

The God who Provides
Ruth 1:19-2:16

Ephesians 2:1-10

Ephesians 2:11-22

Responsive: Psalm 138

This morning we are going to be picking back up in Ruth chapter 1 verse 18, and likely will be going into chapter 2 this morning. This week we will be looking at Naomi's return to Bethlehem, with her daughter in law Ruth. Before we get started, let us read starting in verse 19 of chapter 1, and going to verse 16 of Chapter 2. First off, the trip from Moab to Bethlehem would in and of itself not been an easy one. Bethlehem was about 75 miles away, a trip that would take little more than a week to accomplish. The author here in recounting this story doesn't give us much detail of that journey, but such a journey for 2 widows would have been not only difficult, but dangerous. In the last few chapters of the book of Judges there is an account of a man making such a journey with his wife and servants of his household. Having stopped at a house for the evening, the men of the city came upon the house and demanded the owner send out this visitor so they could have their way with him. They instead took this man's wife and raped her to death. This in turn caused an uprising and a civil war among some of the factions of Israel, some aligning with this man whose wife was killed, to revenge the evil that was done upon her, and some rose up to defend the city of where this atrocity took place against them. In the end the Lord delivered the city to the Israelites who were bringing justice and they eradicated all but a handful of men who fled into the hillside, and a hand full of virgin women killing all others, men, women and children.

Not that this happened around the time of Ruth, for the book of Judges spans around 300 years, I am just highlighting this account, which you can read about in the last 2 chapters of judges, to highlight the dangers of such a journey. This was an outcome that befell a man and his wife, with traveling companions. It is unknown who may have traveled with Naomi and Ruth, but this was a dangerous and difficult journey to make. We can assume here that there was no event worth mentioning in their travels, for the author of this glosses over that journey, but either way I think that we can see, and understand God's protection over them as they make that journey. So now, they have arrived and entering into Bethlehem they are greeted by the women there, who were excited to see Naomi return after all these years. So much has changed in the course of those 10 years, Naomi's husband died, her sons married, and subsequently died themselves. This was not the same Naomi that left 10 years previously, she was older, and had suffered great loss.

In verse 20 we get a sense of this, she says, "do not call me Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me." The name Naomi means pleasant one, but Mara means the opposite, it means bitter. She had left Bethlehem with a husband and two sons, and have returned without any of them. She saw herself as cursed of God, having been left with nothing, having her future taken away, her son's bearing no offspring, her family line dead, her land sold, with no prospect of a husband or prosperity in her old age. She understood God's hand upon her life, the things outside of her control and the affliction that was brought upon her. As we talked last week, reflecting upon her loss, and the loss of her son's leaving 3 widows, through it all God enacted his purpose and his plan in their lives. Through grief and pain, through suffering in this story we see God bringing about redemption for both her and Ruth. Though it may have felt to Naomi like God had left her, had cursed her, and afflicted her, in the large picture it was all a part of the greater purpose he had planned for her life, and the life of Ruth. Again, God moves mountains to call his children, a famine drove Elimilech, Naomi

and their 2 sons into Moab, and out of that came Ruth, a gentile woman who left her family, left her Gods to watch and care over her mother in law, and to follow the God of her people.

Ruth may not have made the list of faithful in the book of Hebrews, but she still stands as a example of faith in the old testament. As I tried to highlight last week, the significance of this decision of Ruth, to return with Naomi to Bethlehem, this would mean that she gave up her chance of finding a husband, gave up her chance of bearing children, gave up her chance of finding peace and rest among her own people, and instead chose a life of hardship, and turmoil as she would likely live as a beggar in a foreign land who would reject her. But in all of this God is working, and that is I think one of the purposes of this little story, throughout it we see God's sovereign hand, as individuals make their choices, living their lives from day to day, God working through it all to bring redemption to Naomi and Ruth.

Naomi for sure recognizes the sovereign hand of God in her life, but she takes it at a negative, and honestly who could blame her here? The last few years have been years of extreme loss and sorrow. Most of us have experienced the loss of a loved one in our lives and can understand grief, but the grief of a loss of a spouse, or children, I can only imagine is amplified. That is why she says, "call me Mara" she is hurting, grieving, and has lost not just her husband and children, but her home, her land, and at her old age has very little. As she says in verse 21 "I went out full, and the Lord has brought me home again empty." She refers to God as the Almighty, the original text is Shaddai, which means, the one who is sufficient, or, the one who provides. Naomi understood that her affliction was not outside of God, she saw it as the sovereign hand of God upon her life, she understood that this grief in her life came from God and that there is no way to avert from God's design and purpose.

Just like with Job, he understood that his affliction was allowed by God, as he also lost everything...but as we know how the story goes, God rewarded Job with twice of what he had before, in this story of Ruth and Naomi, God grants Ruth a husband, and a child of which Naomi helps raise, a son, an heir who would continue the family line..but not only that, who would continue that family line into greatness, would birth a king, and which would end in the promised one, forever being known in the lineage of Jesus. There is a parallel in these 2 stories, of Job and Ruth that can be equated in what Jesus said in his own teaching, in the account with the rich young ruler in Matthew, he says, "go, sell all that you have and follow me." The life of a christian is a life of devotion to God, a recognition of his provision and his blessing. In our own salvation and redemption we were spiritually bankrupt, having nothing of value in ourselves, but through his mercy, he provides, through his grace he is sufficient in that he offered up redemption to us through Jesus. And we have now become heirs with him, the offspring of the most high. We are counted among his lineage, we are sojourners awaiting to return home.

This is the attitude, the mindset that we believers should have in whatever befalls us in this life. An acceptance of God's sovereignty in our own lives, and even through times of hardship and suffering this recognition is a place of rest for the believer, as we understand that nothing happens within a vacuum, nothing happens outside of God's control, and nothing happens outside of his purpose and plan. Such things are to drive us to him, it can be human nature to seek something or someone to blame, to become angry, to become bitter, but instead of that negative route, we should be like Job, who his wife asked, "Do you still maintain your integrity?" Curse God and die!" again I don't think we should harshly blame or judge her, as she too lost everything, but Jobs response was, "should we accept

good from God and not trouble?” Seeing and knowing that God’s sovereign hand was upon their own situation.

Another thing that we can take away from these accounts of Naomi and Job here, is that grief is real, and a natural part of life. It is an inevitable part of life, as long as we live in this world, we will suffer loss, we will face hardships, we will endure trials. But it is what you do in those hardships, those trials, and those times of loss...are you like Job’s wife, full of anger and bitterness? Or are you like Job, grieving yet faithful trusting in the Lord. This does not take away from the grief that Job felt, he did not feel the loss any less than say his wife, this does not take away the grief that Naomi felt in her loss, or Ruth, but there is a quiet comfort in the sovereign hands of God. For we can know that such loss such grief and pain is not worthless, but serves God’s purpose in our lives. That was the core of Job’s response to his wife, it does not change the reality of grief, or hardships..but gives a place of rest in knowing such things are not without meaning.

As we see with Ruth, just like Job, death and loss is not the end, in chapter 2 of this story we are introduced to Boaz, a relative of Elimelech, a very successful man with money and stature among the people of Bethlehem. We are not told his exact relationship to Elimelech, but it is implied here that he is a much older man, likely more along the age of Naomi. And it is his field in which Ruth goes to gather grain. She was not going as a laborer, to work for Boaz to gain a day’s wage, but she was going as a poor widow to glean from the left overs. As was commanded in the book of Leviticus, the harvesters were to leave the corner of the fields untouched, and were not to clean up harvesting every last bit, but rather were to leave some back for the poor. Lev 19:9-10 :When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger; I am the Lord your God.”

This is what Ruth had gone to do, glean from the left overs and from the corners which were left behind for the poor. As she was gleaning, she happened to be gleaning from the field of Boaz. This was no mere coincidence, but was God’s design. We see clearly God working through this story, as Ruth goes out to do as she needs, gathering grain for food from what is left behind, yet the field she happens to glean from is from a relative of Elimelech. As verse 3 says here in chapter 2 “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.” God is working in the life of Ruth to bring about a type of redemption, this gentile woman who will find grace and mercy from this wealthy Israelite man.

As Dr. Grant Richison says in his commentary concerning this passage, “Our times are in God’s hands. We can do nothing without his permission. We make our choices but God puts those choices through the grid of his will. Sometimes he allows us to decide the future, sometimes he does not. Nothing can happen to the child of God without his permission. We often do not realize the significance of our decisions. We make our decision and move ahead. Later we find God’s purpose in them. Joseph did not know why his brothers sold him into slavery, but he later recognized that it was the hand of God. God did not give him a blueprint ahead of time, he recognized the will of God after the fact. As we can see in Genesis 50, verse 20, when he says “But as for you, you meant evil against

me, but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people. What may look like chance in our lives is the providence of God at work.

It was part of God's plan for Ruth, for Naomi, and for Boaz that she would end up gleaning in that specific field. Just as it was no coincidence that Ruth ended up in Boaz field, it was also no coincidence that Boaz arrived while she was there gleaning. In verse 4, the author uses the word, behold, he wants to draw the readers attention to Boaz' arrival, shifting focus from Ruth, to Boaz.

The word behold is used here in the book of Ruth roughly 5 times, it depends on the translation as some render it as look, or see. But each time it is to draw attention to something that God is doing, to highlight pivotal moments within the story. We can also see through Boaz' interaction with his workers that he was a respected and liked land owner. This is not a master/slave type relationship, but one of respect as he greets his workers and they in turn greet him back. This gives us a little insight into his personality, as it would seem he doesn't come to his field to lord over his workers, but greets them, and treats them with respect. It is at this time that he notices Ruth and asks his foreman, the supervisor of the harvesters he has hired, and asks in verse 5, "whose young woman is this?" This question, was a question to determine who her family was, her father, or her husband. The answer was that she was the gentile Moabite who returned with Naomi. Throughout this entire book the author refers to Ruth as the Moabite, to draw attention to the fact that she is a gentile, and outsider, highlighting the grace and mercy she is shown by Boaz, who owes her nothing.

Being a Moabite, she may not have been aware of the law of gleaning in Israel, so she asked permission from the foreman to follow the harvesters and pick up what drops. This establishes her as an upright person of integrity, though she is in a dire need, she does not steal, she does not take without permission here. This little interaction with the foreman gives us these insights into Boaz and Ruth's personalities. In verse 8 Boaz addresses Ruth directly, when he says, "You will listen my daughter will you not? Do not go glean in another field, no go from here, but stay close by my young women." A few things going on here in this, first off Boaz addresses her as my daughter, this highlights an age difference between the two, as Boaz is a much older man then Ruth, and second he is concerned for her safety and well being as he instructs her to glean from no other field, and to follow the young women in his household, likely his own servants. Here she would be able to collect more grain, as she would be harvesting instead of gleaning. This was an unmerited act of grace that Boaz would show to both Ruth and Naomi and likewise we see in verse 9, he says "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 your men have drawn."

Ruth is now under Boaz' protection, he warned the young men in his employ not to harass Ruth, to treat her with respect and integrity. The opposite is also implied here, that without his protection Ruth would be open to harassment again highlighting the dangers to a single woman who was poor. But Boaz invited her to partake of the privilege not of a beggar, but of a worker, to harvest from the field instead of picking up the left overs, to drink of the fresh water drawn from a well, and protection from the young men who were also working the field. This alone would have likely been unheard of for a gentile to get such treatment in Israel. This shows again, the personality of Boaz, that he was a man of integrity, and cared for those working in his field, and this was probably a kindness given to Naomi as well.

Ruth recognizes this mercy, in verse 10 says she fell on her face, bowed down and said, "why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" Boaz

responds saying it is because of her care for Naomi, her faithfulness to her mother-in-law and her willingness to leave her the safety of her own family, her own homeland, to come and be a beggar and struggle to care for and provide for Naomi. Boaz recognizes her commitment, not only to Naomi, but to God as he says to her “The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given to you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.” So, if we are to take our 2 questions here that we are using for a grid to understand this story, How do we see Christ in this encounter, and what is this telling us about ourselves? First off, Boaz here is a type of Christ, in his acceptance and provision to an outsider, a gentile, a cursed one whom he shows unmerited grace toward.

He did not have to do treat Ruth with such mercy, he was under no obligation to do so, but he gave of himself, at risk to himself, to provide for this gentile woman and her aged mother-in-law. And it is in Ruth that we see ourselves, as believers who were once outsiders who have been brought in to harvest from the Lord’s fields as he provides us with the necessities we need in life, and in faith. He is our spiritual food, the refreshing water, and protection from those who would seek us harm. Ruth had every expectation that the people would turn their backs on her, that she would be shunned. It is the same with us as our sin has separated us from God, but Christ died to remove that curse, God gave of his son, through unmerited grace that we may be taken under his wing, be a part of his household, not as servants, but as children, as heirs. God has dealt with us with great mercy, giving us the privilege of being members of his own household though we were once outsiders. And we, like Ruth who was invited to eat at the same table as Boaz, we have been invited to sit at table of God. To partake of his provision, given spiritual food, we need for life through his word. Which is what we honor, and celebrate through communion, God’s invite to the table, to partake of Jesus who was broken so that we may live.