

Ruth 2

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[0 : 00] Turn to Ruth chapter two. Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

And Ruth, the Moabite, said to Naomi, let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor. And she said to her, go, my daughter.

So she sat out 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 clan of Elimelech.

And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, the Lord be with you. And they answered, the Lord bless you. Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, whose young woman is this?

And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, she is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.

[1 : 09] So she came and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest. Then Boaz said to Ruth, now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one.

But keep close to my young women. Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn.

Then she fell on her face, bowing 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.

But Boaz answered her, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me. And how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before.

The Lord repay you for what you have done and a full reward be given to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

[2 : 20] Then she said, I have found favor in your eyes, my Lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants. And at mealtime, Boaz said to her, come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine.

So she sat beside the reapers and he passed to her roasted grain and she ate until she was satisfied and she had some leftover. When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men saying, let her glean even among the sheaves and do not reproach her.

And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean and do not rebuke her. So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned and it was about an eph of barley.

And she took it up and went into the city. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied.

And her mother-in-law said to her, where did you glean today and where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you. And she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, the man's name with whom I work today is Boaz.

[3 : 36] And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, may he be blessed by the Lord whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead. And Naomi also said to her, the man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.

And Ruth the Moabite said, besides, he said to me, you shall keep 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, lest in another field you be assaulted.

So she kept close to the young woman of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvest, and she lived with her mother-in-law. This is the word of the Lord.

You may be seated. A new beginning.

That is the title of this work on this word, which was just read, a new beginning.

[4 : 49] I'm taking off of the last line from last week's text. You can see it there, the very end of verse, chapter 1, verse 23.

And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. I don't know about you, but there's nothing like those rare moments when you awaken to a day where there is in your mind the possibility of a fresh start.

They don't come along very often. Those days that mark the changing of the seasons. There are a few of them that I look forward to every year. One of them, December 21st, is the shortest day of the year.

I don't like the cold. I don't like the dark. And so I celebrate that on that day, forevermore, or at least the next six months, we will be getting more light and more warmth than less.

It is, for me, a day of beginning. I always loved the first day of a new term. Unlike many who excelled in the classroom, I did not.

[5 : 56] My main object was to stay eligible, to have a high enough GPA to be able to compete in athletics. And so the beginning of a new term, the first day of a new course, I was on equal footing with everybody else in the classroom, if only for that day.

It was a fresh start. But new beginnings sometimes always, or at times, fill me with apprehension. I remember the first day in a new place.

I was 18. I had just left home. I'd gone to school. I was in a dorm room with some person I had never met in my life. I'm laying on the bottom bunk.

He is on the top bunk. And I'm hearing him breathe in the middle of the night. And I'm filled with anxiety as I ask myself, who is this person?

And how did I end up here? I remember the first day in a new city. I remember awakening in the middle of the night and walking down what was at that time now my own hallway and feeling like I was a man completely out of sorts, asking myself in the darkness, is this really where I live?

[7 : 15] What is going to unfold here for me? This really can be an exciting thing, a new beginning, or one filled with anxiety.

There are many here today, I am sure, who are longing for, perhaps have been waiting for, a fresh opportunity after a long, tough run.

I've got dear friends in this very room who have lost multiple family members in the last two years, relationships sour, wondering when will I awaken to that last line in chapter one where I realize that now is the beginning of something that might bring new possibilities.

Perhaps you're here. Your health is on the precipice. Can it be a day of new beginnings? Perhaps it's a struggle just to make ends meet, let alone relationships last.

Could this be a day of new beginnings? Is there any hope? Is there some favor on the horizon of your future? Future. Who among us doesn't long for a fresh start?

[8 : 30] The chance to begin again. For Naomi and Ruth, their best hope at a new beginning is now.

Verse one. Let me take a look at how it opens. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. Remember, this story opened with these two women in chapter one.

First, though, with Naomi leaving the land in the midst of a famine. There had been no barley crop that covered the patchwork plots of land outside of Bethlehem on that year.

There had been no wheat field rising like Thanksgiving offerings waving in the wind. The long, hard famine had hit her life hard.

The land was dry. The rains never came. Whatever had been planted in hopes for her own life had yellowed, had withered, and there was nothing left in her hands but weightless chaff leaving with the wind.

[9 : 38] But now, on this day, she is back home and having arrived at the beginning of the barley harvest. As she returns into her hometown, the place from which she left, the place from which she had been embittered and left.

The plants are now full. The grain is waving. The sun casts itself upon it as the clouds go by.

And she wonders, is this a chance for a fresh start? Take a look at the last verse of the story. You know these Old Testament narratives are filled with story lines.

They start, as it were, at the beginning of the barley harvest. But look at the very end. Ruth is going to be told to keep close to the young women of Boaz, verse 23, gleaning until the end of the barley and the wheat harvest.

And she's living with her mother-in-law. We've moved from the beginning of the barley harvest when we open the story with the possibility of something new. But by the time it closes, not only has the barley harvest concluded, but the wheat harvest has concluded as well.

[10:51] And it looks to be that these two women now have friendships that are beyond their own household. They have food as a resource for themselves. They have a home in which they're living.

And if you don't know, the wheat and the barley harvest in this part of the world would have taken all of about 90 days at the most. Something happens in chapter 2 that takes these two at a new beginning, and they actually see the fortunes of their life change.

I'm sure then the question that we ought to be expecting the story to answer is how or what. What took place that brought favor upon their lives?

I'm sure you're really wondering, and can it happen for me? Let me signpost the answer that the chapter provides through a story through three words.

Seeking, finding, flourishing. Seeking, verses 1 through 7. That's the first thing we observe in the story of Naomi and Ruth.

[12:08] Ruth gets out of the house, and she went looking for it. Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

We'll return to that in a minute. But verse 2, And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of the grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor. And she said to her, Go, my daughter.

So she set out and went and gleaned. It's as though she had prayed on that morning, Lord, carve something out for me in a place that is not my home.

You know, there's a story of a missionary who, I don't even recall where, but there was a line in it that she took this faith moment.

And she writes about it later and says, You know, you can't expect a miracle if you don't put yourself in the way of one that might come along. That's what Ruth is doing.

[13:11] She had already affixed herself to Naomi's God, but she rose in the morning, walked across the threshold of that house, into a city that was not her home, through the gate into the outer fields.

And she put herself in the place of a miracle that might come along. She's seeking to find favor, which would require, of course, that there would be a place where favor could be found, and there would be a person, worthy, a worthy person who would grant favor.

As for the place, you need to know just a little bit about Bethlehem, just outside of Bethlehem, which, interestingly, by the way, is called the City of Bread, which had been under a famine, but now there's harvest again.

So she leaves the City of Bread and walks out into this patchwork of fields. From one scholar, Like fields elsewhere in the ancient Near East, these were carefully apportioned sections of a large tract of land.

One individual might own several pieces which need not be adjacent. To take advantage of all the available land, no visible fences or boundaries were used. Rather, each field was identified by the name of its owner.

[14:28] Such a patchwork of property, of course, left to chance the selection of the owner in whose field she would work. And so she does.

She moves. And even beforehand, the narrator has already signposted for you that she's going to get success. It's already introduced you in verse 1 to a man named Boaz who's worthy.

So the reader is quietly anticipating that as this woman begins to seek favor in a new place, that there is someone out there and she finds herself actually in his very place.

She chose his field. That's what the text says. I love it. I love what the story writer does here. It might be my most favorite line in this chapter. The end of verse 3.

And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech. And she happened to come. Think of it.

[15 : 28] It's almost as if, as luck would have it, as if by chance. But all the while, the reader knows that God stands behind the happenstances of our lives if we have trusted him to help us.

And the writer beautifully puts that on display. God, not even mentioned at this point in the text, is honoring this woman as she takes that fearful walk, introduces herself to a laborer in the field, is granted access to its gleanings, and she sets out, probably without any conversation with the others around, lest she disturb the social fabric of what was already in play.

God is behind the scenes when new beginnings arrive. But what she did was she got to the right field. Let me put it to you this way.

If you're seeking the favor of God, you've got to find the right field. You know, in 1 Corinthians 3, Paul picks up on the field and applies it to a metaphor to speak of the church.

The church is God's field. The local church is to be a place where people have a shot at a new beginning, where growth can take place.

[17 : 07] And so you may have just stumbled in here today. You may have just happened upon this place. But I rise to tell you that it's perhaps a day for a fresh start.

This place, among this people. But she's here seeking. I love the middle of that little opening section on her seeking.

It says that Boaz arrives himself from the city, and look at what he proclaims in the middle of it all, somewhere around verse 4 or so. So, the Lord be with you.

Here's the owner of the field entering into his own land in which someone that he does not know is gleaning the edges, and his response is, the Lord be with you.

Now, what are you doing here? What do you need from me? What do you want? The Lord be with you. He proclaims in all of his worthiness her welcome.

[18 : 12] Welcome. It's a beautiful picture of God. In fact, in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul will pick up on these very phrases.

And where she is looking, or he is pronouncing, that Yahweh would be with them, Paul, by that time in the ministry of the whole Bible story, will say, may the Lord be with you.

That is, may Jesus be with you. May Jesus be with you in all things, at all times, and may he be with everyone. That Jesus becomes this one worthy that is capable of redeeming your life and providing a new beginning.

It's a beautiful thought. The church is to be the place in which the peace of Christ can come to you. You know, in old-fashioned churches, well, I'm not going to say old-fashioned, in high liturgical churches, there's a moment in the service where we turn you loose to go talk to everybody and some of you love it and some of you hate it.

I can tell you the ones who hate it. They're the ones who say, well, if I had any kind of religious background at all, we would turn to someone, but we would just say, the peace of Christ be with you and also with you, and we can turn around, not talk to anyone and sit down and the service keeps moving.

[19 : 36] The peace of Christ be with you. But what happens in that little moment in this service is meant to convey more than simply, I need to catch up with someone.

It's meant to convey a welcome of relationship in which you extend yourself to others who may have happenstanced their way in and say, the Lord be with you today.

It's great to have you here. I hope something happens for us. It's a beautiful thing to see what's happening here.

And all, notice, in a single morning, these little temporal markers are fascinating to me. Look there at the end of verse 7. And she continued from the early morning until now.

Or you're going to get later in verse 14. And at mealtime, you've seen the day move forward. Or you're actually going to get even down in verse 17 to the end.

[20 : 36] She's there until evening. The course of the first day of the new season of life, the first day of the new semester, there's a morning and a midday and an evening.

And it all is meant to convey that something wonderful was going to happen for her. That God could reverse in a day what she had been longing for, perhaps, for years.

The first desperate morning when you or I get up and out of bed and leave our home in hopes that something might be new.

Ruth took the risk. So should I. So should you. The seeking of verses 1 to 7 gives way to the finding in verses 8 to 13.

Look at her words there in verse 10. Then she fell on her face bowing to the ground and said to him, why have I found favor in your eyes? You remember verse 2.

[21 : 53] She had gone out to find favor but now she's saying I found it. Why have I found favor? Or look at verse 13. Then she said I have found favor. Verses 8 to 13 move from seeking God's favor to finding favor.

And notice two observations about her sense of I found something today that I can build on. First, she can't believe it because she's a foreigner. Notice verse 11.

How have I found favor? You took notice of me since I am a foreigner. That's the astounding thing to her. I'm not even from this country.

But I entered into your field, into your home, and was met with welcome. Or look at the way it's there in verse 13. She finds favor, though I am not one of your servants, the text says.

In other words, she's saying even though I'm a foreigner, that's big enough, but I'm also, I'm not even of your family. I have no relationship to you at all.

[22 : 56] You do not know me. I do not know you, and yet, though a foreigner, not out of your family, I have found favor, and her mind is exploding with color and sound and taste that's amazed at what God did for her before noontime.

the favor in those verses comes in two forms, provision and protection.

Verses eight and nine, you see the provision. Do not go glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Let your eyes be on the field that they're reaping and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you?

And when you're thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn. Provision and protection. The church, when it operates well, is a place where the needs of people are provided for and where they're protected from the outside forces that will do them harm.

it's interesting to know that it isn't just the modern urban landscape of large cities in which sexual abuse took place. It happened all the way back there in an agrarian context in a field where no one would probably know or be found out or be brought to justice.

[24 : 35] but the protection is given. The people in the place provide for her. That's what favor looks like.

And notice it's all on the basis, according to Boaz, of Ruth's honorable actions and her faith in God as she sought God for her refuge. because he answers and says, you know, why do I do this?

Well, because of all that you've done for your mother-in-law since the death of her husband, verse 11, it's all been told me. I heard a word about you before I ever met you. And the Lord will repay you for what you've done and give you a full reward.

He's honoring her tender desire to live under the wings, it says, the wings of God, which Jesus then comes to his own place, much later in Jerusalem and he says, oh, how I longed for the day when I would have been able to gather you under my wings and provide for you the protection and the provision that I can give.

But of course, that's further along in the Bible story, but here it is, he's honoring her for all of that risk that she took when she had no one and no place to turn to.

[25 : 53] You know, this week I met someone in our church building. I don't know if they're here today or not. They've been in the country three weeks. They don't speak English.

Well, we got a couple sentences out. Those around me fortunately knew how to get further. go to the church. And I thought of this text because I was in it. I thought, could it be that this place might actually be beneficial to someone who's been here such a short time?

Oh, Lord, may they meet someone worthy who can walk with them. I met another individual in the church building this week. they'd come for a little coffee thing that students were doing.

I said, did you ever come to church on Sunday? He goes, no, I've never been yet. And I thought, well, that's interesting. Could it just be that happenstance that somebody said, hey, do you want to go grab a cup of coffee? Could it be that in the coming days, this is the fall term, this is the corner of the market, this is the turn of the season in which many people from our city are provided what's needed here for a fresh beginning.

Edith Schaefer writes, and this is one of my most enjoyable paragraphs from her, quote, the thing about real life is that important events don't announce themselves, trumpets don't blow, drums don't beat to let you know you're about to meet the most important person you ever met or read the most important thing you're ever going to read or have the most important conversation you're ever going

to have or spend the most important week you're ever going to spend usually something that is going to change your whole life is a memory before you can stop and be impressed about it.

[27 : 45] You don't usually have a chance to get excited about that sort of thing ahead of time. That's true. May it be happening even this morning for you.

Well, all this by lunchtime, but she moves from seeking and finding to flourishing. Flourishing. She is flourishing here by the end. But before I get there, I've overlooked one thing I'd like to say. The picture of her finding rest is put forward with simplicity and beauty.

Look at verse 14. And at mealtime, Boaz said to her, come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine. So she sat beside the reapers and he pasted her roasted grain and she ate until she was satisfied.

Wow, that's just a great picture to me. That's what a new beginning looks like at meal, at meal, in conversation, at rest, in community, not caught in isolation.

[29 : 04] In fact, it's the same thing that later Jesus will provide his own disciples when they needed a new beginning after their life's failures. After the resurrection, he comes and he's on the shore and they see him from a distance and he goes, why don't you come have breakfast?

Then in John 21 he says, why don't you come and dine with me? That's what the gospel ought to be doing in our midst, this great invitation.

So she's found something and by verses 14 to 23 she is flourishing. By now you're moving to the evening. By 17 to 23 she's moving to a woman who's now flourishing.

Three elements in that part of the text I want you to see. It's not just that she's getting food right now, but she's even got some left over. Look at verse 14.

The writer is very clear here. She ate until she was satisfied and she had some left over. Same thing later in verse 18. She brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied.

[30 : 11] There's this sense that God's people who are in God's place ministering rightly to God's others who walk in not only meet their need, but meet their need in a sense with something left over.

It reminds me of Jesus when he does the 5,000 and they've got 12 baskets left over. It wasn't just that he gave you a meal. It's that, well, he gave you more than you thought you even needed or could eat.

Feed me till I want no more. See, that's what the gospel does. It's this picture of bounty. But not only just food with some left over, not only just some left over, but look, it's in abundance.

How much did she take home that night? Verse 17, about an ephah of barley. Now, I asked someone because I don't know what that is.

You know, what is this and how do you compare it to gallons or pints or whatever? I said, well, that's about five gallons. So I could picture a five-gallon paint can, a five-gallon thing.

[31 : 18] She walked home that night with five gallons of barley. I said to my friend, how much does that feed someone? He started doing the thing because he knows math and I don't. And he helped me.

And he said, gosh, that could actually be about 50 small loaves of bread. I thought, my gosh, Boaz didn't just give this lady lunch. By the time she went home, he had microfinanced her into a new business.

I mean, she could probably open the next day of the bakery in Bethlehem and begin to be self-supporting and self-sustaining. In other words, what he's saying is it wasn't just a little bit left over.

There's abundance in store for her. Not only food in abundance, though, but the forming of new friendships in community.

Verses 22 and 23, Naomi said to Ruth, it's good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted. So she kept close to the young women of Boaz.

[32 : 15] See, this is what happens. You go out into this city as an individual, but by the end of the chapter, you feel like you've been welcomed into a family. It reminds me, these young women remind me of the little refrain in the book of the Song of Songs that celebrates the love between a man and a woman, but actually there's this little chorus of others.

It's called others, and others continue to celebrate what God is doing. And that's what these young women are. Now she actually has friends. Eventually she's going to know names. After names,

she's going to be in someone else's living room.

When she's in someone else's living room, all that she had longed for that day when she said, I'm going to take this beginning of a barley harvest, and I'm going to get out, and I'm going to risk it. I'm going to see if I can have a fresh start. heart, and it ends up in community. It's almost as if Naomi has already begun to see things here too.

It all came as a result of one person, and her mother-in-law said to her, verse 19, where in the world did you glean today?

[33 : 26] And blessed be whoever it was that 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 work today is Boaz.

And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, may he be blessed by the Lord, whose loving kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead. By the dead, I think she was referring to her own husband, Elimelech.

And then she says, the man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers. Now you may not know what significance that has yet. You have to come back next week, but the redeemer was a blood relative who had the option to purchase the redemption and the welfare of those who were around.

So let me finish. There are men and women and even children here today who are longing for a line in their life that would say, I've arrived at the beginning of a barley harvest.

I want a new start. I need a new beginning. I don't know how I go on. I would pray that this fall season would for many be the time that would change the course of lives, that there would be the happy happenstances of God.

[35 : 02] These two women found favor. They found a new beginning. Ironically, Naomi found it in the place that she had grown up in all along. Although she left for many years and bittered, she found it in the place of her own birth.

Where, differently for Ruth, she found it by having set out from all that she had known and entered into something new. Yet they both found it. And it was the result of one man's generosity who was a redeemer.

And what about you? Is there hope for you? Can favor yet be found on the horizon of your future? Do you want to make a fresh start?

Are you longing, some of you dying, for a chance to begin anew? Where to begin? Where do I go? If you're seeking God's favor, find your way into the right field.

I pray this church would be that for you. If you need God's favor, you'll have to meet the right person. And I would pray that every person here would allow you to hear about Jesus, who is our redeemer.

[36 : 13] We will be happy to tell you that the worthy one also did it. for me. Our Heavenly Father, thus far, God's word, minister to many today who need you to make yourself manifest to them.

In all kindness, we ask in Jesus' name, amen. I want to