

Hope Is Alive!

Ruth Chapter 2

The 2008 presidential election is heating up, and they are all promising one thing – hope for the future. “If you elect me,” they say, “things will improve.” Do you remember the elections in 2004? I think John Kerry had the most articulate way of saying this when he coined the phrase: “help is on the way.” Remember that? Jobs are being sent overseas – “Help is on the way.” Families are losing health insurance – “Help is on the way.” Homelessness is on the rise – “Help is on the way.” Elect me – and I will give you hope for the future.

Politicians know that the idea of hope connects with something deep inside of us. Hope is attractive. Hope is desirable. But even more – hope gives us reason for living. When life is hard we desperately look for hope in the way a drowning man reaches out for a lifeline. G.K. Chesterton said - “It is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength.”

That is what we are talking about this morning – hope. Could you use some hope this morning? Hope for your situation at work? Hope for your marriage? Hope for a relative going through a hard time? Hope for your finances? Hope for your future? I bet you could. But where do you find hope? From a politician’s promise? In a self-help book? From a friend? Wealth? Those may provide some reason for hope – but where does ultimate hope come from?

This morning we have a long passage, 23 verses which you heard so well read for us and we want to follow its four movements: 1) The introduction of Boaz. 2) The hard work of Ruth. 3) Boaz’s interaction with Ruth and 4) Naomi’s change of heart. Let’s start with the introduction of Boaz.

Introduction of Boaz

“Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.” Notice that the narrator introduces Boaz to us before he is introduced to other the characters in the story. This is a literary device that heightens suspense. It is like when you watch a movie and you know something the main character doesn’t. We are teased to wonder if maybe Boaz will be the answer to our problems - Maybe help is on the way!

We are particularly excited about Boaz for two reasons. First, because he is relative – related to Elimelech – maybe because he is a relative he will come to this family’s aide? Not only is it a relative, but, second, he is a man of wealth. In Hebrew the phrase is “*Gibbor Hayil*”. It is a wonderful thing to be called a “*Gibbor Hayil*” - if you are a man. If we are looking for a name for our men’s ministry – this would be a great name: *Gibbor Hayil*. What is a *Gibbor Hayil*? Like *hesed*, it is hard to bring into English. It could be a man who is wealthy such as in the New American Standard, but that is probably not the best translation. Other Bible versions capture various aspects of this type of man: A man of standing (NIV), a worthy man (ESV), a prominent man of noble character (HCSB), a man of substance (JPS). And so in this one phrase, Boaz is introduced as a prominent, capable, good, worthy, brace and noble man who possessed a good reputation.

Now look at Boaz’s arrival on the scene, verse four: “Now behold Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, “May the LORD bless you.” And they said to him, “May the LORD bless you.” The first words out of his mouth are words of blessing from Yahweh. This further attracts us to him and causes us to think that hope is alive – help is on the way.

The story is told of a man approached a little league baseball game one afternoon. He asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, "Eighteen to nothing--we're behind." "Boy," said the spectator, "I'll bet you're discouraged." "Why should I be discouraged?"

replied the little boy. "We haven't even gotten up to bat yet!" In chapter two - Boaz has stepped up to bat and we have hope!

Ruth's Hard Work:

Now that we have been introduced to Boaz – let's notice Ruth's hard work. Back to verse two. **And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."**

It is the barley harvest. Ruth knows that as widows they will need to eat to survive and so she sets out to glean from the fields. The law provided for poor people to go to the fields at harvest to collect the leftover grain:

Deut. 24:19 "When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands."

So Ruth sets out - verse three: **"So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers."** Ruth is willing to work very hard to bring some hope of provision to her and Naomi. It was hard work for several reasons. First you are following the reapers and can only collect what they drop or miss. Second there are other gleaners, not just you trying to get those scraps. Third, Ruth is not just trying to feed herself, but Naomi as well. The equivalent in today's culture might be a person collecting aluminum cans to survive – little reward for great effort.

So, Ruth makes a bold and risky decision. She asks the foreman for more productive work, look at verse seven – **"Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves."** (7). This is astonishing. This is a picture by Van Gogh of sheaves – when the harvested grain is put into stacks. There would be much more grain here to pick up and no other gleaners because the poor were not allowed among the sheaves. Ruth is being very assertive and risks being kicked off the fields for such a comment.

We will see in a moment how Boaz deals with her request – but her hard work concludes at the end of the day with verse 17. “So she gleaned in the field into the evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah (about 30 pounds) of barley.”

We have hope of provision because of Ruth’s hard work – There are no miracles here, but a person who is willing to roll up her sleeves and bring home the barley through the sweat of her brow. It is significant, I think, that our first source of hope is through hard work.

Comedian Billy Crystal came from a loving family. In his autobiography he tell the story of how his mother coped with the death of his father – How much respect he had for her as she changed gears to do the hard work necessary to survive. “She became the greatest hero I will ever know in my life. My mom was fifty years old when my father died in front of her like that. Fifty. A woman who had to grow up, with a boy who couldn’t help but grow up, and two others who were still in college. She kept us together. Her plan was simple. She began to study at a secretarial school, to learn shorthand, typing and dictation so she could get a job as a secretary. She had not had a 9-5 job since her days at Macy’s in the 1930’s. She’d had the toughest job, of course, raising three children, but now it all depended on her...

Just like Billy Crystal’s mom – because the men had died - the responsibility to provide for her family shifted to Ruth - and she was willing to do the hard work necessary. What an example for us. Need hope in your life? The question is: “*Are you willing to do the hard work?*” Sometimes it seems that rather than working hard, we would rather wait for God to do a miracle - like the coin in the fish’s mouth – and so we sit back and wait. Sometimes God does work that way. But more often, God blesses us as we work hard – Need hope? Roll up your sleeves and get to work!

Boaz’s Interaction with Ruth.

We have been introduced to Boaz, and we have seen Ruth’s willingness to work – Let’s now

see what happens when the two of them meet. Look back at verse three, “**she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.**” The Hebrew is literally “by chance” she came to Boaz’s field – that is – she didn’t know the field belonged to Boaz – she didn’t even know who Boaz was! But the narrator is communicating more than that – following immediately upon the introduction Boaz, it is a literary device that communicates just the opposite. We anticipate a divine appointment!

Boaz sees Ruth waiting for him in the shelter and asks, “**Whose young woman is this?**” Boaz has not seen her before – she was obviously new, and a foreign woman. The servant says, “**She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab.**” (2:6). But notice here the emphasis on her origin – Moabite! Now - in diversity training we used to say, “Label jars, not people.” - Ruth is labeled with a big sticker – Moabite! This is not a positive comment on – being a Moabite she would expect to face prejudice and scorn from most Israelites.

This begins a series of kind acts where Boaz shows hesed to Ruth. Hope is alive and help is on the way. Let’s briefly detail them – for they come in abundance. First, verse eight, Boaz calls her “**my daughter**” not “Moabite” – He treats her kindly with affection. From this we learn Boaz to be an older man – probably the same generation as Naomi – he sees himself as father figure to this woman in terms of their age. Second, He offers for her to stay in his fields – Ruth will have steady work through the harvest season. Third, he offers her to stay with his maids – this probably signifies a promotion that she will be a step higher than the gleaners – and perhaps even work within the sheaves of grain. Fourth, verse nine he provides her protection from physical harm. If you know what harassment is in the modern workplace – it was a much worse problem in those days – especially for a foreign, beautiful woman with no male connections. Fifth, he makes provision for her to have water. Sixth, later in verse 14, he provides her food to eat. She has now moved from the

maids to being with the reapers. Seventh, verse 15, he gives her direct permission to glean among the sheaves. Eighth, he protects her from verbal abuse. Ninth, verse 16 he arranges extra grain for her to take home to Naomi and tenth, he again forbids rebuke of her.

We are overwhelmed with the hesed Boaz shows to Ruth and the question is WHY? Why is Boaz being so kind to Ruth? Why? Is it because of LOVE! – Boaz saw Ruth across the field and his heart began to beat faster – he galloped through the field and said with a quivering voice – “*Who is this?*” It was love at first sight. We have a “providential romance” – Max Lucado “the romance of redemption” – J Vernon McGee. “A romantic comedy!” – Reg Grant. Yes, I can see it now – Boaz played by Tom Hanks and Ruth by Meg Ryan.

am teasing here because I think some – especially American popular commentaries - have gone overboard in labeling this a book of romance. I do believe the author has built in some romantic tension between Boaz and Ruth, but at least at this point it is probably not the focus of attention. Why did Boaz treat Ruth so kindly? Ruth asks that very question in verse 10, **Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?”** We have the answer in verses 11-12

Ruth 2:11 And Boaz answered and said to her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know.

Ruth 2:12 “May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.”

Here it is – let’s not miss it. Why did Ruth find such favor? *Because the LORD God of Israel was repaying her, through Boaz, for the hesed she had shown to Naomi.*

You see – perhaps a few days earlier Boaz heard an amazing story about a young Moabite woman – yes Moabite – who risked everything and left everything for an elderly Israelite woman.

Maybe Boaz asked, “What was the Israelite’s name? Naomi? Are you sure? She is a relative of mine! What was the name of the Moabite? Ruth. May the Lord bless her for her kindness.” And then Ruth shows up in his field to glean the scraps. How could Boaz not return - and in a small way repay her generosity. Hope is alive – help is on the way.

Naomi’s Change of Heart

We have one more point– the story goes back to Naomi’s - who has railed against God, who has been bitter and cold. Hope now blows a cool breeze across the dry heart of an old woman. Ruth brings back the abundance of grain. Naomi learns that she gleaned in Boaz’s field and she says, “[Ruth 2:20](#) And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead.” Do you see it – hesed – loyal, faithful love. God was there working all the time. Naomi didn’t see it before, but she does now. Yes she cried: “[It is good my daughter, that you go out with his maids](#), so that others do not fall upon you in another field.” The protection Boaz has offered – it is good. The emergence of the close relative Boaz- it is good! The 30 pounds of barley – it is good! It is good, It is good, It is good. Help is on the way. Help has arrived. Hope is alive.

Application:

How can we apply this text this week? I think the main lesson of chapter two is this: When we live out the hesed love of God – we will be blessed and have hope. How do you live out the hesed love of God. We have two examples to inspire us this week.

First is Boaz – a *Gibbor Hayil* – someone who uses their resources to help one in need. How can you use your resources to help someone in need? To go above and beyond and shower someone with blessings? You don’t have to be wealthy – just use what you have. Write a note of

encouragement. Lend a hand to a neighbor. Give someone a phone call. Live out the hesed love of God – like Boaz. Use the resources you have to help others who are in need.

We also have the example of Ruth – who was willing to work so hard to provide for her mother in law. Take inspiration from Ruth this morning who took risks and was assertive. I know that you have a hard jobs, too. competing in the marketplace is difficulty, raising children is difficult, teaching children is a challenge. But in our hard work we are showing the hesed love of God keep your hand to the plow - It was in Ruth's hard work that hope came to Ruth.

Help is on the way. Hope is alive. You might see it in your life from a person like Boaz, who helps you in a difficult time. Or you might see it from the hard work of your own hand, opening up doors of opportunity. Give thanks for that – but recognize that ultimately, the power behind it all is God. It is like Naomi said – though Ruth and Boaz played a role in bringing home the 30 pounds of barley – but the real power was from God – God had poured out His hesed upon the living and the dead. Help is on the way – through Him.