

The Generous Giver

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You could read today's passage and think I need to try to be more like Ruth or I need to be more like Boaz. Do you recall the old Nike slogan—"Be like Mike."? You should, you are from Chicago. Well, it would be easy to look at Ruth's bravery and humility and assume the lesson is—Be like Ruth. And, it would be easy to look at the graciousness and generosity of Boaz and think the lesson is—Be like Boaz. Yet, that's not the lesson. I pray that's not the lesson you leave with today.

Let's read our text. It's a long text, so settle in.

Ruth 2:1-23

2 Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a man of standing from the clan of Elimelek, whose name was Boaz.

2 And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor."

Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter."³ So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek.

4 Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, "The Lord be with you!"

"The Lord bless you!" they answered.

5 Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, "Who does that young woman belong to?"

6 The overseer replied, "She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi."⁷ She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter."

8 So Boaz said to Ruth, "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me."⁹ Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the

women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.”

¹⁰ At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?”

¹¹ Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. ¹² May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

¹³ “May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord,” she said. “You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servants.”

¹⁴ At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.”

When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. ¹⁵ As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, “Let her gather among the sheaves and don’t reprimand her. ¹⁶ Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don’t rebuke her.”

¹⁷ So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. ¹⁸ She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough.

¹⁹ Her mother-in-law asked her, “Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!”

Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. “The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,” she said.

²⁰ “The Lord bless him!” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. “He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.” She added, “That man is our close relative; he is one of our guardian-redeemers.”

²¹ Then Ruth the Moabite said, “He even said to me, ‘Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.’”

²² Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, “It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with the women who work for him, because in someone else’s field you might be harmed.”

²³ So Ruth stayed close to the women of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

We see two things here—(1st) **Ruth is humble**; and, (2nd) **Boaz is generous**. Then, when we put these two together, we learn—(3rd) **God is working**. Let’s look at each of these in its turn.

1. Ruth is humble.

There’s something uniquely American about asserting your rights; isn’t there? We state in The Declaration of Independence that we have “inalienable rights”—rights that cannot be taken from us. We have a document called The Bill of Rights, which we regularly use to assert our right to say things or own things or do things. And, during the pandemic, it seems we’re even more concerned about these rights. Mask or no mask? Vax or no vax? And, people on both sides of the aisle telling us what should or shouldn’t be a right.

There’s not a whole lot of humility about it; *is there?*

We tend to lookback at a situation like Ruth’s and think that she had no rights. And, maybe that’s why we hold onto ours so tightly—fearing that they’ll be snatched from us. But, even though she was a foreigner in a foreign land, Ruth had legal rights. She had protected privileges. The Law of the Lord established this. So, in Leviticus, we find the following law.

When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God (Leviticus 19:9-10).

God established this law for people like Ruth and Naomi. They had this right. And, certainly, Ruth would have known this because Naomi would have known this. Consequently, it's notable how Ruth approaches her work. It's very un-American. It's very meek and unassuming.

Boaz's foreman tells him about Ruth. This is his report to us.

She said, "Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters." She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter (v. 7).

I love this picture of Ruth. She doesn't *assert* her right to glean in the fields. She doesn't even *assume* her right to it. Instead, Ruth humbly asks for permission. This foreign woman shows her native hosts both respect and honor. On top of this, when she is given permission (*permission to do what was her right!*), she works hard from morning to mid-day, taking only a short rest. Ruth is humble in both her words and her works.

This is a beautiful and touching picture. It's a picture that points us ultimately to Christ Jesus. The One who most profoundly didn't assert his rights but in humility set his rights aside to serve and save others (Philippians 2:6-8). Isn't that what Ruth is doing to provide for Naomi? Isn't this how she's approaching her work?

Friends, we see a Christ like character in Ruth, and it is lovely. It's a character that the Lord intends to craft and cultivate in each and every one of us who've trusted in Jesus and received his grace and forgiveness. It's far more beautiful and attractive than asserting your rights and lording them over others; isn't it?

There's this great story about D. L. Moody. Apparently, he had some visitors from Europe—pastors who came to America for a Bible conference in order to meet and learn from the famous evangelist and pastor. This was all in the late 19th century where in Europe there were still class structures and expectations which didn't exist in the United States. One such expectation was that a servant would shine your shoes if you left them in the hallway outside your door.

As the story goes, that first night after all had headed to bed Moody happened to walk past his visitors' rooms and noticed their shoes set neatly out for polishing. He immediately recognized the mistaken expectations. So, he gathered-up the shoes and asked some of the American Bible students for help. But, all of them were busy

with one thing or another. Nonetheless, the next morning the shoes were laid neatly outside the guests' doors, cleaned and shined.

Moody had done it by himself in order to save his guests any embarrassment. He didn't assume his rights. He didn't assert his rights. He simply did it.

Friends, this is the picture of Ruth. She is a humble and unassuming servant. Those of us who follow Jesus should behave in a similar fashion. Amen.

Well, next we meet Boaz.

2. Boaz is generous.

We see this quite clearly in the text. He doesn't simply allow Ruth to glean what falls to the ground. Boaz doesn't simply follow the letter of the Lord's laws—giving just what is required but no more. He makes sure that Ruth (and Naomi too) receive more than enough to eat from this harvest. Look once again at what Boaz tells the workers to do secretly for Ruth.

Boaz gave orders to his men, "Let her gather among the sheaves and don't reprimand her. Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don't rebuke her" (vv. 15-16).

Often property owners in the ancient Near East would prohibit those gleaning, because of their poverty, from getting near the sheaves (the bundles or piles of grain) which had already been harvested so that dishonest individuals wouldn't subtly steal what was rightfully theirs. Boaz however generously allows Ruth to glean anywhere and everywhere. Moreover, he also tells his workers to intentionally drop some grain on the ground before her.

This is all done without her knowing it. Boaz intends to be generous to Ruth without treating her like a charity case—without embarrassing her. Boaz treats her with dignity and respect.

Yet, this isn't the only way Boaz is generous to Ruth. He also welcomes her into the community. Isn't that what he's doing when he invites her to eat with them? Isn't that what he's doing when he tells her to come back and glean only in his fields where she'll be safe? Boaz is making this outsider an insider. This is true kindness. This is true generosity.

We shouldn't sugarcoat this either. This will cost Boaz. This will be expensive for him. He's essentially offering to support these two poor women who at face value have nothing to offer him. And, on top of that, Boaz is welcoming a foreign refugee from one of Israel's historic rivals, Moab, into the table-fellowship of his household. Friends, this will doubtlessly cost him socially. *Generosity is expensive!*

And, our generosity will cost us as well. It will cost us to really spend time with the outsiders around Chicago—those who have physical and emotional needs. It will cost us time and energy and money to care for them as Boaz cares for Ruth, treating her with dignity and respect. It will cost us to invite outsiders to be insiders. But, this is our calling *because* this is how Jesus has treated us. Amen?

Well, throughout all this, we learn a good news lesson.

3. God is working.

And, it's Naomi who highlights it for us. Look at what she says and celebrates when Ruth returns and tells her about her day.

“The Lord bless him!” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. “He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead” (v. 20).

The question for us is simply this—Who has not stopped showing kindness? Is it Boaz or is it Yahweh? The antecedent in the Hebrew is not clear and, therefore, scholars have argued back and forth about it. Yet, friends, when we read this passage in the context of the Bible, the problem is solved. The answer as to whether it's Boaz or Yahweh is—Yes. Yes, it is Boaz and, yes, it is God. The Lord is showing kindness through the kindness of Boaz. This is how God usually works.

I had an old friend comment on a post Natalie put on Facebook this past week. She posted a picture Silas had drawn of David slaying Goliath, and my friend asked about those three stones David selected when he went-out to meet the giant. This is what he asked?

Been thinking about that story lately. Been focusing on the detail of David's choosing three smooth stones from the brook. If Goliath was slain ultimately by David's faith, why did he need more than one stone?

It's a thoughtful question. But, the point isn't that David's faith slayed Goliath or that David slayed Goliath, although he certainly did. The point of the conflict is,

in fact, stated over and over again in the narrative. The boy David will win this battle because the Lord will fight for him—“For the battle is the Lord’s” (1 Samuel 17:47). Friends, this is the case with Boaz’s generosity, he’s being generous, but it’s God who is ultimately the Giver of every good and perfect gift (1 Chronicles 16:11-12). So, it’s God working generously and graciously through Boaz in the end.

Friends, during this transition period in our church, it could be easy to forget that God is at work. It can be easy to focus on what we can do or what others can do. But, in every blessing along the way, in every help that someone provides, remember who is ultimately working generously. It is the Lord Jesus. It is God.

[Only he’s] able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in...good work (2 Corinthians 9:8).