

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Ruth 2 as we continue our study through the historical books. And we are in our favorite book for two more weeks.

During the time of the judges, there was something that we have shared with you before - it was called the sin-drome of the nation. It was a period of 330 or 340 years where the nation didn't really love God, walk with God, know God or know His power. The people tended to just fluctuate with everything that they wanted to do and whatever was right in their own eyes. But God didn't forsake them. After Joshua and everything had been established, the folks quickly turned from the LORD. And so God, in His great love for them, leaned into them. When rest turned to rebellion, rebellion was met with retribution. Whether it was captivity or a particular group of people that they couldn't handle, eventually - sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly - they repented. And whenever there was that cry to the LORD to deliver, God did, and redemption was brought to them, and peace followed, or rest. And then that whole thing started over again. It's a real sad history time, those 340 years, leading up to about 1040 or so B.C., when Saul becomes king. But it is a beautiful picture in the midst of that, that you find this book of Ruth. We really don't know whether to put it in the middle or at the end of that time. There aren't really any indications to help us to understand that. But it was during the time when the nation was not walking with God, and everyone was doing that which was right in their own eyes, that you find this beautiful picture of God's love and redemption for everyone. No matter who you are, no matter where you've gone, no matter what you've done, God has a way for you to come back to Him.

The book is pretty small. It has only eighty-five verses, fifty of which are dialogue. Like most narrative books (which is the historical books like the book of Acts in the New Testament), you learn from the stories that you find there. You follow the stories. God lays them out so that you can learn from what He sets before you. Sometimes you read narrative, and you go, "Man, I wonder what happens next." Well, if the Lord doesn't tell you, you don't know. You've just got to go with what He gives you and learn from what He sets before you. You can't fill in the blanks, really. You've just got to go with what you're given.

And so we are told of the story of Naomi and her husband, Elimelech. They were OGs from Bethlehem. They lived there for years. They were there before Bethlehem was really called Bethlehem. They were a wealthy family. They were a godly family, it would look like from their names and their desires. But during the time of judges, God brings this corrective famine into the land. It was another way where He sought to bring His people to their knees so they'd look up again because He doesn't want to lose them, obviously, to the world or to sin. In the midst of that famine, wealthy Elimelech - rather than losing many things or trying to ride it out in the Land of Promise (after all, Bethlehem means the "house of bread" - God had made great promises for the land) - decided to temporarily move his family to a neighboring heathen nation of Moab. If you stand in Bethlehem fields, you can see the Moabite mountains across the Jordan River, opposite the Dead Sea. There was no famine there because God was specifically dealing with His people. He made a very sinful choice. It wasn't smart to try to escape God's dealing with His people. It's never wise to move away from where God has put His name. His chastening at every point in the book of Judges was for the good of the people to get them to come back to Him. But, indeed, it was a tough time.

Elimelech and Naomi had two children; they were named Mahlon, which means "sickly," and Chilion, which means "cry baby." Not good names. You have to assume that these kids were born during the famine, that it was severe. Their names seem to describe their health, if you will. But dad thought it was better to move out of state, out of the city, out of the country to settle down temporarily in a place that they could survive, and the verb tenses of the move in chapter 1 bear that out. He was planning to move temporarily. Unfortunately, temporarily becomes years, and it wasn't long before they settled in there. Both of his boys got older; they married Moabite women. By the way, the Moabites were cursed by God as a nation never to be allowed into the Land. They wouldn't let the children of Israel through when they came out of Egypt; they wouldn't even offer water to them. God was angry with this cursed nation, if you will. But that's where Elimelech went. Like I said, both of his boys married heathen women.

But within those first ten years, Elimelech, the husband, the fellow who was leading the family, died; left his wife, Naomi, a widow. And then, within ten years, both of the boys died as well. So here's Naomi, now, in a foreign land with two daughters-in-law from a Moabite tribe, and alone; and once wealthy and successful and blessed now finding herself with nothing. In that position, she does what you might have expected. She repents. I mean, really repents. "God, I don't belong

here. I shouldn't be here. I should be home." And the sincerity of her repentance is found in the story itself. So she decides to go home to her homeland, to the land of her youth. Her two daughters-in-law go with her, or they promise to go with her. Orpah, one of them, decides though, "Gosh, it'd be better if I just stayed here with my family. You're not liable to have any more kids. I've got no future in the land of Israel, certainly." And she returns to her home and to her gods. But the other daughter-in-law, Ruth (who is namesake for the story), had become convinced - watching Naomi struggle with her sin and repentance - that the God of Naomi was the right God to serve. She was tired of the gods of the heathen. She saw in her mother-in-law a love that she hadn't seen anywhere else. And no doubt her mother-in-law's repentance was one of those moving reasons for Ruth to come to know the LORD.

When Ruth is told by her mother-in-law, "Just go home, it'd be easier for you," she mouths what we (I'm sure you know verses 16 and 17 of the last chapter), "Wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people will be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me." So there's this wonderful declaration of faith from Ruth's life. It's a beautiful commitment. She's leaving her family, her way of life, the food, the culture for Israel, a place that has declared a curse upon her people through the God that they serve. But she goes home with Naomi. They arrive back in Bethlehem - penniless. Whatever they had tried to avoid by running, they'd lost in the process anyway. And when they arrived there, she says to the people in the city that recognize her, "Don't call me Naomi, 'pleasant,' anymore. Just call me Mara," (it's a word that means 'bitter' or being embittered) "because God has dealt bitterly with me." The neighbors, many years later, were not very welcoming; they recognized her, but that was about it. And so they kind of had to fend for themselves. And you get this picture of how costly it is to leave a place where the Lord is to try to find solutions for your life in the world. That's what they had tried to do. Yet God will always take you back and restore you, and that's, I think, the lesson of chapter 2.

Chapter 1 took place in Moab, across the Jordan River. Chapter 2 takes place in the fields of Bethlehem. Chapter 1 was all about love's resolve, as Ruth determines with Naomi she's coming back; she loves her and her God. Chapter 2 is all about God's response, as we see God begin to providentially provide for this woman, for

this young woman as well. And you get these beautiful pictures of God's provision for His people in very natural ways.

We ended chapter 1 last week by reading that they returned to the land of Bethlehem about the time of the barley harvest or the Passover, mid- to late April. It was the same time of year, by the way, that Jesus would come to die for the sins of the world. Ruth will eventually marry Boaz on Pentecost, the day that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church. So you have a lot of wonderful kinds of types to lay side by side, the Old Testament revealing what is yet to come. But we're getting way ahead of ourselves.

So let's start in verse 1, where we read this, "There was a relative of Naomi's husband," (Elimelech) "a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz." Our first meeting with this man who was a relative of Naomi on her husband's side. He was a man of great wealth, and it would appear (from all that we read in the Scriptures) that he was a very godly man, though he was very well-off. You don't find too many well-off godly men in the Bible. There are some. You don't find many well-off godly men in the world, but there are some. His name, Boaz, means "in Him is my strength." And so we presume, as I think we are free to do, that Boaz, in the time of judges, was still from a family that was godly and desired to serve the LORD. He had lived up to the confidence in God that his name implied. He had stayed in Bethlehem during the famine. He has not gone broke. He had survived it. He had trusted the LORD. He had found strength in the LORD. And he's one of those families that sticks out like a sore thumb during the time of the judges which, if you read before this book, you know a lot about. So impressed was his great-great grandson, Solomon, with Boaz that when he was older and was allowed to build the Temple years later, there were two main pillars at the front entrance to the Temple - one of which he named Boaz (1 Kings 7:21), the other you can read about there. But he was a true pillar of the day. I think that's how it comes across.

The word for "relative," here in verse 1, just means that - someone near in relationship. In verse 20, when we get there, the word for "relative" will be the word "*goel*," which implies not just near but very near in relationship; it paints a beautiful picture of this kinsman redeemer ritual law that you find at the roots of the Law in chapter 25 of Leviticus. The "*goel*" or the redeemer or the closest relative, the next of kin, in Jewish law had lots of responsibility. One was if some of the family lost land, if they were able to buy it back, keep it in the family, that

was their responsibility if you were the "*goel*," the near kinsman. If someone in your family like a son, died, a brother died, and he didn't have children, you were obligated as the "*goel*" to marry his now-widowed wife and have a son with her - but when that son was born to name him after your dead brother so that the name would continue. And God - all of these things interested in keeping the Law and the land and the name in Israel and the family. So this kinsman redeemer picture, in general, and, literally later on, this Boaz relationship, in particular, is really a picture of what Jesus came to do for you and me. I mean, He becomes our next of kin. He takes flesh. He meets us. God meets us in the flesh, if you will, and He dwells in our midst, and He pays the price for our redemption even as Naomi, who had sinned, or Ruth, who had been cursed, now find redemption in the "*goel*," in the kinsman redeemer. So it's a picture to keep in mind. We'll go after it next week when we get to the wedding. You don't want to miss next week because we're going to do the last two chapters, and if you miss that, you might as well not have been here tonight. So either come next week or go home now. (Laughing) There's a great verse in Psalm 19:14 that says of the LORD, "He is my strength and my Redeemer." In Hebrew, it reads, "He is my Boaz and my *goel*." And so those are terms that you'd want to know and kind of keep ahold of.

Verse 2 says, "So Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi," (her mother-in-law) " 'Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor.' And she said to her, 'Go, my daughter.' " Of the twelve times that Ruth is mentioned in this book, five times is attached to her name the words "the Moabitess." No doubt one lesson of the book is showing us that even if you have been accursed from God due to sin, you can still find redemption in His Son. Sometimes we'll have people come in, and God is dealing with them, and they want to believe the gospel so badly, but they really believe they've gone, somehow, beyond the pale. You know? They're unredeemable, they're way out there, "Oh, God can never take me." And it's good to be able to lay these kinds of pictures up before them because the Lord clearly said, "Within ten generations, no one from the Moabites will ever enter into My land and be counted with our people, that we'll care for them" (Deuteronomy 23:3). But, by faith, she was welcome, and she even finds herself in the lineage and in the descendancy line of Jesus. So you'll read this "Moabitess" quite often, I think, to drive home the fact that she would maybe be in a place of unredeemability if it wasn't for the grace of God that can reach anyone. It says in the Bible, "to the uttermost" (Hebrews 7:25). It's been translated "to the guttermost." God can get wherever we're living.

So she understands Jewish practices of gleaners. That's something that you did if you were poor. Naomi was once wealthy and influential with her husband; now she's there by herself, and she has nothing. Ruth comes from a cursed group. They've come back to Bethlehem, and now she wants to take advantage of the LORD's welfare system. If you've ever read through the Old Testament, especially in the book of Leviticus, there're a couple of places (Leviticus 19:9, 23:22) that talk about the welfare system in Israel. But one of them was about harvest - that when the reapers were to go through the land to gather whatever the grain might have been, they were only allowed (if they were following the LORD's Law) to go through once. And whatever they missed, whatever they dropped, whatever they didn't get the first time, they weren't even allowed to go back and try it again. They were to leave whatever was left in the field for the gleaners, for the poor, if you will. So, the reapers gathered for profit and for gain. The gleaners gathered for survival. And yet God put them together in the same field. In God's welfare system, there were no handouts. The system helped maintain the dignity of the poor. It allowed them to work. It didn't contribute to fraud or laziness or abuse or crime. All had equal access under God's Law. So Ruth understood that. She loved her mother-in-law. They didn't have anything to go on. "How 'bout I go and try to glean? I'm young. I've got energy. Would that be all right with you?" And she said, "Well, go ahead, and maybe you'll find a godly owner who'll allow you to glean." You'd have to find someone who, in the days of the judges, was willing to follow the Law of God. That could've been difficult. Maybe there weren't that many; maybe there were some. So, in any way, there were a lot of evil kind of godless, selfless owners in those days who could've cared less about God's Law at all, especially since the famine that was there had now gone.

So Ruth had learned, I'm sure, from her mother-in-law the laws of gleaning. And she's a humble girl. I mean, this is a young, beautiful girl who just is following the LORD. Really, there's no gain here. She's not in town for the estate, you know? She's here because she loves the LORD, and she's convinced of who God is, and she's willing to take the lowest place. And so, in humility, she said, "Can I go do this?" And her commitment to the LORD, I think, even at the very beginning here is 100%. And so Naomi said, "Well, of course. Go see what the LORD will do." And here's the deal - whenever you put yourself where God can use you and speak to you, you're liable to find out what He wants. But you most often find out in the circumstances in which He places you, which is part of this lesson. The lesson of providence. Remember we talked about providence last week? It is God doing, in a natural way, the things that He wants to get a supernatural result. You'll never

just come to the end and go, "Oh, ho, man, that was the Lord!" No, no. He'll do things in such a natural way. He'll get you to where He wants you to go, but only the eyes of the spiritually in tune will see it. That's what providence is. Right?

So, notice here in verse 3, "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 happened to be this near relative) "who was of the family of Elimelech" (her father-in-law who had died). But notice the words it "just so happened." The Hebrew word is "*miqreh*," and "*miqreh*" literally means accident or fortune or chance or "as luck would have it." Because, to a casual observer, man, what a lucky break! She shows up in the fields of a guy that might very well be the kind of guy that could redeem her and her mother-in-law, that is the closest relative that has a responsibility and a respect for the Law, and maybe he'll bail her out. Who could have thought? It "just so happens" that she ends up there. God brought her to the fields of a relative of her dead father-in-law. It may have seemed good luck to her, but she would learn better because God has providence. Right? This is the narrative story. God's natural ways of working towards a supernatural result. There was no coincidence here. God was doing what God needed to be accomplished. She needed to end up in this field. Of all of the fields that she might have chosen, of all of the places that she might have gone and been welcomed, she finds herself in the right field the first time. A close relative. Perhaps a redeemer, at that. I love how God works behind the scenes. And don't ever shortchange God's work in your life by writing things off, "Well, we got lucky." Maybe before you were saved, you could live that kind of life. But once you come to know the Lord, you'd better never be lucky. You'd better know better. You should know better. Because God walks with you, and chance and luck and good fortune are all replaced by providential care of a loving Father. You know that. Right? So don't think you're lucky. You're not lucky, you're a blessed person, and God is taking good care of you. We presume that, somehow, when God works that the fog should roll in, and we should go into a semi-trance, and there'll be a mystical, ghostly voice, and an echo chamber, and our hair would stand up on the back of our neck. "That's the Lord!" Don't pay any attention to that man behind the curtain. (Laughing) It's right in a movie; you should have seen it by now. That's not the way it works. God works in very natural ways to accomplish divine purposes. And, like I said, if you have the eyes of discernment to see them, you'll be excited. The more mystical ways, by the way, of God working are hardly ever found in the Bible. Like if you were going to go to the Bible and say, "I want to find God working in very mystical ways," you'd have a lot of work ahead of you, and you'd

come up with very little. When Elijah was on the run, thinking that he was going to get killed by Jezebel, even though he'd had a great victory just a few days before, we read in 1 Kings 19 that when he went to hear the LORD in the middle of nowhere, he checked out the fire. "That's unusual." It wasn't the fire. He checked out the earthquake. It wasn't the earthquake. He looked at the whirlwind. Couldn't find that. And then God spoke in a still small voice. It was way understated. Right? And that's the way God works.

So Ruth says, "I just want to go out and be available." And she goes, and it "just so happened," "*miqreh*." It "just so happened" God put her in the right place at the right time. How awesome is that! And God does that for us time, I think, and time again. There's a verse in Jeremiah 10:23 that says, "I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps." But if you let the Lord have your life, man, you should be excited about what He brings your way. "A man devises his plans," Proverbs 16:9, "but the LORD directs his steps." So the natural ways of God.

When the church began - and I was thinking about that the other day because we're going to have a chance to do this remodel now - when we tried to move from a house in Whittier (in late 1984) into a school to have services, nobody wanted a church in the school. We'd hit those years where, "Yeah, church-school." They didn't get along. What happened good in the 60's and 70's was not happening very much in the 80's. So when we went to East Whittier Middle School to meet with the director there, I was all kinds of nervous because we needed a place to go, and we'd run out of options. So on the day that I was to meet this guy at 10:00 in the morning on a Monday or Tuesday (I forget what it was), I had a cup of coffee that I spilled right down the front of my shirt, sitting in the waiting room. So I thought, "This is goin' well already. Look at this. 'Hi. I'd like to borrow a place. I'll be real clean.' " So I walk in, and I meet this guy named Ken (I'll tell you just his first name, I know him to this day). Ken was a fellow that had just taken the job a week earlier. And when I sat down, he goes, "Well, what do you need the place for?" I said, "Well, we're a Calvary Chapel. I'm affiliated. I grew up there, and I worked at Calvary Downey for a lot of years. We believe God's called us out here to start a church, and I'm sure....." And he goes, "Well, why would you do that? Why do you believe in the Bible?" He was asking me these weird questions. And I thought, "Man, this guy's really not real easy." And then I finally just said to him, "Why are you askin' me all of this stuff?" and he said, "Well, I got to Calvary Costa Mesa, and I just got this job, and I'd be excited to help you get into that school to

get started." He signed the papers, got everybody to sign off at the district. We got a, I think, two-year agreement or one-year agreement; anyway, an agreement. And we got in. And a week after he came - he was only there for six weeks - they transferred him. He moved in to sign papers for us, and then he moved out! And people go, "Well, you were lucky." No, I don't think I was lucky. I think that was it "just so happened" that God was doing a great work. So it's important that we need to see God work and to keep our eyes open in how He works.

So Ruth's lot is that she ends up in the fields of Boaz. She will soon understand God's plans for her, and it'll happen one step, I guess, at a time. But I think the way the Holy Spirit wants to point out in verse 3 is never miss God's work. Keep your eyes on what God is doing because there's no luck in your life anymore. You've given your life to Jesus. Right? You belong to Him. So I wouldn't downgrade His work in you.

Verse 4 says, "Now behold," (which is one of those words both in the Old Testament and New where the Lord uses it to say, "Hey, don't miss this, take a look." Behold means, "Check this out carefully") "Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, 'The LORD be with you!' And they answered him, 'The LORD bless you!' Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, 'Whose young woman is this?' So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, 'It is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. And she said, "Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves." So she came and has continued from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house.' Then Boaz said to Ruth, 'You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women. Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. 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 young men have drawn.' "

Notice. "Now, look, behold." I told you Boaz is a picture of Jesus. Notice he comes from Bethlehem. He goes amongst his laborers with blessings on his lips. I love the pictures because, in our Bibles, God is always longing to be among His creation. When He created Adam and Eve and placed them in the garden, you'll read that He walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8). But that relationship was cut off by sin, which separated God from His people. When Israel came out of Egypt, God was with them - both in a cloud by day and by night a fire (Exodus 13:21). When they later built the Temple, His glory was among them; His glory settled on the Temple (2 Chronicles 5). But again, sin drove Him away.

And you'll read in the book of Jeremiah (and other places) watching the LORD's glory depart from that place of meeting with His people (Ezekiel 10). When God came and inhabited flesh, He took a tabernacle, He dwelt among us. But what happened? Sinful men nailed Him to a cross to rid themselves of Him. Today He's still available. He still wants to hang around with you. And by grace and through His Son, He comes to dwell in those who believe in Him. One day, He'll come to get His bride, and then He'll return to rule and reign forever. But God's will is to be with us. And I love how Boaz, the owner - the big shot, hangs out with the workers, comes to bless them and to bring blessings to them. Those of you that work construction, I'm sure this sounds nothing like your typical work crew. "Well, God bless you." "No. God bless you." (Laughing) Not like that at all as far as I can remember. But isn't it wonderful when you can have a place to work where God's work is continuing? And I love the picture because.....but here's a spiritual place in the midst of the fields of the judges, almost a respite, an island of tranquility in a society of rebellion.

"Who's this young girl?" Boaz is a godly man; unusual that, in his godliness, he's not compartmentalized. In other words, he's not a godly guy at fellowship and worship but not such a godly guy in his work. He's the same everywhere. Maybe I should just say to you girls that are in the market for a husband - find a guy like this, who's the same everywhere he turns. So he asks the guy who's in charge of the workers, "Who is she?" "Well, here's who she is, and she's with Naomi, and she's the Moabite young lady that returned from the land of Moab. She's been working from sun-up. She hasn't taken much time off." And as soon as Boaz discovers who she is, he begins to give her and to offer her things of benefit. He tells her that she shouldn't go anywhere else, that she can work every day in his fields. He tells her to stay close to the women that are used to working and gleaning in the fields, someone that he's already made himself available for. "Go with them. If you're thirsty, go drink out of the buckets that the guys have brought up here." And so Ruth is given by Boaz a place up front by the reapers in the best gleaning spot. But she's also then subject to the improprieties of young men because she was obviously a pretty woman. And so he said, "I've told all the guys to be careful around you. I'll make sure they protect you." And so she's only been here half a day, and she goes, "This is not bad here. Look what God is doing. Just so happened." Just so happened.

We read, in verse 10, "So she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground, and said to him, 'Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me,

since I am a foreigner?' And Boaz answered and said to her, 'It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before. The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.' " Man, he's a godly guy. He was already aware of the loss of husband, the father-in-law, leaving what she had left behind, the sorrows of her past and her graciousness even in all of these things; her humility, her thankfulness. She'd only begun to taste of the goodness of God. "I'm a stranger. Why do you love me? Why is the big shot in Bethlehem taking notice of me?" And his answer is, "I know all about you." And already her walk with God was paying dividends. Her faithfulness to the LORD was being rewarded. Since we picked on the girls, if you guys are lookin' for a wife, find a woman like Ruth, whose attitude and outlook is one of humility and grace and thanksgiving, and you'll do fine. I know on your checklist, she's gotta be hot. I'm sure that's your checklist, (Laughing) but just study gravity; that's not gonna last. (Laughing) Find a godly woman. Don't settle for anything less. I love this - the blessings of God are available to those who seek refuge under His wings. She falls at his feet, "LORD, I'm so blessed." God loves us. So he responds to what he had only heard of her faith, but Ruth was already the talk of the town - a converted Gentile seeking a covenant relationship with Yahweh, under His wings. So Boaz blesses her. And he knew from personal experience that if you sought the LORD, God would take care of you. He was not talking from a theological book; he was talking out of his life.

Ruth responds, in verse 13, " 'Let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you have comforted me, and have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants.' Now Boaz said to her at mealtime, 'Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.' So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed parched grain to her; and she ate and was satisfied, and kept some back." Ruth accepts his thankfulness being for his kindness. At lunchtime, she's invited to come sit. Notice here's a neat picture for you Bible students: here's a bride-to-be invited to come eat bread and wine at the Lord's table. Kind of like having communion, isn't it? So, she's eating with the reapers. But notice she shows some restraint. They're poor. She gets to eat, but she's saving some for her mother-in-law. She wants to sneak some lunch to her as well.

And so, verse 15, when she was done eating, "She rose up to glean," (work the afternoon) and Boaz commanded his young men, saying, 'Let her glean even among

the sheaves, and do not reproach her. Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.' " So Boaz, going out of his way to make provision for her, now tells his gleaners to purposely drop stuff every once in a while. "Oops. There goes another handful of grain." And I'm sure that Ruth must have been goin', "Man, this is easier than I thought!" you know? (Laughing) "They're all piled up for me right here. This is perfect." Handfuls of purpose. The sheaves, I think, picture God's Word to us where we go daily to glean food for our souls. Handfuls of purpose. It's a great term, isn't it? Fruit from the fields. Our heavenly Boaz has paid the price so that we can get the spoil in the fields, the treasure.

Well, we are told in verse 17, "So she gleaned in the field until evening, and beat out what she had gleaned," (took it up on the hill and cracked, if you will, the barley from the husks) "and it was about an ephah of barley." She worked a long day, then she had to go up and beat the grain. An ephah is roughly four gallons of dry weight; so eight milk bottles full of grain, completely ready to eat. It's a pretty good haul for a gleaner. Right? She struck gold. And no doubt the guys dropping handfuls of purpose didn't hurt either. By the way, back in the 1940's, there was a man named James Smith who wrote a five-volume set of short devotionals from different Bible passages throughout the Bible, and he called it "Handfuls of Purpose." It is out of print today. It is 3,888 pages. I'm tellin' ya because I have one, and I love it. It's hardback, you can look up Scriptures, and he's got such great insights. It's like a treasure to have. But if you ever run into "Handfuls of Purpose" on Amazon or in a used book store, just snake it, grab it, take it. You'll be so blessed. And I don't think there's any other way you'll get 'em than kind of keep your eye out. But it's called "Handfuls of Purpose." The fellow's name is James Smith. He's no longer with us, but God's Word through him certainly is.

Verse 18, "Then she took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. So she brought out and gave to her what she had kept back after she had been satisfied." So she brought her food as well. "And her mother-in-law said to her, 'Where have you gleaned today?' " Jackpot. (Where did you go?) " 'And where did you work? Blessed be the one who took notice of you.' So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, 'The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz.' " I think Naomi knew something wasn't right when she saw everything that she brought with her.

In the early 1900's, if you (you probably don't normally do that; pastors tend to do that. I have a lot of books that are pretty old because it doesn't really matter how old they are, God's Word is still the same) - but in the early 1900's, and you see it pop up in all these commentaries, there used to be a phrase that the church used with each other, and they would say to one another, "Where have you been gleaning today?" It was like a catch phrase, and it really meant, "Where have you been eating?" or "Where have you been spending your time?" And it might be good to resurrect it because it's kind of one of those searching questions that says, "Where are you spending your time?" because where you're spending your time, that's what you're going to reap. You're going to reap what you've sown. You're going to get back what you've put in and where you've been at. And so it became kind of popular in the church. "Where have you been gleaning today?"

Well, she'd been led by the LORD, she had found a place, she had worked hard there in Bethlehem. She was finding the blessings of God, and so she says, "Well, I've been gleaning in the field of a man named Boaz."

Verse 20, "Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, 'Blessed be he of the LORD, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living' " (that would be her) " 'and the dead!' " (her husband) "And Naomi said to her, 'This man is a relation' " ("*goel*") " 'of ours, one of our close relatives.' Ruth the Moabitess said, 'He also said to me, "You shall stay close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest." And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, 'It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, and that people do not meet you in any other field.' So she stayed close by the young women of Boaz, to glean until the end of barley harvest and wheat harvest; and she dwelt with her mother-in-law." Naomi, I think, restored in her walk with the LORD, began to get, I think, glimpses of what God was up to. She realized that God's blessings had not forsaken her completely. She would not be being called "bitter" for much longer. God had taken her back, had restored her again, had brought blessing. And so mom says to her daughter-in-law, "It's a good thing you stay right where you're found and work there." And she did. For the next several months, she was in the fields. And then the LORD just kind of lets that go until the end of the harvest, when we get the cool part of the story - which we're going to do next week since tonight we have communion.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
March 31, 2019