



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.

If you have ever read an exciting book or watched an exciting movie, you will have had this experience. You know that the bad guy is standing behind the door, so this knowledge makes you want to scream out to the characters, “Run away, don’t walk through that door!” we know something really important that the characters of the story do not know.

This is show we should read verse one of this chapter. *Now Naomi had a relative of her husband’s, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.* The writer of the story and you and I know that Boaz is not the scary man lurking behind the door but one of the hero’s of the story. Humanly speaking, he is going to bring protection and redemption to Naomi and Ruth. But Naomi and Ruth don’t know it yet. So verse one should make us want to scream to the characters, “Just hang on a little longer. Everything’s going to be alright!” if we could, we would sit down next to Ruth and give her hope. “Ruth, you’re going to meet this nice man and he’s going to take good care of you and very soon you will be married to him and will be under his protective care.”

As readers of the story, you and I want Ruth to have hope. We know that she has given up everything to follow Naomi to a foreign land. She left behind mother and father, sisters and brothers, everything familiar she had always known in order to be committed to her mother-in-law (who technically wasn’t even her mother-in-law anymore since her husband died.) We know that chapter one ended with tragedy but we also know how the story will progress. Verse one tells us that Boaz was “a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech.” He is from the same clan as Naomi’s husband. Not only was he from the same tribe of Judah but he was also from the same clan—as Naomi will report later, “the man is a close relative of ours.” Also, Boaz was a worthy man which in the Hebrew language meant that he was wealthy and influential. From the very first verse you and I have hope because we know he is the one. But we also want Ruth to share this same hope. We want her to know that everything will turn out OK.

But here’s the amazing part of this story. Ruth already has hope. She had hope in chapter one in the midst of tragedy. Naomi, the Jew from Bethlehem is the one without hope. Ruth, the former

pagan from Moab is full of hope. How do we know this? First of all we know it based on her commitment to Naomi and to Naomi's God.

She wasn't running after a god who was a divine slot machine and gives her everything she would always want. Certainly you know people who act as if their god is a slot machine, right? If you feed the machine with money eventually it will pay out big. I may not see a payout every week but in the end, my slot machine god will come up all dollar signs. Such people are like those who chased Jesus after he fed the five thousand in John 6. *When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"* Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself (John 6:14-15). They wanted to follow Jesus because he gave them stuff. If he could miraculously feed twenty thousand people then he could make all of their dreams come true.

But Ruth's faith was not born out of prosperity, but just the opposite. Her faith in Yahweh developed after Elimelech and Naomi fled from the famine in Jerusalem. She married one of their sons but then she watched as her father-in-law died, her brother-in-law died and her own husband died. Her faith was born out of struggle and trial and suffering.

### **1. A faith that works is based on a right understanding of God.**

Her faith may have been conceived in suffering but somehow she came to have faith in Yahweh as Jehovah Jireh, as the Great Provider. To her, Yahweh was not a slot machine god where all of her troubles float away into a mist but he was her rock and foundation. He was the sovereign Lord who, though he brought about the famine and trials in the first place, he could just as easily take them away. But even if he did not, he was good and holy. He was not like the god of her people, Molech, who demanded the blood of their children as a sacrifice.

This principle still holds true today. If your view of god is correct then your faith will be as flint but if your view of God is flimsy and full of holes, your faith will be tossed on every prevailing wind of trial that comes your way. Right doctrine is too often seen as boring and irrelevant and sometimes it is as about as exciting as the brick and steel that holds up this building, but take it away and what do you have left.

On this past Monday, Simon and I went to La Crosse to give us something to do as we talked about the Bible and the Christian faith. I took him up to Grandad's Bluff, which I had not seen since they remodeled it. Near the top I asked him if he was afraid of heights. He said "No, I do bungi jumping." Even I wouldn't do that. I am not afraid of heights either as long as I have some kind of security. For example, rock climbing is fun because there is a thrill but you also know you are hooked into a sturdy rope and harness. But take those away and you would never catch me hanging onto hand holds an inch long on a eighty foot rock face. Sound doctrine is like the rope and harness. As long as I have it, I can soar free within the bounds of the rope but without it, I am a dead man.

Ruth not only had a young faith and a series of difficult trials, but she also had the discouragement of Naomi to contend with. In all likelihood, she came to faith in the Lord through her relationship with her mother-in-law but now she had to watch Naomi wallow in despair as she returned to Bethlehem empty handed.

The second reason we know that she had hope is because she went into the fields of strangers to glean for grain. As you may know, gleaning was specifically given for the poor and alien living in Israel.

*19"When you are harvesting your crops and forget to bring in a bundle of grain from your field, don't go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Then the LORD your God will bless you in all you do. 20When you beat the olives from your olive trees, don't go over the boughs twice. Leave some of the olives for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. 21This also applies to the grapes in your vineyard. Do not glean the vines after they are picked, but leave any remaining grapes for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. 22Remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt. That is why I am giving you this command (Deut. 24:19-22).*

The harvesters would grab stalks with one hand and cut them with the other. When he had too much to handle, he would lay them in stacks for the women to tie up into bundles. To glean a field was for the poorest of the poor. It was subsistence living. The closest modern day equivalent would be to live off of recycling aluminum cans. The going rate is about 1.3 cents per can so you have to hustle to make a living this way.

Under normal circumstances, it would have been dangerous for a single woman to glean in the fields of a complete stranger but it was all the more dangerous for Ruth since she was a foreigner. This point was brought out repeatedly in chapter two. The narrator mentioned it twice (vv. 2,21), Boaz's servant mentioned it (v. 6) and Boaz himself brought it into the conversation (v. 11). I think the point of the repeated mentions of her birthplace is because we are not supposed to forget that this Gentile woman is the star of the story.

## **2. A faith that works transcends all cultures, languages, politics and geographic borders.**

Naomi is not the star of the story. Boaz is a close second due to his generosity and kindness but the foreign woman who placed her hope in the Lord is the real star. Ruth's story reminds me of the centurion in the gospels.

*And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. 7 Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. 8 For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." 9 When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." (Luke 7:6-9)*

I do believe that the book of Ruth exemplifies Jesus words. I think that if Jesus would have appeared in the barley fields next to Ruth, he would have exclaimed, *"I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."* Once again we see his promise to spread a passion for his name to all nations.

## **3. A faith that works is expressed by young and old alike.**

We could call Naomi a "seasoned saint." She was a Jew married into the tribe of Judah. In other words, she was a good church girl with Christian parents and grandparents and everything you needed for a strong faith. But along come this young, brand new believer named Ruth and literally blows Naomi's faith out of the water. This reminds me of Paul's introductory remarks to the church

in Rome. *For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine* (Romans 1:11-12). So the simple application of this principle is never to look down on the faith of others. We all know that some young children can express some of the most amazing faith. We have all known brand new believers who make our faith look microscopic by comparison.

One thing I love about this part of the story is that Ruth did NOT KNOW if everything would work out in the end. She had no idea what would happen. We know and the narrator knows what will happen but Ruth didn’t have a clue. She may have known that Israelite law allowed for the poor and foreigners to glean in the fields for survival but she had no idea if she would be rejected, assaulted or worse. She had no guarantee that everything would be OK but she did know that God was in control.

#### **4. A faith that works, works.**

We know that Ruth had faith because she put her faith into action. A faith that really works is one that actually is put to work. James 2:17 cements this idea. *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* Martin Luther did not like the book of James because he was trying to get away from the works-based righteousness of the Catholic Church and his own history. He joyfully translated Romans 1:17 as *Der Gerechte wird aus Glauben leben*—the first German translation of the phrase, ‘the righteous shall live by faith’. And we do live by faith. Faith alone by grace alone in Christ alone but a faith that works must be put to work.

In chapter 1, Ruth committed herself wholly to Naomi and to Naomi’s God. “Your God shall be my God.” Those are powerful words but words count for nothing until they are put into action. A husband can make all of the promise she wants in his wedding vows but if three years later he runs off with his secretary, his words counted for nothing. In chapter 1, Ruth made a commitment of faith to Naomi and to the Lord and here in chapter two we see her faith put into action.

You remember when we talked about the importance of the barley harvest in chapter one. The tragic first chapter simply ends, *And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.* The barley harvest was a sign of hope in the midst of tragedy. But it was, after all, just the barley harvest. It was mundane and routine and nothing special at all but God intended it to turn the world upside down.

Some of you have such barley harvests in your own life. There is something kind of boring and routine in your life but God may intend to use it to turn your life upside down. But you will never reap the benefits of the barley harvest because you sit and watch it happen. There is something in your life that is holding you back. You are afraid to take the next step because you can’t see how it will turn out in the end. But a faith that sits is merely empty words. A faith that does not work soon ceases to be faith. You can say that you trust God but if you always take the safe road before you, in what sense is your faith active?

Twelve disciples sat in the boat when Jesus came to them at night walking on the water. Eleven remained in the boat but Peter alone got out and literally walked on the water. But then he sunk, didn’t he? He lost his faith when the wind and the waves picked up. But so what—at least he stepped out of the boat!! Do you remember when did he begin to sink? It happened when he took his eyes off of Jesus. Do you see, it was not the size of Peter’s faith that allowed him to walk on

water but the size of Peter's God. Can you imagine how many times in the remainder of his life Peter would have thought back on that moment? I am not saying it loomed larger than the cross and empty grave but you have to believe that every so often Peter said to himself, "I walked on water! I still can't get over that. Me, a 180 pound man actually walked on the surface of the water."

This again goes back to our first principle—*A faith that works is based on a right understanding of God*. If your faith is small it is because your God is small. It is as simple as that. I find that most such lapses of faith fall into one of two categories—either you doubt God's power or else you doubt his goodness. In other words, either God is not able to hold your full trust or else he is not willing to see you through. You don't doubt your faith, you doubt the power and goodness of the Lord.

Many of you have barley harvests before you but you lack the faith to enter into it. You are sitting on the sidelines waiting for some bolt of lightning to hit you from the sky and push you in the right direction. You are waiting for some voice from heaven to thunder into your dreams and tell you to go and do thus. Ruth didn't have lightning and thunder to direct her but she did have a God of lightning and thunder. Her God was strong and her God was good, and that's all she needed to know.

Here is one way to know if you don't have a faith that works. You say to yourself, "I think I should do \_\_\_\_\_, but..." There is a direction or a decision before you that you think is right but you immediately hesitate and your mind gives you ten reasons why you can't do it. I am not suggesting that you should rush into any decision but some of you are so overly analytical that you are paralyzed to move forward. Let me give you four quick principles for evaluating a decision, especially if you are already at the point of saying, "I think I should do \_\_\_\_\_, but..."

1. Is it in line with God's revealed will?
2. Have I prayed about it and checked my motive?
3. Have I sought Godly and wise counsel from others?
4. Is it beyond my natural ability to perform?

If you step out of the boat there are three things of which I am certain. One, like Peter, your faith will fail, of that you can be sure, but that doesn't make your faith a failure. At least you will have gotten out of the boat, right? And this is how you test your faith. First, you have right instruction and a right understanding about God but then you have to put that to the test. You believe in your mind that God is good and he is strong but then you get out of the boat and your heart will confirm that this is true. If you step out of the boat, your faith will fail you but it will be stronger than before you stepped out in faith.

Second, things won't always work out they way you want. Remember that Ruth had absolutely no guarantee that the barley harvest would supply her need. If things don't work according to your exact dreams, that does not necessarily mean it was the wrong decision. If you step out of the boat, you also need to submit the success or failure of your plans to the Lord.

The third thing that will happen if you step out of the boat is that you will never be the same again. The first question I asked Kate (after a whole summer ministering in Slovakia) this morning was, “You’ll never be the same again, will you.” “No,” Kate, said, I never will.

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