

Ruth: Trusting God in the Unknown

Ruth 2: The Harvest of Hope

→ *Survey: Let's understand the background and context of the passage.*

The Book of Ruth happens during the period of the Judges, a time marked by chaos, moral decay, and a lack of godly leadership. This was a time where 'Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.' The first chapter of this story sure reads like a tragedy. An Israelite man named Elimelek, his wife Naomi, and their two sons had left Israel during a time of famine, taking shelter in the land of Moab, but Elimelek died. The sons both married Moabite women, but then both sons died too, leaving their mother and wives behind to live as widows in a world that was unkind to unmarried women. When the famine ended in Israel, Naomi decided to return home, but insisted her daughters-in-law stay behind in their native land to marry again and have a family. However Ruth, Naomi's daughter-in-law, refuses to leave Naomi's side and pledges that she will never leave her. This first chapter ends as the women arrive in the town of Bethlehem, just in time for the beginning of the barley harvest.

As we continue this story, we will encounter the practice of *gleaning*. This was part of the Law that God had given to his people. *Read Leviticus 19:9-10.* This was one of the systems God had built into the lifestyle of his people to care for the most vulnerable among them, who were often widows, orphans, and foreigners. Another practice for us to know about is a guardian-redeemer (or kinsman-redeemer). *Read Leviticus 25:25-28.* Naomi's family always intended to go back to Bethlehem when they first left, but after returning poor and without her husband and sons, she was unable to buy back and redeem her land.

A guardian-redeemer had to be able and willing to pay the price of the debt owed. Though we will meet a hopeful redeemer in this story, consider how this story begins to point us to Jesus - the ultimate redeemer. Jesus paid the price of our sin - the debt we owed - and redeems us back to God. This is the good news for all who turn to Jesus and follow him! Let's explore more as we continue the story of Ruth.

Read: Ruth 2 (NIV)

→ *Observe: Let's take a close look at what the text is saying.*

1. *A new character appears!* Who is this person & what do we know about them (v. 1)?
2. What plan does Ruth come up with (v. 2-3)? Whose field did she end up in?
3. *Split into groups.* What do we notice about Boaz's character (v. 4-9)? What stands out?
4. What instructions does Boaz give Ruth (v. 8-9)? How does Ruth respond to this (v. 10)?
 - What reason does Boaz give for his kindness (v. 11-12)?
5. What do you notice about how Boaz treats Ruth during mealtime (v. 14-16)?
 - *(slight interpretation):* Did she deserve this? Why or why not?
6. What did Ruth do after mealtime (v. 17)?
7. How would you summarize Naomi & Ruth's conversation (v. 19-23)?
 - What is Naomi's reaction to what Ruth brings home (v. 19)? How does this contrast to Naomi's feelings at the end of chapter 1?
 - What other difference(s) do you notice between the end of these two chapters?

→ *Interpret: Let's seek to understand the meaning of this text in its original context.*

1. The practice of gleaning was part of God's commands to Israel. What does this tell us about God's heart and His priorities?
2. Let's look closely at verse 3. How do we see God at work in this story? Where else do we see God's provision and faithfulness in this passage?
3. Why is it surprising to Ruth that Boaz is so kind to her (v. 10)? Why is it surprising to us?
4. *Let's split up into groups.* What more do we learn about Ruth's character in this chapter? Boaz's? God's?
5. What is the significance of the fact that Boaz is a relative of Naomi's late husband, Elimelek (v. 20)? Why is a redeemer necessary?
 - In what ways, if at all, does this story point us to Jesus?

→ *Apply: Let's explore where the text intersects with our lives and our world.*

1. It's likely you don't own a field, but how might you practice a variation of gleaning - using what you have, material or not, to care for those who are most vulnerable and in need? What could that look like for you, or for us as the Harbor, at SRU?
2. Ruth took initiative and worked diligently in the fields where God provided for both her and Naomi. What lessons can you draw from Ruth's example of faithfulness? What does this story teach you about God's provision?
 - How can you follow Ruth's example of faithful behaviors while still trusting God's timing in your own life? Are there specific places that this relates to right now?