulness because she showed his fellow Israelite, her mother-in-law Naomi, faithfulness: **"All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!"** (vv. 11–12) Listen to that again. Boaz confesses, like Ruth had done to Naomi back in chapter 1, that she belonged to the Lord. She did not cling to Naomi nor to the hope of mere food, but had come under the wings of the Almighty for refuge. We'll come back to this in a moment.

How faithful is your God? Boaz's kindness to Ruth extended beyond the field. The scene shifts from the field to the table: **And at mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine."** So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. **And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over** (v. 14). Big deal, right? It is a big deal! Here's a Jew welcoming a Gentile to his table, the place of fellowship and friendship. Are you seeing the shadow of Jesus being cast off Boaz? The Jewish

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Jesus eating with outsiders? “And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus” (Mark 2:15). Boaz, and Jesus, set an example for us here in being welcoming as Christians and as a congregation. How so? By recognizing that in our human diversity there is divine beauty. As we sing to our children, “Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight.”

How faithful is your God? Boaz’s kindness reached its pinnacle after the meal when Ruth returned to the field. Boaz **instructed his young men, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her”** (vv. 15–16). And what happened? After she had finished **she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley** (v. 17).<sup>5</sup> That’s roughly five and a half gallons or thirty pounds of grain, which was about two to three weeks of food!<sup>6</sup> Remember Naomi’s words to the townspeople of Bethlehem? “I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty” (1:21). I said that it really was the other way around, but now the Lord demonstrates his faithfulness to her. How faithful is your God? She whose cupboards were bare now saw them become full through the providence of her gracious God!

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<sup>5</sup> Duguid brings out beautifully that they arrived at beginning of barley harvest (1:22), which is associated with the Passover, with redemption. Now it’s the end of the harvest, seven weeks later, and time for the offering up of the first fruits. That offering was associated with the feast of weeks, or what we call Pentecost. Ruth has experienced God’s covenant faithfulness in all the provision provided her. But in a theological sense, she is the provision. She is the first fruits of a new beginning for Israel, which needs a king. She is the first fruits of the nations that will join themselves to the God of Israel. *Esther & Ruth*, 165.

<sup>6</sup> Duguid says it’s 29–50 pounds, or several weeks’ worth of grain. *Esther & Ruth*, 161.

## **In Providing for Ruth and Israel's Soul**

How faithful is your God? He was faithful *in providing for Ruth and Israel's soul*. There's so much more going on here than just the provision of food.

Go back to Boaz's words in verse 12. He confessed that when she left her country, her family, and her gods behind to follow Naomi she was taking up the cross and follow the Lord. That's why he says she came under the God of Israel's wings to take refuge. And he uses the image of the Lord being like a bird caring for its young. That comes out of Deuteronomy 32, which explained Israel's experience of the Lord: "He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him...Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, the LORD alone guided him" (Deut. 32:10, 11-12). Moses then described all the miraculous provision of food in the wilderness as the Lord suckling his baby, Israel (Deut. 32:12-14).

How faithful is your God? Look at verse 18, where the scene shifts from the field back to Naomi's home. Naomi asks, "**Where did you glean today? And where have you worked?** and Ruth said, "**The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz**" (v. 19). What! We read of Naomi being in total astonishment and rejoicing: "**May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!...The man is a close relative of ours, one of our *redeemers***" (v. 20). How faithful is your God? Ask yourself, "Whose

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kindness is being praised here? Whose faithfulness to his promises? Is it Boaz's or the Lord's?" The grammar is ambiguous as it can refer to Boaz or the Lord. And that's the point! In Boaz Ruth and Naomi experience the faithfulness of the Lord.<sup>7</sup>

How faithful is your God? In Boaz Ruth has found a **redeemer**? What's a "redeemer" or as the King James translates it, a "kinsman?" The word used here to describe Boaz is *goel*. This was a man in a family who was obligated to buy his relatives back if they fell into debt or had to sell themselves into slavery (Lev. 25:25-55). This was a man who was obligated to marry his dead brother's widow and to produce children under the dead brother's name (Deut. 25:5-10). What a faithful God! Yes, but notice something odd here. Boaz is not described as Elimelech's brother, is he? He's just called generically **a man of the clan of Elimelech** (v. 1). Further, Ruth is not Elimelech's widow; Naomi is. Even more, Ruth is a Gentile and the law of God had no provisions for a kinsman redeemer to do anything for an outsider, even if an outsider joined herself to the Lord.<sup>8</sup> How faithful is your God? We're going to see Boaz's worthiness demonstrated as he doesn't just fulfill the letter of the law but the spirit of it, loving his destitute, helpless neighbor as himself. Boaz loves the stranger. Sounds a lot like what God has done in sending his Son for us, doesn't it? Destitute; helpless. That's what Advent and Christmas is all about—Jesus coming to the rescue! Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Duguid says the context fits the Lord being the subject best. *Esther & Ruth*, 162. See also Dean R. Ulrich, *From Famine to Fullness: The Gospel According to Ruth*, The Gospel According to the Old Testament (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2007), 66.

<sup>8</sup> See Duguid, *Esther & Ruth*, 162-163.