

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic.,
3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 2

RUTH

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

At the end of chapter one, Naomi said, *I went out full, and the LORD (Yahweh) hath brought me home again empty.* By the end of chapter two, Naomi would reverse her testimony by praising the LORD. In the worst of times, God works for the good of His people. Naomi echoed what the psalmist declares in the opening words of his song (46:1): *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.* The concept of refuge embodies protection, safety, provision, help, hope, renewal and revival.

God works in mysterious and marvelous ways by providing and supporting His people. This is evident from this second chapter of Ruth to the end of the book. There is also a “split screen” image in the narrative of Ruth — one that shows human responsibility and the other, the providence of God. The main characters themselves might not realize the silent work of God as they lived from day to day making their decisions, but the divine writer knew

as he skillfully and accurately wrote the book.

We who are at this end of history could see through the lens of the New Testament and may be tempted to think of the narrative in Ruth as a love affair at first sight between Boaz and Ruth. But it is much more than that. It is a significant underlying insight of the account foreshadowing the grace and sovereignty of God to save a hopeless and helpless world in Christ Jesus. This intent of the divine writer must be kept in mind as we read the book.

Clearly absent in the account are the direct revelations, appearances of angels, miracles, judges, prophets and priests, like in the book of Judges. But to those who see through the eye of faith, the marvelous working of God's providence is evident in the lives of His people. And the important thing is that Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz were each able to make their own choices. The sovereign work of God in fulfilling His plan and purpose does not deny the responsibility of man in making his own choices.

Ruth chapter two contains five inter-related dialogues. The first is the dialogue between Ruth and Naomi (vv. 2-3); then Boaz and the reapers (vv. 4-7); then Boaz and Ruth (vv. 8-15a), then Boaz and the reapers again (vv. 15b-16), and lastly Ruth and Naomi (vv. 17-22). There is a pattern — A, B, C, B, A. In literary style, it is called *chiasm*. It is a method of emphasizing the central unit which is “C”, the dialogue between Boaz and Ruth (vv. 8-15a); and at the height of that conversation, Boaz said (v.12): *The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.*

OUTLINE

- (1) Ruth Gleans in Boaz’s field (2:1-3);
- (2) Boaz Notices Ruth (2:4-7);
- (3) Boaz Meets Ruth (2:8-15a);
- (4) Boaz Favours Ruth (2:15b-16);
- (5) Ruth Returns Home (2:17-22).

COMMENTARY

Ruth Gleans in Boaz’s Field – 2:1-

3

The chapter opens with an editorial comment by the divine writer introducing Boaz. Boaz (means: *in him is strength*) was a kinsman or relative of Elimelech, Naomi’s deceased husband. He is described as “a mighty man of wealth.” Although the phrase “mighty man” is often used to refer to

a great warrior or soldier, here it is used to describe Boaz as a noble man whose social standing was respected by others. It may also include the idea that he was an able warrior. Boaz was rich, influential, powerful and a man of great means.

We now look at the first conversation between Ruth and Naomi. Ruth asked Naomi for permission to glean the harvest fields so that they could both have food to eat. She hoped that the reapers or the landowners of the field would be gracious to her. She realized that her status was vulnerable because she was a poor young woman and a stranger, worst still a Moabite. The fact that she was the one who initiated going off to glean indicates that Naomi could possibly have explained the Law of Moses to her stipulating the rights of widows and orphans.¹ Naomi readily gave her the go-ahead. Naomi should have gone with her. She could act as a deterrent against any attack on Ruth, but she did not because she was too old or weak to do this back-breaking work.

¹ Deuteronomy 24:19 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: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. 20 When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

Ruth went off to glean in a field. The text says that she *hap* (or happened) to glean in the field which belonged to Boaz, who was a relative of Elimelech. The divine writer repeated the fact for emphasis. The phrase *her hap to light on* in the original Hebrew language does not convey the idea of “mere chance or luck.” Literally translated it reads: *her chance chanced upon or this happenstance that happened to her was.*² The original text made it clear that Ruth’s presence in Boaz’s field was providentially directed by God. As far as Ruth was concerned, she went from the city to an outlying barley field in Bethlehem. She did not know that it belonged to Boaz. In fact she had not met him before and did not know who he was. Ruth’s choice of gleaning in this field had been providentially determined by God! God was already working out His purposes.

Boaz Notices Ruth – 2:4-7

And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem to his field (v.4). The timing was perfect, not a day earlier or a day later, but on the very day that Ruth came to glean in his field. It was the LORD’S doing but they each made their own deliberate choices. Boaz greeted his reapers with the words, *The LORD be with*

you although a simple *shalom* (peace) would do. This shows that Boaz was a godly man. For him, even the workplace was sacred. There was no line drawn between what was “sacred” and what was “secular”. As far as he was concerned, everything in his life was sacred. How many CEOs in today’s multinational corporations greet their staff with these words when they come to work? The reapers answered Boaz with *The LORD bless thee*. This shows that there was a good relationship between Boaz and his workers.

Ruth’s gleaning at the last line amongst the reapers caught Boaz’s attention even though the attire of the women in those days did not show their physical attractiveness. Boaz could recognize all his workers, both men and women. He noticed Ruth because she was a foreigner. She was young for Boaz referred to her as a *damsel*, and Boaz asked for her family ties, *Whose damsel is this* (v.5). The foreman answered that Ruth was a Moabite who came back with Naomi. This showed that he knew about Naomi, that she had formerly lived in Bethlehem, gone to Moab, and had returned from there. Ruth had asked him for permission to gather the fallen grain. The foreman added that Ruth had been working from the moment she came and had only rested in the shed for a while. These remarks showed that

² The NIV translation is too subdued: “as it turned out.”

Ruth was modest, diligent and hardworking (v.7).

Boaz Meets Ruth – 2:8-15a

Boaz approached Ruth and talked to her. Boaz addressed her warmly calling her, *my daughter*, and told her that she should not go to the other landowners' field to glean. He instructed her to stay close to the women workers. He also charged the young men not to "touch" her. He told her that if she was thirsty, she could help herself to the water in the vessels which were drawn by the young men (v.9). The word "touch" is generally translated in the sense of one coming into close physical contact with something or someone. In this case, it is a stronger verb form denoting the act of "touching" that could refer to the intent of hurting or having intimate sexual contact.³

In those days, it was dangerous for a woman like Ruth who was young, widowed and a Moabite to be about by herself. She was vulnerable to insults and abuses in those days because "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Boaz recognized that it was not safe for her and accordingly gave instructions to his male workers. His kindness, tokens of his grace and favour, went beyond the

requirement of the law. He became Ruth's provider and protector.

In response, Ruth *fell on her face and bowed herself to the ground* (v.10). It was a gesture of submission and gratefulness. She exclaimed (paraphrased), *why have I found grace and favour in your eyes, that you should notice me, when I am a foreigner*. Ruth was overwhelmed by the exceptional kindness of Boaz for she was prepared to be rejected by the Bethlehemites. Boaz answered that he had been made fully aware of all that she had done for her mother-in-law since the death of Naomi's husband, and how she had left her own father and her mother, and the land of her birth, to come to a people she had not known before (v.11). Boaz must have heard a lot of good things about her since the return of Naomi. He was impressed. She was a foreigner, still young and marriageable yet she had sacrificed her future to accompany and care for her mother-in-law in a foreign land. This form of godly and sacrificial loyalty was unheard of in the days when every man did what was right in his own eyes. Ruth was a diamond in a pile of dark charcoal. Her behavior was beyond reproach.

Boaz continued with a benediction upon her — *the LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings*

³ Stephen D. Renn, editor, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, p. 978.

thou art come to trust (v.12). He prayed that the LORD might reward her fully. He had done as much as he could, and whatever he was unable to do, he prayed that God *under whose wings* she had come to trust would fully compensate her. The image of *wings* projects the picture of a bird tenderly protecting its young under its wings. Ruth was secure and safe under the LORD'S powerful wings. Ruth humbly replied that she had hoped to find continued favour from Boaz. Addressing him as *my lord* (master), she expressed that she felt relieved and comforted for he had spoken to her heart as *his servant* even though she was aware that she was *not* one of his actual servants (v.13). In bestowing the benediction upon Ruth, Boaz did not know that he would be the one whom the LORD would use to fulfill the full extent of that blessing.

Boaz Favours Ruth – 2:15b-16

The dialogue between Boaz and Ruth continued. Boaz pleasantly surprised Ruth. He invited her over to dine with him at lunch. Apparently Boaz took his meals with his workers. He must have observed that Ruth did not have her "lunch pack." So Ruth took her place beside the reapers. In those days, they sat down on carpets to take their meals. The barley bread was thin and usually eaten parched (roasted) and dipped into vinegar (wine vinegar), just as

today the toasted garlic bread is dipped into olive oil.

Boaz made another surprised move. He reached out and gave Ruth his roasted bread. He gave her such a generous portion that she had some left over which she could doggy-bag for Naomi. This was another gesture of kindness on Boaz's part which went beyond what a gleaner would expect.

After mealtime when Ruth got up to resume gleaning, Boaz *commanded* his young men to let her gather the fallen barley around the bundled sheaves. In addition, he told the young men to deliberately drop and leave some handfuls of barley so that Ruth could glean them. This was grace indeed! Boaz had been generous, gracious, kind and compassionate. He reflected the grace and mercy of God. As someone has remarked: "We never owed grace but we are awed by grace"!

Ruth Returns Home – 2:17- 23

After a day's gleaning, Ruth beat out the grains. There was about an ephah of barley which weighed about 14 kilograms (30 lbs). Naomi and Ruth would not have to worry about food for at least the next two weeks. Ruth collected the barley grains and went back home to the city. When she reached home, Naomi was surprised by the amount gleaned. Then Ruth took out the leftovers which she had bagged at

lunch for Naomi. Ruth displayed an affectionate care for her. Naomi was so excited that she charged Ruth with two questions in quick succession: “where have you gleaned today, where did you work”. Before Ruth could answer, Naomi invoked a blessing upon Ruth’s benefactor.

On hearing the name “Boaz”, Naomi praised the LORD for showering His faithfulness and kindness (Hebrew, *chesed*) upon the living and the dead (v.19). Naomi told Ruth that Boaz was their relative, one of the next nearest of kin (v.20). Her statement suggested that she was thinking of Boaz as a potential kinsman-redeemer (Hebrew, *go’el*).

A similar incident had happened to Abraham’s servant when he was instructed to find a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24). Abraham emphatically told his servant that he must get a wife for Isaac from among his own relatives and country. Abraham’s servant set off and prayed that the LORD would lead and guide him. At a well where he hoped to meet young maidens, he met Rebecca. And when he discovered that she was the daughter of Abraham’s nephew, he bowed down and thanked the LORD, and testified, *I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master’s brethren* (Genesis 24:27b).

The fact that Boaz was their kinsman probably spurred Ruth to share more of what had transpired – she told Naomi that Boaz had told her to stay close to his young men until they have harvested his crops. On hearing this, Naomi encouraged Ruth to go out with Boaz’s *maidens* and not to glean elsewhere. Naomi steered Ruth away from the male workers and asked her to stick to the female workers. Her counsel intimated that she wanted to prevent any relationship between Ruth and the male workers. She harboured hopes of a developing relationship between Ruth and Boaz. As in chapter 1, the divine writer commented in the last verse that Ruth obeyed Naomi and did all that she was instructed to do. Ruth stayed close to the maidens and gleaned until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. She continued to be with her mother-in-law and did whatsoever she was told concerning the customs and practices of the Jews.

PRACTICAL VALUE

We cannot but be speechlessly amazed at the generosity and kindness that God had showered upon Ruth through Boaz. Boaz acted rightly when he approved of Ruth gleaning in his field as stipulated by the Law of Moses. He went a step further and told her not to glean in another

landowner's field. He assured her that she could glean until the harvest season was over. In addition he guaranteed her personal safety and protection from any harassment from his own male workers.

Right from his first encounter with Ruth, Boaz showed extraordinary kindness. He invited her to lunch with him and his workers, and granted her special freedom to gather among the bundled sheaves. Furthermore, he invoked the name of the LORD to bless and fully reward her because she had come to trust the LORD.

Boaz set a wonderful example for us in caring for the needy and rejected — starting with the household of God first, and then others. Irrespective of our financial and material resources and talent, we can help as long as, like Boaz, we are willing. Boaz reflected the character of God and so should we.

A wonderful truth that we learn is the working out of the sovereign will of God in the lives of His children. God had providentially orchestrated the meeting between Ruth and Boaz. The wonder of it all is that Naomi, Ruth, Boaz and the foreman did and spoke according to their individual choice and yet, all the time, God was in control! The Scriptures is replete with such examples. There are no accidents in a believer's life! This precious truth once learned and internalized will be

a great comfort and encouragement to us all. Let us do everything that is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, virtuous and of good report, and let the LORD God Almighty do the rest.

Another wonderful truth we learn is that the LORD our God is faithful and true to His covenantal promises (Psalm 100:3). Naomi, in spite of her deprivation and suffering, did not reject the LORD God Almighty. In her affliction and bitterness she firmly acknowledged God's sovereignty and power to deal with His children as He pleases. Thus when we experience dire and difficult situations, we must not give in to the temptation of denying God. Instead we should faithfully and firmly acknowledge the LORD God Almighty before all men. In His time, He will bless and reward us. AMEN

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Ruth 2:1-13.

TUESDAY: Ruth 2:14-23.

WEDNESDAY: Genesis 24:15-27.

THURSDAY: Leviticus 19:9-10;
Deuteronomy 24:19-22.

FRIDAY: Mark 16:20, Philippians
2:12-13; Romans 8:28.

Analysis:

Text	Practical Value
Ruth 2:1-3	
Ruth 2:4-7	
Ruth 2:8-13	

Ruth 2:14-17	
Ruth 2:18-23	

Discussion Questions

1. What can we learn about Boaz's character, his standing in the community and his relation to Naomi (vv.1-7)?

2. When Boaz spoke to Ruth for the first time, what did he already know about her (v.11)?

3. What character traits did Ruth reveal in 2:7, 10 & 13?

4. What do the following verses tell us about Boaz: 2:4-9, 14-16?

5. What did Naomi tell Ruth about Boaz (vv.19-23)?

6. Ruth was a young widow and new to the Jewish faith. In her first encounter with the Jews, what impressions would she have about them (vv1-17)? How could this be applied in the church?

7. What two qualities of Boaz and Ruth do you admire?

8. Boaz's servants co-operated with him in his plans for Ruth. How can we apply the example of Boaz's employees in the context of the church (vv.15-17)?

9. Ruth and Boaz thought of responsibilities rather than rights. How might their attitude change your approach to life (vv1-23)?

10. What characteristics of Ruth's life can be reflected in your life?

11. What do you make of Boaz's extremely generous treatment of Ruth? Was it because she was a relative, or was he interested in her or was he a "redeemer"?

12. What was Naomi's judgment of God (vv.19-23)? Was there a change in her earlier judgment (1:13, 20, 21)? Has there been a time in your life when your anger at God suddenly gave way to great joy?

13. In this chapter, what indications are there of God's providence towards His people who are poor? What are the wonderful ways in which God move to help?

14. How does Boaz's treatment of Ruth reflect that God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20)?

15. Would it not be simpler and better for Boaz to give Ruth the grains instead of letting Ruth continue to glean them? What do you think?
