

The Favor of the Lord

Ruth 2:1-23

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on January 12, 2025

Introduction

- ❖ I mentioned, last week, how we've started a new fundraising campaign aimed to renovate that building next door that we purchased over a year ago. This campaign will last until the end of February. Each of you will have the opportunity to submit a faith pledge. To get involved and stay engaged.
 - Now if you weren't here last week, I issued a challenge for those of you trying to figure out what kind of pledge to make towards this project. I mentioned how, if we were to end up selling a portion of our existing land, then we estimate our internal fundraising goal to be \$13.5M. That's about five times the average of our annual general fund giving over the last two years. **So if everyone who gave to the general fund over the last couple years would take the average of their giving and multiply it by five – if we pledged that amount, then we'll achieve our goal!**

- ❖ Now, after praying about that, if you determine that it's just not possible for you to meet that particular challenge – we still want you to participate. If we're going to cross the finish line on this project, then we can't stay on the sidelines merely watching. All of us have to get into the game. Look, I would love to see us reach our fundraising goal. **But what would please my heart, as your pastor, is to hear that we ended our campaign with 100% member engagement.** Meaning that, in the end, every single church member participated with a pledge. Doing the best they can. Giving out of thanksgiving and faith.
 - Because – if there's anything we can learn from the story of the Widow's Mite (Mk 12:41-44) – **the amount you give is not nearly as important as the amount of faith you exercise in giving.** Jesus said those rich people pouring loads of money into the offering box were merely giving out of their abundance. But that widow gave out of her poverty, putting in everything she had, all she had to live on. **In other words, she gave out of an abundance of her faith.** Which is why, in the economy of God, out of all who gave that day, she contributed the most.

- ❖ My hope is for all of us to actively participate and give with hearts full of gratitude and faith. **As much as I want to see us worshipping in that new building one day soon, I care more to see our faith stretched to its fullest potential.** I hope to see our expectations of what God can accomplish surpassed – extended far beyond what we can currently imagine.
 - **So to that end, my plan is to preach a message this morning that shines a light on the hidden providence of God.** That highlights how our good God often shows us favor and blesses us – but in such subtle ways and through such common means – that we often don't recognize his hand and don't give him enough credit.
 - Because that's what I see happening over the past few years throughout this building project. And what I'm afraid will continue to happen. **I'm afraid we'll miss signs of God's hidden hand of providence.** He won't get the glory that he deserves. And our faith won't be stretched the way it needs to be. So I thought Ruth 2 would be a fitting text.

- ❖ If you're not familiar with the book of Ruth, it's partly **a love story** between a Jewish man named Boaz and a Moabite woman named Ruth. It's partly **a story of personal growth** for a woman named Naomi who suffered a deep personal loss and had to wrestle with her faith in God's goodness. This book is also a **historical narrative**, introducing us to the ancestors of Israel's greatest ruler, King David.
 - In chapter 1, we learn that, in those days, a famine was in the land of Israel, which led a man named Elimelech to move his family to Moab. But there he dies widowing his wife Naomi. Their two sons marry Moabite women named Orpah and Ruth. But after ten years, both couples are unable to bear children and both sons die. So Naomi, Orpah and Ruth are widowed with no means of support.
 - But then, in chapter 1:6, Naomi receives word that the LORD has visited his people and blessed their crops. So as she prepares to return, she urges her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab and find new husbands. Orpah complies. But Ruth clings on and commits herself to Israel and to their God (1:16).

- ❖ So chapter 1 ends with Naomi and Ruth entering Bethlehem as two poor, helpless, widows. **Naomi – whose name means *sweet* – has responded to her suffering with self-pity and bitterness.** Listen to chapter 1:20, "*She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. . . . the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me."*" Naomi is quick to recognize the Lord's hand when things go wrong. And concludes that God is out to get her.

- ❖ **But what Naomi had a harder time recognizing were the signs of God's sweet providence and blessings in her life.** Particularly the blessing standing in front of her named Ruth, whose name means *to refresh*. Ruth had also suffered loss. She also lost a husband. But she responds – not with bitterness – but by becoming a source of refreshment for others.
 - Look at chapter 2:2, "*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 by the end of the chapter, her search for favor in someone's eyes is fulfilled by Boaz. But, in the end, Boaz ultimately serves as a channel for the favor of the Lord.

- ❖ Friends, we experience the same. When things go wrong, like Naomi, we're quick to complain. To wonder why God is so cruel. Why he's against us. But when he extends his hand of favor towards us – we tend to overlook it. His hands work through such ordinary means that we tend to miss it and chalk it up to mere coincidence or good luck. **We often fail to see the hidden hand of God's mercy at work in our lives.** We easily miss it if we're not looking at our circumstances through eyes of faith.
 - But by the end of chapter 2, both Naomi and Ruth are beginning to see. **They're beginning to learn three lessons about the favor of the Lord.** (1) The Lord's favor can be found in the seemingly random. (2) The Lord's favor can touch us through human hands. (3) The Lord's favor is to be reciprocated by those it has blessed.

The Lord's Favor Found in the Seemingly Random

- ❖ The first lesson is this: **The Lord's favor can be found in the seemingly random.** When we think of God's hand working in this world, we usually assume the miraculous. We think of the Ten Plagues or the parting of the Red Sea – something spectacular. But notice how there's not a single miracle in this book. We don't read of Naomi's husband or sons being raised from the dead. There's no manna miraculously appearing on the ground. **We never see the visible hand of God working overt miracles. But why should that surprise us?**
 - Isn't that more like our lives? Sometimes it's hard to relate to biblical characters because their lives are so full of crazy miracles. We can't relate. But Naomi and Ruth are different. We can relate to them. Miracles were just as rare in their lives as ours.
 - **But that's because God's normal way of working in our lives is – not through miracles – but through providence.** Providence refers to God's hidden hand working through ordinary folks and ordinary events to accomplish his extraordinarily good purposes.

- ❖ Let me show you this starting at the end of chapter 1, *“And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.”* (1:22) The LORD had truly visited his people and a ripe harvest was at hand. So Ruth goes out looking for food.
 - **Fortunately in those days, there was a welfare system in place.** Israel's law instructed harvesters to work through the fields only once and whatever was missed or dropped was left for the poor. And you weren't supposed to reap the corners of your fields but to leave it for the poor to work (Lev 19:9-10).

- ❖ Now watch what happens in v3, *“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.”* **Now this is good storytelling because the narrator doesn't flat out show you God's hand. But he leaves us big clues.**
 - Here's one of them. In v3 it literally says, *“she happened to happen”* upon this field. Or as we might say today, “As luck would have it,” she ended up on Boaz's field. What are the odds? How many fields must there have been along the Judean countryside? She could have gone anywhere, and yet she happens to happen on the field of Boaz, who just so happens to be of the clan of Elimelech.

- ❖ Chapter 2:1 already revealed this, *“Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.”* Two things jump out. **First, the fact that Boaz is related to Elimelech is huge.** In that culture, two widows on their own were as good as dead without a male protector and provider. What's known as a **kinsman-redeemer**. And Ruth just so happens to happen upon a field belonging to a male relative of Naomi's who could potentially play that role. And he's not just any male relative.
 - **The second thing that jumps out is the way Boaz is described as a “worthy man.”** That phrase is translated elsewhere as *“a mighty man of valor.”* (Jdg 6:12) He's a noble man. Which is evident a few verses later in the way he goes beyond the requirements of the Law to help a poor Moabitess. Boaz was a good man.

- ❖ Now as readers, we were given a heads up in v1. But remember, Ruth knows nothing about Boaz or his relationship with Elimelech. She doesn't even realize she's on his field. **She just picked one at random. But unbeknownst to her, she was doing exactly what the Lord had providentially planned to happen.**
 - This fact is reinforced by v4. *“And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem.”* Behold! That's the narrator's way of saying, “Look! Look, who just so happened to show up.” The very man I told you about, this worthy man of valor who just so happens to be a relative and a potential kinsman-redeemer.
 - From human eyes, it looks like one big coincidence. It just so happened to happen. **But the point is that God's hand was working behind the scenes to bring about these events – all in order to show favor to his beloved.** And what was true then is still true now. Nothing the Lord desires is left up to chance. Nothing comes down to luck. All is carried out by his hidden hand.
- ❖ **Church, when you look back now in hindsight – at how this entire building project unfolded – God's hidden hand of providence becomes more apparent.** Before that land next door went on the market, we were planning to expand on our existing 5-acres of land. When we conducted that first pledge campaign back in January of 2023, we ended with enough to move forward with Phase One of that old master plan. But then, that month, we just so happened to happen upon a *For Sale* sign next door. After exploring that option, we discovered that the amount we had pledged – plus what was already in our building fund – was just enough to put down a competitive bid to purchase 10-acres next door.
- ❖ Think about it. If we weren't already well into a building project and if we didn't already have over \$10M committed, I doubt we would've moved fast enough to offer a competitive bid. It would've been difficult to mobilize our members in time to purchase that land.
 - **But because we had been talking about expanding for a while now and because we had the exact amount needed, secured in pledges, we were able to come together in a short amount of time and agree to buy that land.** I'm not sure it could've happened any other way.
- ❖ **It's so easy to chalk it up to coincidence. But with eyes of faith, we realize that, all along, it was the hidden hand of the Lord granting favor to his church.** It was his good and gracious providence. And I draw attention to it with the hope that it'll produce hearts of gratitude. Grateful for all the subtle ways in which God has blessed us.

The Lord's Favor Felt Through Human Hands

- ❖ But I realize someone might say, *“Well, you claim that it was God's hidden hand at work behind that land purchase. But it's not like \$10M dropped down from the sky. It took a lot of sacrificial giving on the part of church members and other generous people. We had to do it.”* And to that I say, *“Yes. Exactly. That's how God usually provides.”* This leads to the second lesson we can learn about providence and the favor of the Lord: **The Lord's favor can touch us through human hands.**

- ❖ If I were to make the claim that “*God healed me,*” you’d probably expect to hear a testimony about a miraculous healing I experienced that surpassed all medical odds. But imagine if my story went like this, “*I wasn’t feeling well, so I went to see a doctor. A nurse ran some tests. The doctor gave me a diagnosis and wrote a prescription. I got it filled out by a pharmacist. And in no time I was feeling a lot better. Like I said, God healed me.*”
 - You might be thinking, “*Wait, what do you mean ‘God healed you’? You just got healed the ordinary way through medical professionals and medicine.*” Exactly. **And why do we assume God only heals through spectacular miracles AND not as well through the hands of ordinary doctors, nurses, and pharmacists?**

- ❖ **Providence teaches that God is hidden in our human vocations, and his favor is, more often than not, felt through human hands.** We see this in Ruth’s experience of the Lord’s favor. It came through the ordinary hands of a man named Boaz. Look back at vv5-13. Here we see Boaz return to his field to find Ruth gleaning, and he inquires about her.
 - The narrator reminds us in v6 that she’s a Moabitess. Other landowners would’ve chased her off. But Boaz immediately accepts her and says she can keep coming back to his field. He says in v8 to “*keep close to my young women.*” He grants her permission to glean in the main section of the field and not just the corners. He also gives her access to their water supply, and he warns his young men not to harass her.

- ❖ **You have to realize that Boaz was going way beyond the call of duty. This was pure favor – kindness beyond what’s expected.** Ruth recognizes this in v10, “*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?’*” Why are you doing this for me?
 - Boaz says he heard about the kindness she showed Naomi, and how she left her people and Moabite gods to commit herself to Israel and Israel’s God. In v12, he says. “*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!*”
 - What a great image! **He’s comparing Ruth to a baby chick who takes refuge under the wings of her mother hen.** In the same way, he’s praying that she finds protection and provision under God’s wings. **But the point is Boaz is the very answer to his own prayer.** The Lord’s favor towards Ruth will be felt through human hands – Boaz’s hands!

- ❖ And the Lord’s favor continues to pour forth in v14. Boaz invites Ruth to lunch with him and his servants. She eats to her heart’s content and gets to keep the leftovers. And it gets better. In vv15-16 Boaz instructs his men to deliberately drop sheaves on the ground for Ruth to pick up. V17, “*So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.*” Now an *ephah* is about 35-50lbs of barley. The average output of a male worker in those days was about 2-5lbs a day. So she gleaned in one day what would’ve taken a man two weeks to produce!

- ❖ Imagine Naomi's shock when Ruth returns home with a 50lbs sack of barley and a box of leftovers. Look at v19, "*Where did you glean today? Where have you worked?*" She immediately realizes that's a silly question since no one gleans that much in one day. The only explanation is someone must have shown favor. And before even asking who it is, Naomi cries out, "*Blessed be the man who took notice of you.*"
 - Keep reading, "*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.'*" **And suddenly that heart of Naomi's – which had grown so hard – began to melt.** Her suspicions about God's goodness suddenly vanished. It took one word – one name – Boaz.

- ❖ Naomi knew the significance. She explains in v20, "*This man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.*" According to Mosaic Law, if a man lost property, a kinsman had legal right to redeem the land so it stays in the family (Lev 25:25-28). And if a husband dies, a kinsman could redeem the widow by bearing her children. Thus perpetuating the dead man's line (Deut 25:5-10). **A man like Boaz was in position to serve as a kinsman-redeemer.** To help Naomi redeem Elimelech's land and to marry Ruth, preserving the family line.

- ❖ None of this escapes Naomi's attention. She immediately invokes the LORD's blessing on Boaz. Look at v20. "*May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead.*" Now the Hebrew in this verse is vague as to whose kindness Naomi is referring to – is it Boaz's or the LORD's? Whose kindness has not forsaken her? The answer is both. **Naomi is clearly grateful for Boaz's kindness. But now she realizes that the Lord's hand, his kindness, is hidden in Boaz's.** This is providence. She gets it now.

- ❖ Consider how far she's come. Chapter 1 ends with Naomi convinced God is against her. **But by the end of chapter 2, she realizes God has not forsaken her.** The evidence was a 50lbs sack of barley from the hands of Boaz. This was proof of the Lord's favor.
 - Now conceivably, she could've chalked it up to mere coincidence. She could've attributed Boaz's generosity to the fact that he's a noble man. **She could've thanked her lucky stars that nice guys still exist out there. But then she would've completely missed God's hand.**

- ❖ And we do that all the time. **When something good happens to us, we consider ourselves lucky.** When people treat us kindly, we think it's because they're good folks with good hearts. When church members give generously to raise over \$10M – or when they significantly increase their giving to meet our significantly increased operating expenses due to the new building – we're tempted to just rationalize where the money came from.
 - **But are we comfortable saying God was the One who provided us the necessary funds?** That God raised enough money to buy that land? That God covered our operating deficit? **Friends, we can confidently say that – if we embrace the biblical doctrine of providence.**

- ❖ Now, look, we can't give definite numbers yet because there are still some 2024 expenses to reimburse. We'll have to wait until next week. But we know how much was donated to the church through our PayPal Giving Fund in the last half of the month. It's not accounted for in our bulletin because it's not scheduled to be transferred from PayPal to our checking account until the end of January. But let's just say it's looking really good for our year-end bottom-line. **We were worried all year long about ending with a historic operating deficit. And God responded with a historic year-end giving bump!**
- ❖ My point in bringing this up is – to point to our text and its emphasis on God's providential hand of blessing – **and to challenge us to consider how behind the generous hands of all who gave last year are the hidden hands of God.** Or how behind the kind face of a friend who arrives at just the right time to encourage you – is actually the face of God.
 - That's what providence teaches – that when the Lord shows up to do a mighty work in our lives – it's not just through the miraculous. Providence teaches that God's normal means is to work through ordinary events and ordinary people who just so happen to show us favor. **God's grace usually has a human face.** And in Naomi's case, she properly recognized God's grace in Boaz. And that realization was all it took to revive her faith and restore her hope.
- ❖ Friends, if you're in a difficult season of life right now, I want you to know God's grace has not forsaken you. He has not abandoned you to suffering. I know it's hard to see, but his blessings are in your life. **Perhaps your just looking in the wrong place. Instead of looking up for the clouds to part, maybe you should be looking at the faces around you.**
- ❖ **And for Christians today, the human face of God's grace is, first and foremost, that of Jesus Christ.** The similarities between Boaz and Christ are striking. Just as Boaz arrived at just the right time to meet Ruth, Jesus arrived at the fullness of time to meet us.
 - Like Boaz was to Ruth, Jesus became, to us, a relative. He took on our flesh. Just as Boaz was a worthy man, Jesus was, in fact, the worthiest man to ever live – because he walked in perfect obedience to the Father. And just like Boaz, Jesus was suitable and willing to become our kinsman-redeemer. And he redeemed us on the cross!
- ❖ If the Lord's favor – shown through Boaz's kindness – was enough to revive Naomi's faith and restore her hope, **then the Lord's favor – demonstrated by the Crucified and Risen Christ – is more than enough to give you overwhelming evidence that God is still good.** Even when life is difficult. Even when your problems seem insurmountable. The favor of the Lord is available to you through the merciful and kind face and hands of Christ. That's an invitation for you – to receive him, by grace, through faith.

The Lord's Favor Reciprocated

- ❖ So we've seen how the Lord's favor can be found in the seemingly random and how it can be felt in the ordinary touch of human hands. And now let's close with an application. Our third lesson is this: **The Lord's favor should be reciprocated by those it has blessed.**

- ❖ We see this principle lived out in Boaz's life. Unlike Elimelech, Boaz didn't leave Israel when the famine hit. He sought refuge under the Lord's wing. And the Lord's favor was evident. Boaz had fields full of barley and many crews of hired servants working under him.
 - **He was blessed by the Lord, and now he sought to be a blessing to others.** He wanted to reciprocate the favor. And he couldn't have chosen a riskier or costlier way. Boaz tried to help a poor, Moabite widow with unmatched generosity that I'm sure hurt his bottom line. And with an apparent disregard of his reputation. He knew people were going to talk. Rumors would spread. His intentions would be questioned. **Boaz knew the risks attached to living a blessed life aimed at blessing others.** And he embraced it for the joy set before him.

- ❖ And the same should be true for all who follow Jesus. **Like Boaz, you have the chance to be the face of God's grace to those whom he has put in your life. Is there someone in your life right now for whom you can be the face of God's grace or the hands of his mercy?** Perhaps there's someone in a difficult mess. Someone in need physically, financially, or emotionally. There will be some risk involved and some costs to pay. But there will be joy. There will be the favor of the Lord.
 - **And let's respond to God's favor and blessing – evident in our historic year-end giving – by reciprocating that blessing through an active engagement in this ongoing fundraising campaign.** Again, I'm praying for 100% member engagement. That all of us make a pledge towards this project. That all of us reciprocate God's blessing, through a gift, however he leads.