

## Ruth 2:1-3

The first chapter of Ruth sets the stage for events that will take place in the lives of Naomi and Ruth. We were given a clear picture of Ruth's respect for Naomi's advice. As we continue, Ruth's growth in her trust in the God of Israel and the miraculous way God uses unlikely circumstances for His glory, will be developed. Also, a third character, Boaz will enter into this story of trust and redemption.

Recall, Naomi had returned at the beginning of barley harvest. Just in this small detail alone, God's perfect timing is evident. Consider for a moment His perfect timing in your life for circumstances that have taken place. Perhaps in the moment we are a bit surprised and even dismayed at what befalls us, yet God's hand is always in the events of His children's lives. Often without our knowledge, He is preparing us for what is to come – because He loves us and cares for us.

For example, in the eighties I relocated to the Antelope Valley. I had grown up and lived in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains for most of my life so the high desert was not exactly appealing. However, the housing market was affordable and my husband insisted we move in order to purchase a more sizeable home. So I excitedly got on board and we relocated our family – including our three children, ages 9 months, almost three years and seven years old – to a large home on the east side of Lancaster. We knew no one in the area and had left friends and family. Many, many years later I can look back and marvel to see God's hand in every decision, including the exact house and neighborhood, all the while I had not yet accepted Him as Lord and Savior. There are no words to describe God's care for His children.

It is now time to meet Boaz.

**Ru 2:1 Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.**

**What is a kinsman?** The literal translation is simply an acquaintance. However, there is an additional word attached to kinsman, the word <yada'> which seems to imply that Naomi had knowledge of this person beforehand. The NKJV describes Boaz as a relative and in fact we read that Boaz is from Elimelech's family. Elimelech had apparently been well-known in the town and seemingly of some wealth before his move to Moab. We know his family had not been entirely forgotten because a scene is recounted for us in Chapter One of people in the town recognizing Naomi when she returned after Elimelech's death and the death of her two sons.

The word kinsman used in this section of scripture means that Boaz was a relative, and therefore found himself in the place of a 'kinsman redeemer'. This is important information because there were obligations

attached to the male relatives of a family in the case of death or poverty. Culture at that time was different than what we might experience today. According to Easton's Bible Dictionary, a kinsman was the nearest male blood relative and could be called upon to restore or save a family name as well as family property.

It would be neglectful if we didn't take a moment to pause here and consider the incredible role Jesus Christ willingly took as our Redeemer. He is the perfect example of restoration. However, Jesus was not under the arm of culture or law in fulfilling His redemption for mankind. Instead, He chose, out of obedience and love for the Father, to embrace the position of Redeemer. Read the following scriptures that title God as our Redeemer. Make note of His uniqueness – the only one who has the power to deliver mankind from sin; none other compares to Him; He alone is creator of all things.

Isaiah 44:6 "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me.

Isaiah 44:24 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, "I, the LORD, am the maker of all things, Stretching out the heavens by Myself, and spreading out the earth all alone,

Continuing in Ruth 2:1, we learn that Boaz was also a man of great wealth. The wealth referred to is both in resources and virtue. In one commentary, it was suggested that Boaz may have been a judge in the land. In any case, we can conclude that Boaz was a man of authority and held a place of honor in Bethlehem. This information about Boaz will be necessary to recall as we move forward in this chapter.

In Ruth 2:2, we read that Ruth understands the immediate need to supply food for herself and Naomi. She continues to seriously consider her role in providing and caring for her mother-in-law as she is learning about the Jewish culture and their God, whom she has acknowledged as her God.

Ruth 2:2 And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."

It was expected that Ruth would walk to a field and gather grain that had been left on the ground after harvesting. This was in accordance with Jewish law to provide for the widows and the poor. As we read along in this book, we will see Naomi continuing to instruct Ruth in Jewish law and custom. Recall that Ruth was a Moabitess, unfamiliar with the God she chose to follow, apart from what she saw in her mother-in-law's example. Ruth was a model student of asking questions, listening, and applying what she was taught. Hover over this last sentence for a moment. **How might your day**

change if you were to pay special attention and **Ask – Listen – and Apply** the correct information and knowledge?

Consider for a moment, the personal application of both Naomi's example and Ruth's response. Does your life – in words and actions – draw others to a desire to know more about God? Do you place yourself in the classroom of learning from the good examples around you? Do you then seek to hear truth, increase your understanding and make changes as God reveals areas that need attention? Are you coming to Him on your terms or His?

According to law, Ruth goes to the fields where harvest has begun and hopes to gain favor from its owner and glean the leftover grain. **Leviticus 19:9-10** 'Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. 'Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God.

Ruth readily places herself amongst the poor in order to provide. This willingness speaks of a humble heart. It is possible when Ruth married into the family of Elimelech that she gained a respectable stature as she was now associated with a family who had been well-known and established in Bethlehem. Life was very different now and it seems Ruth is able to embrace her new role with a determination to do whatever was necessary. We don't see her wasting time bemoaning the fact that things have changed. She steps up to the task at hand and moves forward.

The humility to do whatever is necessary to provide is an example for each of us to follow. Sometimes, we can mentally place ourselves above certain tasks. Either we feel we are too qualified or the work is unpleasant and certainly not meant for us to do. **Can you relate?** Simple things, such as picking up someone else's mess or following through with a chore meant for another, are sometimes challenging in our prideful minds. Lest you quickly relate that you would never begrudge serving in any way, stop and think carefully for a moment. **Have you wiped off a kitchen counter thinking it should have been done by the previous user? Does anyone here have a husband who leaves things lying around or out of place? How do you respond? When you extend your help, are their limitations to what you are willing to do? When you say you are available, do you hope no one takes you up on your offer?**

We are blessed to have many meaningful relationships among the college/career age group. There is a common and persistent struggle that often presents itself as these young adults finish their education or training and are ready to seek full-time employment. It is more typical than not for these intelligent and talented individuals to be offered a position that, in their

mind, does not measure up to their knowledge or degree. The response we see falls in two categories. Either, any position at all is welcomed and appreciated with a willingness to start anywhere, or these young adults are offended to accept something for which they feel over-qualified. Unfortunately, we have witnessed the choice to remain unemployed too often. The Bible is clear, we are to work. The title or position or salary is not the key. The willingness to work to provide is the goal. Family Bible Notes puts it this way, "True piety will lead those who have it to be industrious, and to engage in any honest, useful employment to which they may in the providence of God be called".

Back to our example in Ruth. She walked to the fields that were being harvested in the hopes that someone would allow her to gather the leftover grain. Boaz is mentioned in the preceding verse, however Ruth at this point does not know him and does not know the owner of the fields she is seeking to gather. We have been given information in order to clearly see God's hand at work in the lives of Naomi and Ruth. Although the law provided for the poor to glean, perhaps there were some owners who prevented this practice. Recall also, that Ruth was a stranger in the land. She was from Moab and recognizably different in her dress and likely stood out in her features also. *Would she be accepted to take part in the provision of Jewish law for its poor?*

Ruth is quite fearless to move forward, hoping to gain the favor of a landowner, knowing she is an obvious foreigner. John Wesley's Notes on the Old and New Testaments says, "Nor was she ashamed to confess her poverty, nor would she eat the bread of idleness". She moves forward with Naomi's blessing. She walks down a dusty road pursuing a field to glean. She is looking for someone to show her favor or grace as the NAS translation says. Again, what we do see is a humble heart seeking that which is undeserved. *Do we thankfully acknowledge the opportunities God places before us? Do we move forward in them, trusting in Him? Do we recognize how undeserving we are of the numerous blessings God has afforded His children?*

An additional observance that comes to mind is the fact that Ruth sought guidance from Naomi, she sought wise counsel and waited for her answer before she forged ahead. This reeks of patience I don't always display! I am personally reminded of the importance to ask questions, especially of those things I am not as familiar with. Often, a piece of information I may not have thought of is revealed. At the very best, I am assured of the direction I am to go when it seems clear I should move forward. Naomi's go-ahead must have given Ruth confidence as she was about to embark in a practice which was unfamiliar to her.

Ruth 2:3 So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

God's hand of care is written all over this! Consider how blessed we are to have this encouragement of God working in our life. Even in dire circumstances which are unforeseen, God has an incredible plan.

I mentioned earlier how it came about that I moved to this valley. I didn't mention that three weeks later, with absolutely no foresight on my part, my husband left myself and our three young children. This move in his mind had been premeditated. I also didn't mention that the house we had moved into was directly across the street from a young family who happened to attend Valley Bible Church and host one of the two weekly growth groups at their home. Of course, she invited me to attend the Bible study and thirty plus years later, here I am.

Our text says Ruth happened upon a field belonging to Boaz. This word 'happened' means something met with an accident or fortune, something befallen or by chance. **Was this an accident or providence?** Family Bible Notes makes this comment, "With a fatherly kindness God watches over and directs the concerns of the poorest, most obscure, and defenseless of his people, and directs them in such a manner as to promote their highest good". Matthew Poole's Commentary says, "It was indeed a chance in reference to second causes, but ordered and designed by God's providence". God uses the circumstances in our lives to bring glory to Himself.

If you are God's child, you will be able to see His hand directing your life in all areas. Look back at seemingly unimportant events or decisions and praise God for how He has turned them for your blessing. Before we leave verse three of this chapter, don't miss the example of hard work and trust given to us from Ruth's actions. She did find a field where workers were harvesting and she did gather what was left on the ground. This was a strange, new practice for her and I think we can assume it may have felt a bit uncomfortable. Physically, this was hard work. Mentally, she must have been wondering if she was following protocol for this exercise or if she would be welcomed or reprimanded. But in faith she moved ahead and willingly placed herself at the mercy of those in charge in order to provide food for Naomi and herself. And she happened upon a field belonging to Boaz.

Some of us have a disease that labels us as control freaks. Lest you think you have not succumbed to this illness, consider how you react when things don't happen exactly the way you think they should! Granted, this disease shows itself much stronger in some individuals. It is recognized early, even in childhood. Next time you have an opportunity to be in a room with several children take the time to watch how they play. The need to line

everything up according to size or color or shape, or the drive to have everything in its place can be a blessing and a curse all at the same time! Why am I bringing this up? I wonder how often I misplace my responsibility. God is the one in complete control of all things and all individuals. My purpose needs to be in concentrating on how I respond to what God wants me to do. I am not able to hold everything together, that's God's job. I am not capable of changing people, God will take care of others. I am also unable to dictate most circumstances. God does not need us for the details! We have plenty to take care of without ordering the lives of others. This puts greater responsibility on myself for those things I am able to influence.

Think for a moment. **What are the things you can influence for good? How about looking to your example that others see? Do you notice how your attitude can readily affect the attitude of others?** In Ruth, we have an example of her faithfulness to do what God would have her do, paying attention to her own responsibilities. And God, in His providence, directs the circumstances and the individuals, to go according to His plan. Ruth happened to find herself in a field belonging to Boaz because it is precisely what God ordained.

Right now, if you are truly desiring and taking action to please God while remaining obedient to His truth and direction, you are where you belong. He has set the motion for your life to please Him in all circumstances.

Your responsibility is to

- be faithful to His call,
- be diligent to work at whatever task He places before you, and
- trust in His perfect direction and timing.