

Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. 2 And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."

3 So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech. 4 And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered, "The LORD bless you." 5 Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" 6 And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. 7 She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.' So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest."

8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. 9 Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn." 10 Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" 11 But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. 12 The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" 13 Then she said, "I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants."

14 And at mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine." So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. 15 When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young

men, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. 16 And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.” 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. 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.

19 And her mother-in-law said to her, “Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you.” 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.” 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 also said to her, “The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.” 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.’ ” 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.” 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.

How do we move forward in our Christian walk? We can find ourselves stuck and stagnant with little to no movement. We may not be hopelessly addicted to a particular sin but we are not exactly lighting up the sky with our spiritual fireworks. People are not seeking us out and drinking deeply from the well of our wisdom and righteousness. We’re stuck.

There are ways forward but we may not like them. I have had more than one man tell me that the best time of their life spiritually was when they were unemployed. No one in their right mind seeks out unemployment but unemployment brought great spiritual dividends. No one would seek out pain and trauma that Ruth experienced but as we will continue to see this morning, Ruth’s faith working through these trials brought great spiritual dividends. Ruth clearly had a faith that works.

Here are the four points from last Sunday.

1. A faith that works is based on a right understanding of God.
2. A faith that works transcends all cultures, languages, politics and geographic borders.
3. A faith that works is expressed by young and old alike.
4. A faith that works, works.

#### **5. A faith that works transcends gender.**

This principle is related to number two above. Just as faith transcends all cultures, languages, politics and geographic borders, so it transcends gender. What I mean is that we must take care to properly elevate the place of women and their examples of amazing faith.

This past week I spoke with a Christian woman who told me briefly about the way she was treated by her father. Her father did not beat her or abuse her. Her father did not neglect her or abandon her. But her father did raise her in a home where women were looked down upon. There are dozens of ways that this can be communicated to a young girl but she left home with a feeling of worthlessness. And she felt this way, not because of any particular failing of hers but simply because she was a woman.

This kind of parenting and general opinion of women may be slightly improving but we must be clear that it has no place in the church or in Christian families. Think about the women who are closest to you—your wives, your mothers, your daughters and your sisters. I am not saying that you

will never have relational troubles with these women and girls, but I am asking that you ask the Lord to examine your true heart attitude toward them. Do you value them and respect them precisely because they are members of the female gender?

As this story illustrates, fathers have an incalculable effect on their daughters for good or for ill. Husbands continue the path that their wives started with their own fathers. This woman I spoke with was able to break free of her sense of worthlessness because she learned the true meaning of Biblical grace and because her husband loved her with an unconditional love. Also, the way that a brother treats his sister and his mom is a good indicator of how he will treat his future wife.

This story is extremely relevant because of the book of Ruth. This is not a principle that comes from within the book of Ruth as much as it comes from its presence in holy Scripture and Biblical history. In a day when women possessed no power or influence in society, God's plan was to use a Godly woman named Ruth. God used a foreign woman, which we know had significance of its own but the fact is he used a woman. Boaz plays a vital role in this book but as we said before, Ruth is the true hero of the story. God saw fit to call her out of paganism into saving faith. God walked her through these trials to demonstrate her faith. God caused her to become a part of the human genealogy of the Savior of the world. Finally, God preserved her story and sovereignly guided its placement in our inspired Bibles. He did all of this, in part, to demonstrate that true faith transcends gender, to tell the whole world for the remainder of human history that women are important and valuable and can often inspire the faith of men. Men and boys, learn from Ruth and from the Godly women and girls in your life.

#### **6. A faith that works results in courage and humility.**

Both of these character qualities—courage and humility—are lacking among believers but what is even more rare is to have both of these in good measure at the same time. We all know lots of people—believer or not—who are courageous but not very humble. We also know people who are quite humble but not very courageous. But it is the rare person who has good measures of both bold courage and genuine humility and this is Ruth to a tee.

First, let's make sure we grasp the depth of her courage. We know that she went to glean alone in the fields of complete strangers as a young woman in a foreign land. This as dangerous as a young woman walking alone through a seedy part of a major city. Later we learn that Boaz was very concerned for her safety. *8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. 9 Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you?"* After she returned we learn that Naomi had also been very concerned for her. *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."*

We know that her actions were dangerous and therefore took great courage but a skeptical person might chalk it up to pure desperation. A cynic would say that she wasn't really that courageous she was just extremely desperate. If she had not have gone out to glean, her and Naomi would have starved to death. In other words, her fear of death was stronger than her fear of being assaulted, so that really isn't courage.

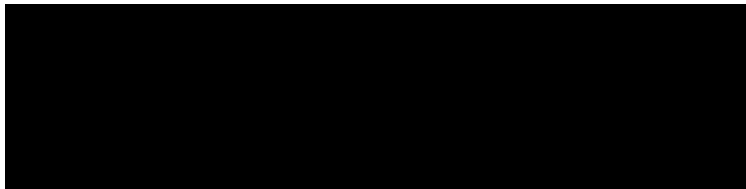
I think this skeptical viewpoint is dead wrong but even if we grant Ruth some motive of desperation, there was a courage here that is often overlooked. In order to see it clearly, we need

to jump to verse fifteen. After Boaz had been amazed at Ruth's commitment to her mother-in-law and after she had a lunch at the table of his workers, we learn that *When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her.* This was part of Boaz's overwhelming generosity in caring for the young widow and her mother-in-law. Here are the ways that Boaz showed exceeding kindness to Ruth and Naomi. Ruth...

- Was asked to glean with Boaz's workers and servant girls (8)
- Drank from the servant's water source (9)
- Was invited to sit with the reapers and with Boaz for a meal (14)
- Was given more food than she could eat in a single meal (14)
- Was allowed to glean among the sheaves (15)
- Was provided with bundles from which to glean (16)
- Was permitted safe conduct among the men: "Do not reproach her"; "Do not rebuke her" (15-16)
- Gleaned 22 liters of barley—30 pounds! (17)

All of these acts of kindness accomplished two basic things. They allowed Ruth to be more productive because she was fed a good meal and provided with water but primarily they represented a special kindness from Boaz. Ruth and Naomi were not eating a gluten-free diet or a low-carb diet but it was enough to feed these two women for a few weeks. This was an enormous amount of grain for one day's gleaning. It represents the bountiful mercy of Boaz and of the Lord.

And part of this surpassing kindness was the right to glean among the sheaves. We know that this is a special request because of the word "even." Boaz granted her the right to glean *even* among the sheaves. Again, this both drastically speeds up her gleaning and represents Boaz's kindness and care for her. But here is the place where Ruth's true courage emerges. Look back at verse seven.



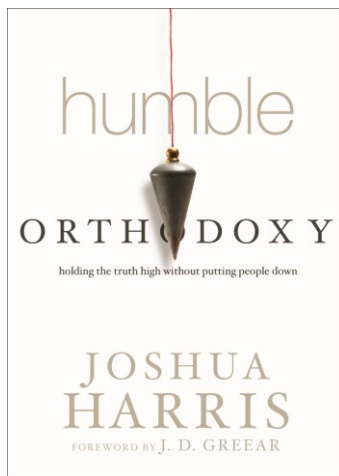
Do you see the significance of this? When Ruth entered the field of this total stranger, her first request was to glean among the sheaves. Gleaning is somewhat like going to a soup kitchen for a meal—with the exception that with gleaning you are working for your meal—but both are a form of charity. Let's say you went through the line got your meal and ate it but afterward you went back into the kitchen and said, "Could I please load up two carts of food to take home with me?" Ruth's request was bold and courageous. It could be said that it was almost presumptuous but I think it was a presumption based on faith of the Lord's provision. Unlike his other acts of kindness listed above, Boaz did not come up with this one on his own. He was merely giving an answer To Ruth's specific and special request.

Here is the basic order of events on that day. She entered a random field and sought out the man who was in charge and asked him if she could be permitted to glean among the sheaves. We know this because the conversation takes place in verses five and following. Since this was a special request, the head reaper knew that only Boaz could grant such a thing so he arrived. Meanwhile, Ruth set to work gleaning in the normal manner, behind the reapers, picking up loose grains and stalks that fell.

She did not just sit around waiting for special treatment or come with a sense of entitlement. She immediately set to work gleaning one grain at a time. When Boaz arrived a few hours later, the manager explained all that he knew about Ruth's background, including the special request to glean among the sheaves. Boaz spoke with Ruth gave all of the blessings and graces to her described above and as icing on the proverbial cake, granted her the right to glean *even* among the sheaves.

Ruth had no right to glean among the sheaves. The Mosaic Law did not provide for such generosity and it's doubtful that local custom did either. Ruth was asking for special treatment. She exhibited extraordinary courage in the face of overwhelming odds.

However, all of her immense courage was wrapped in a cloak of full humility. She demonstrated her humility by asking and not demanding special treatment, by working hard before her request was granted and by bowing down before Boaz in gratitude. *10 Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"*



As I said before, these two characteristics of courage and humility are seldom seen together in such liberal amounts. A practical way to apply this combination of courage and humility would be to speak the truth in love to others. Speaking truth always requires courage but doing it in love always requires humility. Joshua Harris recently released a new book titled *Humble Orthodoxy*. On page eleven he writes, "There is nothing more unloving than to be silent in the face of lies that will ruin another person."

John Stott is a great help here as well.

"Thank God there are those in the contemporary church who are determined at all costs to defend and uphold God's revealed truth. But sometimes they are conspicuously lacking in love. When they think they smell heresy, their nose begins to twitch, their muscles ripple, and the light of battle enters their eye. They seem to enjoy nothing more than a fight. Others make the opposite mistake. They are determined at all costs to maintain and exhibit brotherly love, but in order to do so are prepared even to sacrifice the central truths of revelation. Both these tendencies are unbalanced and unbiblical. Truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love; love becomes soft if it is not strengthened by truth. The apostle calls us to hold the two together, which should not be difficult for Spirit-filled believers, since the Holy Spirit is himself 'the spirit of truth,' and his first fruit is 'love.'" There is no other route than this to a fully mature Christian unity."<sup>1</sup>

#### **7. A faith that works sees God at work at all times.**

Out of all of the fields surrounding Bethlehem, just how did Ruth end up in the field of Boaz so that all of these wonderful blessings could happen? Look back at verse three. *So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz.* She "happened" to come to Boaz's field. Sure, mere coincidence! The Hebrew term "describes accidental events"<sup>2</sup> It's really a tongue-in-cheek statement about the story. If you could see the author writing this story I think you would see him write the line *and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz* and right then he would look up at you and go,

“wink, wink—do you get it—she just ‘happened’ to stumble on this particular field, just an accident—yeah, right!” It is the powerful providence of God working behind the scenes.

You know how the book of Esther never once mentions the name of God yet we see God’s fingerprint on every page? This is the same thing happening in this verse. By outside appearances, Ruth just happened to end up in Boaz’s barley field but there are no accidents in God’s economy. Furthermore, look what happened in the very next verse. *And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem.* There are endless reasons Boaz could have stayed away that particular day but he came from the city at precisely the right time. Ruth was there, she had given her request and had been working hard all morning. We need to picture God as the divine director standing off stage giving cues to his characters so they enter the stage at just the right time. There are no accidents in God’s economy. Do you see God as the Divine Director working behind the scenes of your life?

#### **8. A faith that works moves from cold sovereignty to loving-kindness.**

You have to love the conversation between Naomi and Ruth later that day. *“Where did you glean today? And where have you worked?”* This was much more than the typical statement when husbands and wives gather around the dinner table and say, “Hi honey, how was your day.” For Naomi, this was the most important question of her life. What Ruth said next could mean either life or death for both of them.

Ruth’s response brings the tension of verse one to a close. *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.”* Finally the main characters in the story realize in verse 20 what we and the narrator knew in verse one—his name is Boaz. *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 also said to her, “The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.”*

Naomi made two extremely important statements. She said that Boaz is “one of our redeemers.” We will discuss this in future messages. But before that she said, *“May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!”* This is a verse where pronouns are very important. May he be blessed by the Lord refers to Boaz. Naomi is grateful to this relative who looked on her daughter-in-law with such kindness. She prayed that the Lord would bless Boaz as a result. But the one who is showing kindness is the Lord—*whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!*

If you recall in chapter one, Naomi had a strong sense of God’s sovereignty. He was the one who had brought the famine and had given her all of her trials. She never once doubted God’s power but in her despair, she did seem to doubt God’s goodness when she said, “the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me” (Ruth 1:20). The best phrase I can put on this is to call it a “cold sovereignty.” God is sovereign but he is not particularly warm-hearted. But now she is testifying to God’s kindness, specifically God’s *hesed*, his loving-kindness, his grace and mercy. She again sees God as both strong and good, as sovereign and merciful.

Charles Spurgeon is one of the greatest preachers of all time and we would have to agree that much of his effectiveness came through immense suffering. For the last half of his 57 years, he suffered from gout, rheumatism and inflammation of the kidneys. Listen to how he described one particularly painful time.

When I was racked some months ago with pain, to an extreme degree, so that I could no longer bear it without crying out, I asked all to go from the room, and leave me alone; and then I had nothing I could say to God but this, 'Thou art my Father, and I am thy child; and thou, as a Father art tender and full of mercy. I could not bear to see my child suffer as thou makest me suffer, and if I saw him tormented as I am now, I would do what I could to help him, and put my arms under him to sustain him. Wilt thou hide thy face from me, my Father? Wilt thou still lay on a heavy hand, and not give me a smile from thy countenance?' ... So I pleaded, and I ventured to say, when I was quiet, and they came back who watched me: 'I shall never have such pain again from this moment, for God has heard my prayer.' I bless God that ease came and the racking pain never returned.<sup>3</sup>

I like this story because Spurgeon had his prayer answered even though he was not totally healed. He died fairly young at the age of 57 from his various maladies but he testified that he never again experienced the intolerable pain. He knew that God was equally strong and good, that both were true in infinite measure. Furthermore, Spurgeon and Ruth both illustrate our final principle.

### **9. A faith that works takes refuge under the wings of the Lord.**

Listen to how Boaz spoke to Ruth for the first time.

*11 But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. 12 The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!"*

The most important thing Boaz said was the last thing he said to Ruth—*a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!* This is a wonderful description of Ruth's faith and hope in the Lord. With childlike faith she asked the Lord to come under his protection and care. Once again such a thing requires that you see God as infinitely strong so that he can meet your needs and infinitely good so that he will care for you,

This reminds me of Psalm 73.

*Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.  
My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

Ruth knew that her only hope was in the Lord. She placed herself under the protective and nurturing wings of the Lord. You and I can turn this into our own prayer. Maybe you will need to pray one of these this morning.

Lord, I am desperate. Cover me with your loving wing.

Lord, I'm tired. Cover me with your nurturing wing.

Lord, I'm confused. Cover me with your wise wing.

Lord, I have sinned. Please cover me with your healing, forgiving wing.

**Rich Maurer**

**August 25, 2013**

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<sup>1</sup> John Stott, The message of Ephesians, IVP, © 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Robert L. Hubbard, The Book of Ruth, NICOT, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, © 1988.

<sup>3</sup> "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," p. 24.