

As Love Would Have It

Ruth 2:1-7 October 5, 2025

It was late at night at a New Jersey train station in 1864. Two men crossed paths while waiting to board. One was a famous actor - regarded as the greatest American thespian of the 19th century. He was also a theatrical manager. He had his own theatre in Manhattan.¹ The other fellow was a young man, just 20 years old, on a break from college, heading home to see the family.

The platform was crowded. Passengers jostled for one of the limited sleeping car spaces. In the commotion, the college student was knocked off the platform into the space between the landing and the train car, just as the train started to move. The young man knew he was in a helpless situation. Death at worst, disfigurement at best.

Suddenly, he felt someone seize his coat collar and pull him up back onto the landing. The rescuer had no idea who he just saved. That young college student was none other than Robert Todd Lincoln, President Abraham Lincoln's son.²

Robert later wrote of his rescue, "Upon turning to thank my rescuer I saw it was [an actor], whose face was of course well known to me, and I expressed my gratitude to him, and in doing so, called him by name - [Edwin Booth]." Edwin was the *brother* of John Wilkes Booth.

Believe it or not, this remarkable story of coincidence and rescue is true. Sadly, the Booth name is not bound up with redemption, but with assassination. But Edwin was not like John Wilkes. Edwin was a *supporter* of Abraham Lincoln and a Unionist. A completely different kind of man.

What are the odds that a brother of John Wilkes Booth would save the son of Abraham Lincoln? What are the odds that Ruth would wander into the field that belongs to her husband's relative who *happens* to be her Kinsman-Redeemer? A man connected with Elimelech but *not like* Elimelech.

There's an interesting phrase in verse 3. It says Ruth *happened* to be in a certain field. The Hebrew literally says, "Her chance chanced upon [this spot]."³ With a wry smile, our narrator says, "As *luck* would have it..." But it's not luck. It's as *Love* would have it. In chapter 2, we see a kind and caring God orchestrating the rest of the story according to His goodness and His perfect providence.

Ruth is a helpless young woman whose circumstances have knocked her off her station in life into dangerous and desperate position. But, thanks to God she finds herself in the very spot where a savior can rescue her. And through her rescue, the Lord rescues us all, sending *the* Savior through her line so we *all* can be lifted up from the pit of death and raised to everlasting life.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edwin_Booth

² <https://medium.com/knowledge-stew/the-time-when-a-booth-saved-a-lincoln-ae2925246af9>

³ Frank Gaebelein, et al. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 3: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*

Ruth 2:1 - ¹ Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side. He was a prominent man of noble character from Elimelech's family. His name was Boaz.

At the end of chapter 1, Naomi was convinced she had nothing. No husband, no sons, no future, not even the love of God. Chapter 2 opens with the revelation that she *did* have something - a *relative*.

But he wasn't *just* a relative. Many manuscripts use a form of the word that indicates a he was a close friend.⁴

And then we see his description: He was a prominent man of noble character. Your Bible may only say he was a man of great wealth, but that misses the *wealth* of what the narrator wants us to know about him. Boaz was not only a man of *wealth*, he was a man of *worth*.⁵ The descriptor "prominent man" *does* indicate he had money and property and influence, but it always describes a man of good reputation and integrity.⁶ The Hebrew says that he was a *gibbor*.

This term refers to a mighty man. A valiant warrior. In Joshua, Judges, and 2 Samuel, it refers to someone who was a war hero.⁷ Like David's *mighty* men. This Christmas when you're reading some of your favorite passages about *Jesus* you will inevitably come to Isaiah 9 and hear, "A Child will be born to us...and He shall be called Wonderful Counselor, *Mighty* God." He is the great *Gibbor*.

Boaz is a type - an illustration - of Christ Jesus, Who by His own kindness and love and grace and generosity would save his Jewish kinsmen *and* outsider Gentiles when we were utterly helpless.

Ruth 2:2 - ² Ruth the Moabite asked Naomi, "Will you let me go into the fields and gather fallen grain behind someone with whom I find favor?" Naomi answered her, "Go ahead, my daughter."

Ruth asks if she can go out and *glean*. That's why we're calling her the gleaning lady in this series. This was a legal right in the Law of Moses specifically providing for the poor and needy, whether they were citizens or resident aliens.⁸

These ladies really had no other options. But we're a bit surprised at this scene. First, it's surprising that Naomi does not go *with* her.⁹ It seems she is still overcome by sorrow and discouragement.

Second, it's surprising to see Ruth consistently hopeful even when her mother-in-law is not. She'll leave Moab. She'll move to a new land. Now she'll go out and start working. She doesn't know where to go, but she'll figure it out. Ruth is made of some tough stuff. Hard working *and* brave.

⁴ Edward Campbell, Jr. *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*. See also Hubbard.

⁵ Robert Alter *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation With Commentary*

⁶ Frederic Bush *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 9: Ruth/Esther*

⁷ Robert Hubbard *The Book Of Ruth*

⁸ Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22

⁹ Campbell

You see, there was an element of danger here. We'll find that both Boaz and Naomi are worried that some violence might happen to Ruth in the fields. This is the time of the Judges - a time of terrifying immorality, *even in Israel*. Boaz will reassure Ruth that he has *ordered* his workers not to touch her. Being a woman out in the fields was not particularly safe at the time.

Being a *Moabite* woman was even more dangerous. She faces a very real possibility of at least verbal, if not physical, abuse.¹⁰ We're surprised again when Naomi doesn't warn her. She only warns her once she gets *back* at the end of the day.

But there's one more surprise hidden for us in this verse: The word Ruth uses for fields is the same that was used in chapter 1 for the plateau of Moab.¹¹ Elimelech's family looked for a field in the world but found only death. Ruth will search for a field in *God's* will and will find more than she could possibly imagine.

Ruth 2:3 - ³ So Ruth left and entered the field to gather grain behind the harvesters. She happened to be in the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was from Elimelech's family.

She *happened* to be there. No, God *led* her there by His gracious providence. His eyes and hands were on her life. His eyes and hands are on *yours*, too. Note that He does not only work through burning bushes or pillars of fire. He works through ordinary circumstances. Things that *seem* coincidental or accidental are often a piece of providence accomplishing something in your life.

This does *not* mean we should adopt the old cliché, "Let go and let God." Ruth wasn't *passive*. She's *active*. She's taking steps. She's moving forward. She's seeking. Our motto is not "let go and let God," it's "seek His Kingdom and these things will be provided for you."¹² That we *walk* by faith, not stand around and let life happen hoping everything will work out despite our inactivity.

But be encouraged! God intends to do wonderful things through your *regular* life experience.

Ruth 2:4 - ⁴ Later, when Boaz arrived from Bethlehem, he said to the harvesters, "The LORD be with you." "The LORD bless you," they replied.

Where my text says "later," the narrator is really saying something like, "Wouldn't you know it!"¹³ It's a term used when a scene has been set and then *just the right thing* happens.¹⁴

As we've seen before, the first words a character says in the Bible can be very important. What did Boaz say? Yahweh be *with* you. As you live, as you harvest, in your *today*, may God be *with* you.

¹⁰ Hubbard

¹¹ Campbell

¹² Luke 12:31

¹³ Bush

¹⁴ Campbell

No matter what's going on in your life, no matter your circumstances, your struggles, your prospects, or your pressures, what you need most of all is God's *withness*. To be in intimate communion with Him so that He can do in your life what He wants to do.

The Bible examples again and again that when we're in communion and harmony with God, He is able to strengthen and empower us for any situation in life. Whether you're in a palace or a prison. The *circumstances* may be terrible, but what we need above all is closeness with our Lord.

God's desire is to be God *with* us. He is *Emmanuel* Who indwells His people. Boaz says to his workers, "God be *with* you." He developed a culture of faith and gratitude in his "company." They respond in kind. They believed that the God of Israel was good and true and ready to bless *even though* they had just come out of famine. *Even though* enemies would sometimes come against them. *Even though* many of their countrymen around them had surrendered to paganism. As for Boaz and *his* house, *they* would serve the Lord and trust the Lord and speak well of the Lord.

He was not only a mighty man and a wealthy man, he was a *Godly* man. A man who believed that his relationship with God wasn't only for the Tabernacle, but for the fields as well.

Your Christianity can infuse your regular life like this. Your work life. Your school life. If you're a boss, be a boss like Boaz. If you're an employee, be like one of these harvesters. Realize that God is with you not only in your desk work, but that He is working *His* harvest *through* your desk.

But that *will* require faith. You see, Boaz was a *farmer*. Bethlehem had just been through a terrible famine. Facing difficulty, Elimelech cut and run. *He* gave up on God and looked to the world's fields. Meanwhile, Boaz *stayed* where God had called him. He *kept* planting. He *kept* looking after his workers. He didn't look out only for himself. Those would've been hard years, but look at what a difference his faith made, for him, for his workers, for *their* families, and for Ruth and her family and ultimately for *our* families, who benefit from Boaz's willingness to trust the Lord.

Ruth 2:5 - ⁵ Boaz asked his servant who was in charge of the harvesters, "Whose young woman is this?"

He knows his workers. They weren't just drones for him. But suddenly, he sees this young woman he *doesn't* know. But he asks something we don't expect. He doesn't say, "*Who is this young woman?*" He says, "*Whose young woman is this?*" Who does she *belong* to? Who looks out for her?

Well, Boaz, she's actually *your* young woman, you just don't know it yet.

But again, it reminds us of Jesus - the Redeemer Who came out of Bethlehem - Who looks at us not for what we can give Him, because we can offer Him nothing, but Who looks on us with immediate care and concern and affection. Who is taking care of this little lamb? We'll see next time that the

first thing Boaz does when he speaks to Ruth is call her “my daughter.” He has immediate hesed toward her.

But on a devotional level, we are reminded that, as Christians, we have responsibility to care for one another. God says your family, your neighbor, some group are given to you to care for.

Ruth 2:6 - ⁶ The servant answered, “She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the territory of Moab.

He puts the headline in bold: She’s a *Moabite*. Actually, he opens *and* closes with that fact. Ruth’s Moabite heritage is an issue. It’s going to scare off the *other* relative in chapter 4. Her background is the *opposite* of what most Godly Israelites would want. And so the servant doesn’t even mention her name, because, after all, why would a great man like Boaz give any attention to a *Moabite*?

While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.¹⁵ This *proves* His love for us. He did not die for you because you are great. He did not die for you because you have something to offer Him. He did so because He has loved you for all eternity. It was His *delight* to form you in your mother’s womb, with the *hope* that you would accept His love and love Him in return so that He can not only save you, but make you into a *new* creation, and purify you and bring you forth as gold to be put on display for all the cosmos to see the immeasurable riches of His grace and kindness to us.¹⁶

If you came in a Moabite today, it does not matter. You can leave a Christian. You can leave not only a citizen of heaven, but a child of God. All you have to do is receive the free gift of salvation offered by Jesus Christ. You receive it by faith - believing what God has revealed. You cannot receive it by working. Ruth was not saved because she was willing to pick up pieces of grain. She was saved by Boaz’s generosity and provision and protection and, ultimately, by his *hesed* love for her.

If you want to be saved this morning, you *can* be. If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you *will* be saved.¹⁷

The servant’s initial remark was a point against her, but he wasn’t done.

Ruth 2:7 - ⁷ She asked, ‘Will you let me gather fallen grain among the bundles behind the harvesters?’ She came and has been on her feet since early morning, except that she rested a little in the shelter.”

Boaz had a choice. Would he allow her to glean? If he really was as valiant and integrous as people thought, now was a chance to show it. Because here was a helpless hopeless outsider fallen onto the tracks of life. What would he do in this moment? Would he be a champion for *her* or only for his bottom line?

¹⁵ Romans 5:8

¹⁶ Ephesians 2:7

¹⁷ Romans 10:9

Under the Law, it was her *right* to glean in this field. But she knew she was dependent on his mercy. Because, after all, not everyone in Bethlehem would follow the Law. This was a time when everyone did what was right in their *own* eyes.

Everyone, that is, but Boaz. He would go above and beyond to show her grace and generosity, as we'll see. That is exactly what Christ Jesus has done for us.

We talk about the *fall* of humanity when Adam and Eve sinned. We fell into guilt, into death, into hopelessness. But a Savior came out of Bethlehem to reach down and save us. And because His love is so *great* and because His power is so *great*, *nothing* can stop Him in His mission. His providence *will* accomplish what He sets out to do.

The only thing that can stop *you* from being rescued by Jesus Christ is *you*. If you refuse to believe that Jesus is God and that He is Savior, then you will die in your sins and you will be condemned forever and *nothing* else can save you.¹⁸

But Jesus *is* mighty to save. And He is reaching out to you so He can pull you out of your sin so you can live and walk *with* Him. This first act of rescue Boaz does for Ruth is not the end. It's the *start* of their life together. And we who *have* been saved are now commanded to live lives of love and obedience and closeness with *our* Kinsman-Redeemer, finding our rest, our provision, our protection, our future in Him. *That* is how Love would have it.

¹⁸ John 3:18, 8:24