

Boy Meets Girl

Text: Ruth 2.1–23

Theme: God is at work providentially arranging the details of our lives to accomplish his purposes.

Introduction — It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.

- Charles Dickens begins his 1859 novel, *A Tale of Two Cities* with these famous words
- most people know that opening line, but do you know what follows?
- It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.
- you couldn't sum up the time of the book of Judges any better than this
- what a time of schizophrenia, spiritually, politically, socially
- it got played over and over again
- there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

Book of Ruth takes place during this time

- as it starts out, seems like it was the worst of times
- and yet, if we sneak a peek at the ending of our story, we see otherwise
- God is working it out to be the best of times

God is at work behind the scenes and behind the “seen”

- He is fulfilling Romans 8.28 in the life of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz
- **And we know that for those that love God all things work together for good, for those called according to His purpose.**
- at first, what we've seen so far, looks like a major speed bump along the way
- there were three widows, and two remain
- they return to Bethlehem, after the famine is over
- that which drove Naomi's family away is done & she returns
- but not the way she went out
- remember what she said?
- “the hand of the Lord has gone out against me”
- “the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me”
- “I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty”
- “the Almighty has brought calamity upon me”

Doesn't sound like a very good love story, does it?

- we know that it is...sort of, but not yet
- but today, in Ruth 2, we see the bud forming
- here, the shy Boaz is put on display
- he is kind (the word here is *hesed*, the Hebrew word for “covenant” love)
- and at first, Ruth is unaware of any romantic interest at all
- what she experiences, thru Boaz, is God's blessing

But we hear the notes of the song of Ruth being played in the background here

- God's lovingkindness, even when it appears unseen, never ceases to work on behalf of His children no matter the circumstances
- even in discouraging times, God is unfolding His plan to bring about the redemption of world
- His promised Deliverer will come through this lineage, as we'll see

- “And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.”
- God is the master conductor and orchestrates a marvel of great beauty
- and we hear this in the closing words of ch. 1

Let's watch and see as...

I. BOY SEES GIRL, VV. 1-7

- two key factors come into play right away in ch. 2
- Ruth & Naomi arrive back just in time for the barley harvest
- the famine is over; God has visited His people with blessing
- the second factor is that Naomi has a relative, a worthy man, a man of standing, Boaz

1. Aware of one's vulnerability

- apparently Ruth has learned from Naomi about the Israelite's religion
- she seems to be aware that the Lord values acts of benevolence for the vulnerable
- and Ruth & Naomi were some of the most vulnerable
- without husbands or sons, they could be abused, disrespected, betrayed, even raped
- and as a foreigner, a woman of Moab, this would have made her fair game
- after all, she worshiped idols, was an enemy of the people of god, and now a widow too
- so, here are two women who qualify by high standards, for the vulnerable needing help
- this comes out when Ruth asks permission to go out two times: v. 2, 7
- Naomi may have been too old, by this time, to go with her, so she sends Ruth alone

2. God's hand is working already

- look at verse 3: “and she happened to come to the field...”
- Hebrew makes an emphatic point here: “her chance chanced upon”
- this was no happenstance of luck; this is the providential care of God
- here is how it worked: she came to a section of land
- in that section of land were outlying fields
- in those outlying fields, there was one particular field
- and it all belonged to Boaz
- the God who brought bread to the “house of bread”/Bethlehem is very involved here

3. God's people showing compassion

- v. 4: And behold! — this is Hebrew's way of saying, Pay attention; something amazing here
- Boaz of Bethlehem, greets his workers: The Lord be with you!
- by this, Boaz seems quite committed to his faith, bringing it into the work place
- I wonder if some of us ever leave God home when we go to work
- here is an example that teaches us not to do such foolish things
- his workers respond, “The Lord bless you!”
- now, this may not have been the heart sentiment of all
- after all, Boaz has to warn them shortly to not abuse, harass, or molest this women
- Boaz notices a young woman he doesn't recognize and inquires about her, v. 5
- v. 6: one of the workers knows the briefest of stories about Ruth & Naomi
- one point, as we prepare to move on
- note Boaz is asking about family relationships with this young woman
- “Whose young woman is this?” Thinking she must have a husband
- I don't believe Boaz has a romantic feeling here yet; he's simply gathering information
- having heard some about Naomi as well, he shows compassion, a serious component of faith
- even though she is a foreigner, Boaz knows his Old Testament law: take care of them

The plot thickens slightly as we observe...

II. BOY MEETS GIRL, VV. 8–13

- no doubt, Ruth was surprised to receive personal attention from the landowner here
- Boaz will explain what his motives are in this section of verses

1. Protection is now provided

- before Boaz speaks to Ruth personally, he takes care of some urgent business
- we know this is the timing of things, because he then tells Ruth what he has done
- he went to the young men harvesting nearby and says “Hands off! Don’t you dare touch her”
- to an enemy, this may have just been assumed as fair game, but not in this instance
- Boaz’ first words to his workers was one of blessing
- his first words to Ruth are full of respect as well as distance
- he calls her, “my daughter” and instructs her to stay within his fields
- he will make sure she gets enough from the gleanings, the leftovers fallen by the side

2. Provision comes along

- Boaz informs Ruth that she can get a drink whenever she needs
- this would not have happened with the other harvesters; they needed to wait until break time!
- there is more going on here than just compliance with OT laws
- Ruth is first of all, overwhelmed with Boaz’ kindness, his *hesed*: she bows down to Boaz, v.10
- she also shows that she has not been prepared to receive such mercy and lovingkindness
- “Why have I found favor in your eyes...”
- aware that she is a foreigner, she expects nothing but harshness
- but Boaz is a man of the true covenant of the One God of Israel
- he reflects God’s covenant love back to the most vulnerable, here being Ruth

3. Lovingkindness shown

- the words Boaz gives in v. 11 and following reveal his heart for God and others
- he knows what happened to Naomi in Moab
- word has reached him about Ruth’s commitment to follow Naomi back to Bethlehem
- aware of all the bad news, Boaz brings good news, even as he blesses Ruth, v. 12
- in all that Boaz has heard, he hears of the grace and mercy of God to Ruth
- God has taken her under His wings, meaning, she belongs to Him now, by faith
- knowing this, he prays that Ruth would receive wholeness within this life
- little did he realize the part he would play in that wholeness!
- and as lovingkindness is shown, Ruth receives it, and in a way, returns it back in like kind
- v. 13 shows that Ruth has an understanding of grace: it is unearned and undeserved
- but it is given freely
- do you know this grace of God? Or are you still trying to earn God’s favor?
- it is freely given in Christ Jesus, if you would only come, empty-handed, receiving Him

God’s lovingkindness, even when it appears unseen, never ceases to act on behalf of His children, and we see this as...

III. BOY FEEDS GIRL, VV. 14–17

- in this next paragraph, we see God using Boaz to work His plan of redemption
- Ruth is actually taken aback by the personal hospitality of Boaz
- but isn’t this the way of the Lord?
- He welcomes strangers, the downcast, the broken and empty-handed to Himself
- and He does this through the One who will come from Boaz and Ruth’s offspring

- God always fulfills His promises and He is doing that even here

1. Hospitality to a stranger

- come mealtime, Boaz continues to show his *hesed* lovingkindness to Ruth
- it is likely that Ruth brought nothing with her, not knowing if she would be anywhere by now
- the first surprise is that Boaz eats his meals with his employees
- the second surprise is he invites her, a Moabitess, to eat with him, along with the other workers
- it is not recorded for us how the other workers took this; after all, Ruth is a foreigner
- then, a third surprise comes: Boaz gives Ruth roasted grain
- this removed any doubt anyone had about the provision & protection Boaz was giving
- and note: it wasn't just barely enough; there was enough for a doggie bag!

2. Provision aplenty

- after lunch, Boaz gives instructions to the workers: leave extra sheaves for Ruth
- this is not just favor for her, but also for Naomi
- remember, Naomi was a relative of Boaz and now he takes care of her also
- and once again, he reminds the men: You will not say or do anything to harm this woman
- I would imagine they sat up and took notice
- they would suffer dire consequences should they do otherwise
- Ruth, not wanting to take advantage of this blessing, works hard until near sunset
- the amount she gleaned from this was about an ephod
- an ephod would have fed about 50 fighting men, in other words, several weeks worth for two
- if you are in Christ, are you aware the riches you have in Christ?
- His lovingkindness in saving you gave you so very much
- Ephesians 1 tells us we have been blessed “in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”
- Ephesians 2 goes on to tell us that we have been “seated with Him in the heavenly places”
- Peter adds to this by saying that we have been granted “all things pertaining to life and godliness”
- in Jesus Christ, we lack nothing
- but do you know this?
- do you possess Christ, or better yet, does He possess you?
- look to Him and be saved, today could be the day of your salvation
- then you too will know the riches of His mercy

Well, Ruth can't keep this a secret, so...

IV. GIRL REPORTS BACK TO “MOTHER”, vv. 18–23

- perhaps, for the first time, Naomi sees bitterness turning into blessing
- there were glimmers with the barley coming back, and then their coming back
- but after Ruth reports what has happened, Naomi's faith is being restored
- remember, she had taken the crossroads of restoration in ch. 1
- now we see the fruit coming ripe to her and Ruth

1. The wonder of it all

- wouldn't you like to have been a mouse in the corner of their home that day?
- Naomi sees the bounty that came home with Ruth
- she pummels her with questions and as Ruth answers, Naomi's eyes must have grown teary
- when Ruth mentions Boaz' name, Naomi becomes truly excited
- she gives three key responses here

- first, she pronounces a blessing upon Boaz
- then she affirms that the Lord truly has not stopped showing His kindness to the living
- and finally, she explains her enthusiasm at all this great news: Boaz is a relative

2. More than a relative—a redeemer

- Boaz, Naomi now goes on to state, is also a kinsman-redeemer, in Hebrew, a *go'el*
- Ruth probably had no idea what this meant, but she would
- as Ruth breaks the news that Boaz told her to stay with his harvesters until harvest's end
- Naomi sees this as a grand plan, and perhaps even begins to scheme and plan on her own
- then as the time goes on, we see that Ruth will work for seven more weeks harvesting
- imagine the seeming wealth of the grain she brings home and Boaz protects & provides

3. God is working

- you and I can see it so plainly, as we read this account
- it seems so obvious, but not to Ruth and Naomi; at least, not until now
- their circumstances had been difficult, to say the least
- they wondered if they would survive for very long at all
- and now, the hand of God is making a glorious appearance to them
- what about you?
- are you in that far country we spoke of last week?
- are you in a place you think is bitter in life's circumstances?
- look, with that eye of faith, for the hidden hand of God
- remember the words to that hymn from our first week here:

*God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.*

*Deep in unfathomable mines of never-failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs, and works His sovereign will.*

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread
are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head.*

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace;
behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.*

*His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding ev'ry hour;
the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flow'r.*

*Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain.*

Conclusion – from desolation to delight

- that could be another title for our series here in Ruth
- Naomi was as dismal as one could be, it seemed, by end of ch. 1
- but now, by God's grace and mercy, her life is about to turn and see tremendous blessing

It would be easy to simply wait until we see circumstances change and only then have hope

- but do you not hope in God's character now?

- do you know His mercy already?
- have you experienced His grace, even yet this day?
- spend some time, even this afternoon, meditating on the words of Jeremiah
- Jeremiah knew bitterness multiplied many times
- he knew heartache and rejection, oppression and lamentation
- and yet, God used him to lift our hearts with these words:

**21 But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
23 they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
24 “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”
25 The Lord is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul who seeks him.**

Let’s pray—

O Lord, you have told us that we may be content in our earthly circumstances because our citizenship is in heaven. We confess that it seems easier to us to walk by sight than by faith; we ask forgiveness for those times when we gauge our understanding of your love by our circumstances rather than by your promises. We ask that we would take courage from Your grace, be awed by Your lovingkindness, and take refuge in Your wings. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen,