

## Ruth 2:1-23: Hope for a Redeemer

Good morning everyone. Please turn with me in your bibles to Ruth 2.

Thanks to Sue and Norma for sharing. Love hearing those stories. You have certainly seen the church through many changes, many difficult times over the years. And your faithfulness to the Lord and your commitment to the body at Rock Prairie are an awesome example to all of us. So thanks so much for being willing to share.

This morning we're in Ruth chapter 2, and we're going to do something a little different. We're going to spend the first half of our sermon revisiting our text from last week before moving on. So let's pray and then we'll jump in.

Let's pray.

*Father, we praise you for your goodness. We praise you for your faithfulness. We ask that you would speak to us in this time. Hearing your word preached is not a natural thing, it is completely Spiritual. We are dependent on your Spirit to speak life to us. We praise you for your Word. It is so much deeper, so much richer, than we know. Help us have eyes to see that this morning. Speak through me to our hearts, and make us more like your Son. In Jesus' name, amen.*

This week, we're going to do something a little different and we're going to spend half our time looking back at last week's passage.

The main point of Ruth 2:1-16, which we saw last week, is that the undeserved favor that we have been given in Christ should lead to living lives of unconditional generosity.

We've been blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the gospel. Like Ruth, that should lead us to fall on our faces and worship God, and live generous lives as a result.

That's the main point of this passage.

But as I prepared to preach the end of chapter 2 this week, I kept returning to our passage from last week, because there's a lot more

in there for us. We haven't wrung out the entire washcloth so to speak.

As I thought more on our passage, I realized that there's a ton in there that helps us see how we're supposed to care for the poor. It's particularly important for us right now because the neighbors team is starting to meet and talk about these very issues.

I came up with 4 lessons. Started with 10 but thankfully for you this morning I whittled it down to 4.

### (SLIDE)

So this morning we'll talk about 4 lessons from verses 1-16 on caring for the poor, and then we'll close with verses 17-23 about our hope for a redeemer.

### (SLIDE)

#### 1. It starts with relationship

If you remember from last week, we saw incredible generosity from Boaz in providing for Ruth's physical needs. He recognized her need, and he went above and beyond in providing her food. But it didn't stop there. He also invited her to share a meal with him and his men, and in doing so invited her into relationship.

This is key. Ultimately, when it comes to caring for the poor, it's all about relationship. This is a lot harder, a lot more invasive, than just writing a check.

I have a good friend who is a Pastor in Rock Island, Illinois, which is a notoriously dangerous and difficult area to live in. His church just started a community garden this year. But they did it in a really creative way.

Instead of the church working the garden and giving the food to the neighborhood, he assigned different families in the church to work with specific people in the neighborhood who signed up. And they committed to working in the garden with that family.

### Ruth 2:1-23: Hope for a Redeemer

He told them, “I don’t care if you’re the worst gardener in the world. I don’t care if we don’t grow a single tomato. Your relationship with the family you’re working with far outweighs the importance of how many veggies we grow this year.”

Now, that is a *lot* harder than getting together with your friends to grow a garden. And there’s certainly nothing wrong with that. It’s not a sin to grow food to give away.

But the question is, how can we make the longest term impact? Relationship is messy, but the potential impact is eternal.

When I talked to him about it this week, he said that their goal in helping the poor was to move from transaction to transformation. And that happens through relationship..

This is not necessarily a new concept to us. One thing I love is that, when we do our food pantry once a month, we provide a hot meal as well, to give opportunity for conversation and relationship to form. We have an opportunity for more people from our church to volunteer to go once a month just to hang out and spend time with people. To try to build relationship with those in need to try to fulfill not just their temporary need of food, but their ultimate need which is the gospel.

When Boaz invited Ruth for a meal, he was going beyond just giving her things to provide for her physical needs, he was going beyond just providing for her protection, he was opening the door for relationship.

When we think about caring for those in need, it starts with relationship.

**(SLIDE)**

## 2. Protect the Vulnerable

We also saw last week that Boaz instructed his men that he better not lay a finger on Ruth while she was working. We half joked about how Boaz instituted the first anti-sexual harassment in the workplace policy in history, but the truth is that this was a big deal.

As a single, foreign woman working all alone in the field, Ruth had no guarantee of protection. It’s clear by context clues that going into the fields could have been a dangerous place. Boaz was considerate not only of her provision, but of her protection as well.

In the same way, Christians need to be making sure that they are looking out for the protection of the marginalized in our community and in our world.

That means everyone from the unborn, to single moms, to widows and orphans, to kids in the foster system, to the elderly, and a whole lot more.

As Christians, we are not given the luxury of turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to the needs of others. Obviously, no one can do everything. We can’t solve every problem.

But we can ask the Lord what needs he’s placing in front of us. What people he’s given us relationship with that we can look after in a special way. What resources he’s given us to be able to adopt, or foster a child.

Maybe you have a neighbor who’s a widow, and you can mow her lawn or shovel her snow. Maybe your small group can agree to help out a single mom by taking turns babysitting every once in a while or providing meals.

Or maybe you’re in a place where you can be a voice for the rights of the unborn, who have no voice to speak for themselves. Or to care for a woman who has had an abortion, and regrets it, and you can help her understand how God’s grace applies to her through the gospel.

There are a ton things we can do. But we don’t have the luxury of doing nothing. We, like Boaz, are called to protect those in our community and in our world who are the most vulnerable to being abused and exploited.

**(SLIDE)**

## Ruth 2:1-23: Hope for a Redeemer

### 3. Avoid Paternalism

The neighbors team is starting to read this book “When Helping Hurts.” (HOLD UP BOOK). It’s one of the best books out there on this subject. The premise of the book is that a desire to help isn’t enough. Many well meaning people have, in their attempt to help others, actually done more harm than good.

One of the things the book talks about is the idea of paternalism. Basically it’s a fancy word that means is don’t do things for people that they can and should do for themselves.

Boaz didn’t tell Ruth to stay home and he would drop the grain off at her house each night. He told her to continue to work, and if she did she would be taken care of.

The reason we need to avoid paternalism, is because it can end up doing more harm than good.

We get a lot of benevolence requests at our church from people who need help paying rent, or an electric bill, or something else. The neighbors committee has the unenviable task of discerning who we are called to help financially. One of the determining factors they look at is, “Is this person willing to take full advantage of the opportunities that are already in place for this need to be taken care of?”

Ruth didn’t need a handout, she needed a way too break the cycle of poverty she was in. Now, sometimes people do need a handout. If disaster strikes and someone loses everything they have, they are going to need help. That’s called relief.

And honestly, I think this is where we *excel* as a church. I am proud to be a member at a church where I know that if there’s a need, people are going to rally around that need and make sure it’s taken care of. That is awesome.

But when it comes to poverty alleviation, relief is not appropriate in every case. Because, even with the best of intentions, people can

become dependent on the relief and become unable to work their way out into a long term solution.

We don’t want people to be stuck depending on what is handed to them forever. That’s not healthy for the giver or the receiver. And that’s where we need to avoid paternalism, and not do for people what they can do for themselves.

So as a church, and particularly on the neighbors team, we’re going to be looking at what are appropriate places where we’re called to give temporary relief, and in what ways would our relief actually hurt this person because we’re doing for them something that they could do for themselves.

But we’re also going to err on the side of mercy. This is not easy. We don’t want to be taken advantage of, but we also don’t want to be cold. We don’t want to be guilty of what it says in James 2: **If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?**

So we want to develop compassionate care that works to help people to break out of the cycle of poverty and provide for themselves in a way that is healthy and sustainable. .

That leads us to the fourth point.

### (SLIDE)

### 4. We Need To Point People to the Savior

We need to remember that we’re not called to be anyone’s savior. That’s Jesus’s job.

I think it’s really interesting that Boaz says in verse 12, “A full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

He didn’t say, “I’m so glad you came to my field, so that you can take refuge under *my* wings.” He said that she had taken refuge under the wings of the Lord.

## Ruth 2:1-23: Hope for a Redeemer

A biblical understanding of poverty and poverty relief recognizes that we are not called to save anybody. We're called to point people to Jesus.

Everyone on earth—rich or poor, black or white, from the country or from the city, republican or democrat, everyone on earth is born with the same problem. Separation from God.

We have a sin problem, and it far outweighs any other problem we could face on earth. Our sin has separated us from a holy God, and only the Son of God, fully God and fully man, living a sinless life, dying on the cross and raising again can solve our sin problem.

When we think about caring for the poor as a church, we need to remember that we're not called to save anyone. We're called to point them to a savior. Everything we do needs to point to that.

We could come up with an amazing program that gets people out of debt and working and into homes and if we're not also pointing them to Jesus, it's worthless.

Like everything else, it's all about Christ. We're called to make Christ known from our neighbors to the nations.

Those are four lessons we learn about caring for the poor in verses 1-16. The neighbors team is working hard on figuring out what all this means for our church, and I know they would greatly appreciate your prayer.

### (FINAL SLIDE)

Ok. That's all I'm going to preach on verses 1-16, I promise. Now, let's take a look at verses 17-23 as we close with our hope for a redeemer. Look there with me: Verse 17

**So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.**

So after Ruth's amazing day in the field, she went to the threshing floor to beat out the grain that she collected and it says she collected

an ephah. (AY-fuh) Scholars disagree about exactly how much that is, but it was anywhere between 30 and 50 pounds, which would have been an unbelievable amount for gleaning for one day. Clearly the workers who were told to be generous followed orders.

Verse 18:

**18 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.**

So she shows her how much grain she gathered, and she gives Naomi her doggy bag of food leftover from her lunch, and Naomi is understandably in awe. Verse 19:

**19 And her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked?"**

In Hebrew literature, often times the same idea is stated twice in slightly different words to convey one thought. She asked where Ruth got so much grain, but before Ruth can even answer she breaks out into this spontaneous blessing of whoever it was.

**Blessed be the man who took notice of you."**

It was obvious to Naomi just by seeing how much grain Ruth had amassed, that even though Ruth was a hard worker, someone had to have been involved. Ruth couldn't have possibly done this well if there wasn't someone taking special care of Ruth.

And then this is where it gets good.

**So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, "The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz."**

This guy named Boaz. And listen to Naomi's response. Think about what we've heard Naomi say with her own voice in the story so far.

## Ruth 2:1-23: Hope for a Redeemer

She tells Ruth and Orpah to return to Moab, she's silent when Ruth pledges herself to her, she told her friends to call her "Bitter", she blamed God for being too harsh with her, and when Ruth asked if she could go out and glean, she responded tersely with "Go my daughter."

Now contrast all of that with what she says next:

**20 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!"**

Naomi's heart is starting to change. Why? Because she's seeing evidence of the goodness of God. Of Boaz, she says, "May he be blessed by the Lord." The same Lord who she says brought her back from Moab "empty," she now asks that He would bless Boaz.

And of the Lord she says, "whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead."

That word "kindness," is the Hebrew word *hesed* which we touched on a few weeks ago. It can't be translated with just one English word. Our word kindness doesn't do it justice. It's meaning is a combination of love, covenant faithfulness, mercy, grace, kindness, and loyalty. It means going above and beyond what's expected. It's how Jesus loves us.

And Naomi says God's *hesed*, his "above and beyond" love and faithfulness has not forsaken the living or the dead: he hasn't forgotten her after all.

It's almost as if she's awakened out of her stupor, she's awakened out of her "Eeyore" state of, "Don't mind me, don't bother with me, I'm just the one who God forgot." God has awakened her out of that and reminded her of his amazing *hesed*, his incredible kindness that goes above and beyond what we could imagine.

Why? Why did the fact that this guy's name was Boaz do all of that for Naomi?

Because of the next verse:

**Naomi also said to her, "The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers."**

The chick flick elements of our story are about to rapidly intensify.

We briefly touched on it last week, and we can only briefly touch on it this morning, but a redeemer was a relative of a deceased family member who would take care of his family. And part of that is that they would marry the relative's widow.

So Naomi breaks out into spontaneous praise and blessing not just because they're going to have plenty of food, but because she realizes this can't just be a coincidence.

*This man* who took special notice of you, *this man* who showered a foreign widow with blessing and favor on her first day in the field, he's a potential redeemer too? Could this really be happening Lord?

At this point in the story, we need to understand that there was no guarantee that Ruth would be redeemed. It's not like Naomi's first step was to walk back into Bethlehem and set up a meeting with Elimelech's closest relative to get the whole redeemer process in order.

Remember this was a time where not many people were following the Lord. Not many were obeying the law. Everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes. To find a decent man who was related to them who would actually do what the law said wasn't particularly likely.

And not only that, but even if they did find that man, the law was unclear about if Ruth was even redeemable as a Moabitess. The Israelites weren't supposed to intermarry in the first place.

And on top of that, Naomi was angry at God and wasn't looking to God's law to provide for her, because she was convinced that God had forgotten her.

## Ruth 2:1-23: Hope for a Redeemer

That's the tension that we need to feel here. It was extraordinarily unlikely that Ruth would be redeemed according to the law. So unlikely in fact that the thought never crossed Naomi's mind.

That is, it never crossed her mind until Ruth told her the name of the farmer she worked with that day. And then the wheels started to turn. And she realized that the Lord may not have forgotten her after all.

He's one of our redeemers.

And then Ruth piles it on with even more good news:

**21 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.'"**

"He told me I can stay in the field for the whole harvest."

**22 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."**

IOW, yes! Do that! Don't blow this opportunity! And not only that, but it's dangerous out there and you need to be safe. Stay in Boaz's field.

So she does. And anticipation is at an all time high for this potential love story.

But as act 2 closes, verse 23 dashes a little bit of that hope that Boaz is going to be Ruth's knight in shining armor.

**23 So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law**

She gleaned through barley and wheat harvests, which would have been 6 or 7 weeks. And nothing happens in the romance department. Things were looking so good, it seemed inevitable that Boaz was

going to step in and redeem Ruth. And yet here we are, 6 or 7 weeks later, Ruth's still getting food, but Naomi's dream of redemption is fading by the day.

And with that, the story of Ruth reaches it's halfway point.

At this point, Ruth has kind of been halfway redeemed. She has a provider, but she's not yet received the fullness of their relationship.

In the same way, those of us who are in Christ have been provided for, we've been adopted into his family, but we haven't yet received the fullness of what that entails. And we won't until we die or until Jesus come's back.

And that's going to be amazing. Sometimes I feel like a main part of my role as your pastor is just to keep saying, "Hey guys, heaven is going to be amazing! Because God's there!"

But we're not there yet. God has ordained for us the days that he's given us. And it's not an accident. And what we do with them matters. We say it all the time, God has placed us here for a reason. And that reason is to minister the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We want to do that through caring for the poor and needy in our community in ways that are wise and Christ-centered. We want to be bold about sharing our faith with the people God has placed in our lives who don't know him yet. And we do all of that while anxiously awaiting the fullness of our redemption.

Because our situation is slightly different than Ruth's. She had hope, but she wasn't sure she would be redeemed. Our hope is sure. 1 Peter 1 says:

**He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup>In this you rejoice, though now for a**

**Ruth 2:1-23: Hope for a Redeemer**

little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ

We have an imperishable inheritance awaiting us. It can never die. And we didn't earn it. It's all because of Jesus. Let's give him the praise and honor and glory that he deserves.

*Father, we praise you that our hope for redemption is sure, it's living, it's imperishable and unfading. We long for that day. Help us long for it more. In Jesus' name. Amen.*