The Book of Ruth

Provision

Ruth 2:14-23

This book has been called *The Gospel of Ruth* because of God's love for His people so evidently revealed and pointing forward to Jesus Christ, our kinsman-redeemer. Saints in the Old Testament were saved by grace through faith alone just as we are now, and in this chapter we see how to trust the Lord for His provision and rich hospitality.

Summary of the Text

Boaz blesses Ruth for coming under the wings of the Lord for refuge, and she gratefully acknowledges his kindness, treating her like a maidservant even though she isn't (v. 13). A new scene begins in verse 14 not in the field but at the table. Boaz invites Ruth to come eat of *the* bread and *the* wine (cf. Num. 6:3), food and drink prepared for his workers (v. 14). She sits beside the reapers, and he hands her roasted grain, a generous portion so that she has plenty leftover which she keeps. She then gets up to go back to gleaning, and Boaz commands his young men to let her glean among the sheaves, the stalks they've already cut, and not reproach her (v. 15). They're to intentionally let grain fall and not rebuke her, removing any physical or emotional barrier to her prosperity (v. 16). She works until evening and comes away with an ephah of barley, likely enough food for a couple weeks, weighing 30 to 50 pounds (v. 17). She gathers it and goes to the city, shows it to Naomi, and shares the leftover from what Boaz had given her (v. 18). Naomi asks where she got it, and blesses the one who took notice of her, and Ruth answers that she worked with a man called Boaz (v. 19). Naomi then blesses Yahweh who has not forsaken His *chesed*, His covenant kindness to the living and the dead; Boaz is a close relative, a kinsman-redeemer (v. 20). Ruth the Moabitess reports that he told her stay near his young men until they've finished the harvest, and Naomi instructs her to be with his young women so she isn't hindered by others in any other field (vv. 21-22). She does this and works through the wheat harvest, living with Naomi her mother-in-law (v. 23).

Fellowship at the Table

This new scene centers on a table as Ruth comes under the shelter of the Lord's wings. She is given bread and what is translated "vinegar", a sour wine used to moisten what would otherwise be dry bread. Remember the book of Ruth explains how a Gentile woman is called to be part of Israel and becomes an ancestress of king David, how the Lord brought His people out of chaos and idolatry to establish a kingdom. Ruth is becoming a matriarch in Israel, a new Sarah who puts away her fear and trusts in God's covenant kindness to provide for her. Boaz bringing her bread and wine is like Melchizedek king of Salem bringing bread and wine to Abraham (Gen. 14:18-20). If Ruth concludes at this point in her life that this meal means she'll marry Boaz and be an ancestress of the messiah, she would be foolish and presumptuous. But the author tells the story the way the Lord did with one provision leading to another so we can see God's faithfulness at work in every scene. Boaz has treated Ruth like a maidservant, working in his field. Now he invites her closer, to his table to receive directly from his hand, almost like she is part of his household. The word for "passed" in verse 14 occurs only here in the Old Testament and originally meant "to seize with the hand." We say "hand over" or "hand" something in a similar way. It stands out that he took this roasted grain, a staple in Israel, and gave it to her so that she would be satisfied. Boaz is the kind of great man who eats with his people, including the ones he hires, and welcomes the stranger (Lev. 19:34). He is a generous provider and particularly to Ruth. The Lord provides for us this way. He welcomes each of us to His table and specifically blesses us with bread and wine. We shouldn't miss this simply because He does it for others and through others. There are a lot of people at Boaz's table (cf. Lk. 13:29).

The Book of Ruth

Provision

Ruth 2:14–23

Satisfaction & Abundance

The quantity of food given at the table and the harvest stands out. Ruth has leftovers and when she goes into the fields, Boaz tells his men to let her take from among the sheaves, to let grain from the bundles purposely fall for her and not to shame or correct her (vv. 15-16). He needs to say this because the point of leaving behind corners of fields to be gleaned was so that the poor could come work. It was not permission to come steal from the labor of others. Once again Ruth shows her mind to work. She eats at Boaz's table until satisfied, but not until she passes out. She saves some for later, goes to work until evening, and then beats out what she gleaned, about an ephah of barley (v. 17). Then she hauls it back to Naomi and shares with her what was left over from Boaz's table (vv. 17-18). "The lazy man does not roast what he took in hunting," Solomon says, "but diligence is man's precious possession" (Prov. 12:27). Ruth has already worked hard and could take it easy and still survive, but she's not lazy. She finishes the job late—it's harvest after all. She's not a farmer, but she acts like one because she has a mind to work. Her faith brought her to Israel, her humility to Boaz's house, and now her diligence to finish the job. Cotton Mather said, "Faithfulness begat prosperity and the daughter devoured the mother" (cf. Deut. 8:10-14). But prosperity doesn't have to devour. This example in Ruth is just a day, or really a season, of hard work. She continues until the end of the barley and wheat harvests (v. 23), about two months. Her diligence endures and God blesses her abundantly. This is how to walk in God's providence and understand the way He made the world to function. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide, and I will fill it", He says (Ps. 81:10). In other words, slavery and destitution are not in the works for His faithful people. He made the earth to flourish under our blessed dominion. Just regarding farmland productivity, we feed eight billion people in the world with less acreage every year. According to research at Rockefeller University, we're on pace to return farmland equal to the size of India back to nature by 2050. This side of the resurrection we will face hardship but God provides abundantly. The Lord blesses Ruth with abundance and she does not become lazy or entitled.

Enduring Covenant Kindness

Naomi softened a little when she said to Ruth, "Go, my daughter" (2:2). Now she melts, blessing "the one who took notice of you" (v. 19). Who is that one? Twice she asks where Ruth has worked, but Ruth answers with whom she has worked: "The man's name…is Boaz" (v. 19). Whereas before Naomi said "the Almighty" dealt bitterly, deprived, testified against, and afflicted her, now she names and bless Yahweh (v. 20). What changed? Outwardly, a man's kindness and 50 pounds of grain. Inwardly, Naomi can see God "has not forsaken His *chesed* to the living or the dead" (v. 20). Boaz is a *goel*, a kinsman-redeemer who may act further on their behalf. A kinsman-redeemer would help with hereditary property (Lev. 25:25-30), restore freedom by buying back those sold into slavery (Lev. 27: 47–55), avenge the murder of relatives (Num. 35:12, 19–27), pursue restitution on behalf of a deceased victim of a crime (Num. 5:8), and seek justice for relatives (Job 19:25, Ps. 119:154). The practice of levirate marriage occurred when a married man died without a son and his brother could marry his widow and raise a son to preserve his line, a family in Israel that might give birth one day to the messiah. Naomi stops pitying herself and cares for Ruth, for her life and future, and in doing so finds hope for her own. God's *chesed* is more than simple kindness. It's love, mercy, grace, sacrifice, goodness, loyalty, benevolence, and rescue all summarized as covenant faithfulness. God never abandoned them but was there in the famine in Bethlehem and now at the end of a long harvest. He is Boaz, our kinsman-redeemer, Jesus Christ, who bought us out of slavery with His own blood, claims us as His inheritance, and gives us Himself as our own.