

David Meiklejohn

15 November 2020

Ruth 2 - Serving

Ruth 2

Introduction

What a difference a day makes! In the time between waking up in the morning and going to bed at night, so much can happen. So much can change. We are born in a day and we die in a day. We might get married in a day. We might have a child in a day. You wake up as the lowest branch on the family tree and by the evening you're a parent. We can be promoted in a day, or we could be fired. There are good days and bad days. Some days are so memorable that we remember them for the rest of our lives.

I think this is one reason lockdown hit some of us really hard. Suddenly every day was pretty much the same. There was no holiday to look forward to, no trip out for a meal, no visit with friends. And no church gathering on a Sunday. What do you do when you wake up every day with no hope for the day ahead?

Well, our chapter this evening is a beautiful example of someone waking up with very little to hope for, and going to bed with everything changed. Ruth chapter 2 covers just one day, from verse 2 to verse 22, but it's a day packed with the grace of God.

Recap

Remember where we got to last week. Naomi, Elimelech and their two sons had gone to Moab during a famine. The sons married Moabite women there, but the 3 men died. Naomi decided to return to Israel and encouraged the daughters-in-law to return to their families. Orpah did so, but Ruth insisted on staying with Naomi, uttering that famous verse: *where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.*

Start of the Day

So they start the day in not too great a place. Two widows who lack food, work, protection, security, friends, family. They have each other and that's about it.

Ruth was an immigrant, remember. She faces a situation that immigrants all over the world face when they get to a new country. Very often they arrive with few possessions, work may be impossible at first, security is non-existent, and the support network of friends and family that we sometimes rely on is far away if it exists at all. Their new country may not want to help them, and in fact may even make life very difficult.

How did Ruth deal with this? Let's work our way through this chapter and see.

A Worthy Man - v1

First, though, there's a wee aside. V1 tells us about this man Boaz. He's not part of the story yet, but the writer sets him up so we know his importance when he arrives. He's a relative of Elimelech's and we are told he is a worthy man. Not a wealthy man, a powerful man, a

handsome man, an intelligent man, a man of status, but a worthy man. He wasn't poor, as he owned land and had people reaping for him, but it doesn't look like he was very wealthy either - v3 says he owned part of a field.

It's easy to look on the outside when judging someone. And the stereotypical ideal match was always someone tall, dark and handsome. But how much wiser to desire someone worthy.

A Morning Gleaning - v2-7

Anyway, let's get into the story. Ruth gets up early and announces she's off to the field to glean for barley. Now a gleaner would walk behind the reapers, looking for any stalks of grain they had missed. It was a way of showing charity to the poor. They were hardly likely to make a good living out of it, but if they worked hard and diligently they might get enough to feed them for the day.

This shows that Ruth had such a servant heart. She was the stranger here, and the junior member of the family, but Naomi was incapacitated with depression. So Ruth the loving daughter-in-law goes out and works all morning at this back-breaking task. I picked up some leaves in the back garden last week and I was done in after half an hour! So she's showing real dedication here.

Now as anyone with the gift of service, or a ministry of service, will tell you, you don't often get noticed. You can work away making things better for everyone and they just take it for granted. In fact one of the few times you're noticed is when you don't do the work. Ask a student just moved out of their home to study at college or university and they'll tell you that suddenly their clothes have stopped magically washing themselves and dinner doesn't just appear on the table any more. They're missing the service their mother did for them and which they took for granted.

But Ruth does get noticed. Here comes Boaz in v4 and he sees Ruth right away. *"Whose young woman is this?"* he says. The foreman explains who she is and comments on her hard work. She's been gleaning all morning, apart from a short rest.

Ruth uses an interesting phrase in v2 - *"Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favour."* This idea of finding favour is going to develop through the rest of the chapter. Note that Ruth is not asserting her rights here. She knows she's not in a strong position. She has to rely on someone allowing her to work. It's a picture of God's grace. We can't approach God by asserting our rights, or waving our credentials. We can only come to him through his Son and by his grace: his unmerited favour.

So the day has started out well. With a servant heart, a humble approach and a strong work ethic, Ruth has managed to gather at least some grain for her and Naomi. Things are going to get better.

A conversation with Boaz - v8-13

From v8 - v13 we have Boaz approaching Ruth. He tells her to stay in his field for safety, staying with the young women working for him. He assures her she'll be safe as he's instructed

the men to leave her alone - there's a sense that the danger Naomi talks about later is real here. And he says there is water for her.

In v10 Ruth says *"Why have I found favour in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"* And then in v13 she says *"I have found favour in your eyes, my lord... though I am not one of your servants."* She is very aware of her position here. She has come from a foreign land. She's not an Israelite. She's not even one of his servants. And yet she has gained acceptance. When she asks why, Boaz explains that he's heard about how she's looking after Naomi. A *"full reward"* will be given by the Lord. And look how he expresses her position. Ruth has said she's a foreigner, but Boaz talks of *"the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!"*

And there's the pattern. People talk about the Old Testament God as being vengeful and angry, but the truth is he is the same in the New Testament and in the Old Testament and today. For those who come to him for refuge, he takes them under his wing. They find safety and security there. And he rewards those who seek to serve him.

So here is progress. Not only is Ruth allowed to glean, but she's also sharing in the water drawn for the workers, and told to stay close to the reapers. Things are looking better.

Lunch - v14-17

Now let's stop for lunch. And rather than wait a little distance from the reapers, Ruth is drawn into the circle. *"Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine."* She's given roasted grain (which in my head is like popcorn but I'm sure it's not) and is given so much she can't eat it all. V14 says *she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over.* There's a definite echo of the feeding of the 5000 here. The idea of having nothing to start with and being given more than enough to satisfy is another insight into the heart of a God who loves his people.

And then it gets even better: Boaz instructs his men to let her glean among the sheaves, where the barley is plentiful, and to drop some behind them as they go, so she has plenty to pick up.

The job is looking better all the time, isn't it? What started as a risky venture has resulted in Ruth being accepted into the group, fed and watered, and her work made easier. How much better could it get?

Evening - home with a Massive Haul - v17-22

Ruth worked all the rest of the day until evening. She beat out the barley she had gathered to separate the grain from the stalks, and took it home. She came hoping she would be able to glean enough for a small meal, and she left with enough to feed them for a week. An ephah is about 22 litres, about 10kg of barley. And she still had some of the roasted grain from lunch time. Naomi was amazed and wanted to know where she'd been to bring back such a haul. *"Blessed be the man who took notice of you."* she said. When Ruth speaks Boaz's name Naomi reveals what we learned at the start. Boaz was a close relative, and he was even a "kinsman redeemer". If he wished he could restore their fortunes by marrying into the family.

And so Ruth ends her day. It started with empty stomachs, an empty house, and little hope. It ended with food on the table, a productive job for Ruth to continue in, and even the hope of the family continuing. So many blessings in one day, it would be one she remembered.

Many more days - v23

And the chapter ends with a summing up of the next couple of months. Ruth was able to continue gleaning in Boaz's field until the barley and wheat harvests were over.

Application

I don't know how you started the day. Perhaps it feels like every other day. Maybe you feel life is dragging. You might feel that prospects are slim. When are we ever going to get back to normal? When will we have something to look forward to again?

Sometimes it can seem like there's no hope.

Learn from Ruth. She got up and went out and hoped that she would find favour with someone. Ultimately she needed a redeemer and amazingly she found one.

We all need a redeemer, to free us from the bonds of sin, to buy us back into the family of God. Thankfully he has supplied one, his son Jesus. And if we seek him out humbly, we are sure to find favour in his eyes.

Even those of us who know the redeemer and call him our saviour can feel distant though. We too can wake up and wonder what hope there is for the day. The good news is that there is hope and if we can't see it it's often because we've stopped looking.

Seek out god. He can change your circumstances. More importantly he can change your heart. Seek him in his word. He promises that it will nourish us. If we go with the intention of just gleaning a little he will often give us a lot. You may find the purpose you were looking for; the truth you feel the world is lacking; the hope to look forward to a night's sleep and a new day.

Isaiah encourages us to *Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.* Let's do that today.