



Central Peninsula Church

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Ruth 2
Mark Mitchell
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When God Provides More Than Enough

SERIES: *Romance and Redemption*

A young woman brings home her fiancé to meet her parents. After dinner, her mother tells her father to find out more about the young man. The father invites the fiancé into his study.

"So what are your plans?" the father asks the young man.

"I'm a Bible scholar," he replies.

"A Bible scholar. Hmmm," the father says. "Admirable, but what will you do to provide the kind of house my daughter is accustomed to?"

"I'll study," the young man replies, "and God will provide for us."

"And how will you buy her the kind of engagement ring she deserves?" asks the father.

"I'll concentrate on my studies," the young man replies, "and God will provide for us."

"And children?" asks the father. "How will you support children?"

"Don't worry, sir, God will provide," replies the fiancé.

The conversation proceeds like this, and each time the father questions, the young man insists that God will provide. Later the mother asks, "How did it go, honey?"

The father answers, "He has no job and no plans, but the good news is he thinks I'm God."

The question we're confronted in the second chapter of Ruth is, Who will provide? Last week we learned of Naomi's migration to Moab, the death of her husband and sons, her return to Bethlehem with her daughter-in-law, Ruth, and her bitter complaint. The bottom line is, Ruth and Naomi are dirt poor. How will these two widows survive? Who will provide?

We might think that this question of provision is irrelevant for us today. Do we need food? We go down to the supermarket and buy it. But don't forget that it's not that way for everybody in our world today. And with the economic downturn the last few years the question of provision is one that many people right here in the Bay Area have been asking. By the way, the question of provision doesn't only have to do with food – it deals with any number of needs we might have: companionship, health, even spiritual needs such as forgiveness or just the strength to endure something difficult. Every morning you wake up, in some way or another, you're asking whether or not God will provide. You face that question at work, in raising your kids, in paying your bills, in all you do.

This is what Ruth chapter 2 is all about. Will God provide what we need? If so, how does He do it? And what is our part in the process?

I. THE MECHANICS OF GOD'S PROVISION 2:1-7

Let's begin with vv. 1-2. "Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of

Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess 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.'"

In v. 1 the writer lets us in on a secret. He tells us something Ruth and Naomi don't know about. He introduces Boaz. We're not exactly sure how it fits either, but we know that somehow this man will come into play in an important way. This adds suspense to the story. He tells us two very important things about Boaz: *First, he is a man of great wealth.* This means more than that he was rich. It means he was a man of great worth – a valiant, powerful man of high status in the community; perhaps even a warrior. This is important to the story in that it hints at the fact that Boaz has the power to do something to help these two women. *Second, he is of the family (clan) of Elimelech,* Naomi's deceased husband. This is important because people in the same clan were supposed to watch out for one another. They had responsibilities to one another. And so we're led to wonder how this powerful relative will fit into God's plans for Naomi.

I can imagine the two women sitting at the breakfast table with their heads in their hands and nothing to eat. But suddenly, Ruth has an idea and she presents it to Naomi: "I'll go to the field and glean among the ears of grain..." Ruth is referring here to something God had set up in His word as a means to take care of the poor. It's actually quite simple, but at the same time ingenious. Listen to 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.**" Somehow Ruth got a hold of that Scripture and she thought, "Hey, that's talking about me! I'm both a widow and an alien." Throughout the Scripture we see this basic truth: God cares for the poor. This is not a political issue; it's a spiritual issue. It's not about being a Democrat or Republican. It's about being a man or woman of the word. God's word makes provision for the poor. Notice that his way of doing that allows them to maintain their dignity. They had to get out and work for it. It wasn't a welfare system as we know it. It wasn't a handout.

She speaks of, "gleaning after one in whose sight I might find favor." It seems not everyone obeyed this law. This was the time of the Judges when "every man did what was right in his own eyes." So we're left to wonder if Ruth will "find favor" with someone as she gleans?

And then, Naomi, who is probably too old or too depressed to work says, "You go for it, Ruth." So Ruth takes her idea and heads out towards the field. Let's see what happens next. "**So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the**

family of Elimelech. Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, 'May the LORD be with you.' And they said to him, 'May the LORD bless you.' Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, 'Whose young woman is this?' The servant in charge of the reapers replied, 'She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab. And she said, "Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves." Thus she came and has remained from the morning until now; she has been sitting in the house for a little while'" (vv. 3-7).

The first thing we're told is that as she began reaping she "happened" or "chanced" upon the field of Boaz. Now remember, we know something about Boaz that Ruth doesn't! And right now we see something very exciting going on! He's a relative! He's a man of worth! You see that in the way he greets his workers: "May the Lord be with you." And they say to him, "May the Lord bless you." He's not just a man's man, he's a man of God. And he's a fair man; people get in line to work for him. I mean let's face it: this is the most acceptable bachelor in Bethlehem! I'm sure all the mothers of marriageable daughters made Boaz cookies and invited him over for dinner all the time! But Ruth doesn't know any of this. She hasn't planned to go to Boaz's field. She just chanced upon it as she was trying to eek out a living. We know, of course, that what Ruth didn't plan, God did. God was at work here.

And then Boaz happens to visit his field at the right time. Now our hearts are really beating. That's why the writer begins by saying, "*Now behold...*" Will Boaz notice Ruth? Will they somehow meet? Sure enough, Boaz notices Ruth. And he asks about her to his foreman, "Whose is she? Who does she belong to? I don't recognize her." Was this love at first sight? Was he saying, "Who is that? Where has she been all my life?" I don't think so, but if Hollywood ever got a hold of this story, they would go to town! Cameron Diaz would play Ruth. Brad Pitt would be Boaz. He'd ride up on a Palomino horse. She'd have just the right amount of sweat and dirt on her face. Their eyes would somehow meet as he rode up. But that's Hollywood. The real story is better. Boaz asks, "Who does she belong to?" The foreman explains she is the Moabite woman that had returned with Naomi. She asked permission to glean in his fields. It's as if he's saying, "Boaz. Leave her alone. Not only is she poor; she is a Moabite. You can do better, Boaz!"

Before we look at Boaz's response let's step back for a minute and consider what we've seen here about how God provides. There are two things that stand out in this first scene: *First, the initiative of Ruth.* Ruth doesn't sit around and moan about how hard life has been. She doesn't sit around and wait for God to act. She does something. She recalls reading something in God's word about gleaning. She'll find a field and glean. We know from the beginning of the chapter that Boaz is the man, but she doesn't know that. We wonder, how will she find Boaz's field? Did God draw a map for her? Was there a voice from heaven telling her where to go? Did she have some kind of dream where God said 'Go to the field of a man named Boaz?'" I wish we

could interview Ruth right now and ask her. I'd say, "Ruth, you must have had some very definite leading about what to do and where to go." She'd have said, "Well, no, not really. Didn't you read the story? It says I just 'happened' to come to Boaz's field. Sure, I asked the Lord to guide my steps. But I had no idea I would end up in Boaz's field. Now as I look back I can see that God was leading me into that field. It was no mistake. But I didn't know it then."

You see, besides the initiative of Ruth, we also see *something in these verses of the quiet providence of God.* God is directing the steps of Boaz and Ruth without them even knowing it. He's taking the ordinary events of their lives and the small choices they make of doing what seems right at the time and using them to accomplish purposes far greater than they could ever imagine. Aren't you glad Ruth had an idea and went for it? Aren't you glad she happened on the field of Boaz? Do you know that if these things hadn't come together there would have been no King David; there would have been no baby in the manger at Bethlehem either. Remember, Ruth and Boaz would become King David's grandparents, and Jesus was in the line of King David. So angels held their breath as they watched Ruth approach the fields of Boaz that day. So much hung on this chance meeting in the field.

When God provides, He does so in such a way that combines our own initiative and good choices with His own quiet providence. We don't have to wait around for God to send us an e-mail from heaven telling us what to do and where to go. I talk to so many believers today who talk about God's will like they have a direct line to heaven or like he's given them a road map. "The Lord told me to do that or say that..." I wish it was that clear for me, but it rarely is.

I remember when I was trying to decide whether or not to marry Lynn. I kept begging God to tell me. I wanted it written in the clouds. And then I talked to an older and wiser believer and he asked me, Is she a believer? I said yes. Do you love her? I said yes. Do you want to be with her? I said, Oh yeah! Does she love you? I said I think so. Do you get along pretty well? I said yeah we get a long great. He said, well what are you waiting for? Just ask her.

A few years later Lynn and I were trying to decide what seminary to go to. We narrowed it down to three; one in Boston; one in Pasadena; and one in Denver. We asked God to show us where to go. We went out to Boston and liked it but the cost of living was too much. We went down to Pasadena and said, "We really want to go to seminary but not bad enough to live in Pasadena." So we decided to go to Denver because it was a good school in a nice place to live and it was cheap. We never heard God's voice and we never got a road map. Later, we could look back and say, "Yeah, that was God's perfect will for us." But that's later.

Sometimes God's word helps us narrow down the choices. If Lynn were not a believer and I was asking God to lead me as to whether or not I should ask her to marry me, all I'd have to do is read his word and the decision would have been clear. Sometimes circumstances make one choice seem better than the others. Doors open and close. If Ruth were here she might recall, "When I went out that morning, I really didn't know where to go. I went to this one field with nice grain but the people there weren't very friendly, and there was no one else gleaning there, so I moved on. When I came to fields of Boaz I could see that things were

different. I saw that as an open door.”

I have to tell you it's exciting to live this way. The providence of God makes every day of our lives such an adventure! If we had a roadmap or a blue print life would be so boring. There would be no surprises. This way we have no idea how God might use what we think of as the most mundane events and ordinary choices. How could life ever be boring knowing this? You never know what God's doing.

Let's get back to our story. Remember, Boaz is now left with a decision about this Moabite woman, Ruth, and her request to glean among the sheaves. How will Boaz respond? Will he take his responsibility to the clan seriously? We've seen something of the mechanics of God's provision, now let's see the abundance of God's provision in vv. 8-16.

II. THE ABUNDANCE OF GOD'S PROVISION 2:8-16

In vv. 8-9 we begin to see that Boaz is indeed a man of great worth. **“Then Boaz said to Ruth, ‘Listen carefully, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field; furthermore, do not go on from this one, but stay here with my maids. Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Indeed, I have commanded the servants not to touch you. When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the servants draw.’”**

He gives her permission to glean. He tells her to stay in his field and not to wander to another field where she might get hassled. He will instruct his own reapers not to bother her. Gleaners were considered a nuisance and often treated with contempt. Ruth would especially be a target since she was a foreigner. So, Boaz tells her to “*stay close*” to his own maids and glean in his own fields where she'll be safe. These maids were female employees who followed after the male reapers and collected and bound the piles of cut grain. She was to follow after them and glean from the sheaves they bound up. He even allows her to drink from the drawn water. It was hot out there and normally a gleaner had to draw her own water which took precious time away from the gleaning. We can see that Boaz is not just fulfilling his duty but he's going further. He's going beyond the law and stepping into the realm of grace.

Ruth is overwhelmed by Boaz's generosity. Look at vv. 10-13. **“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?’ Boaz replied 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. 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.’ Then she said, ‘I have found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants.’”**

Remember in v. 1 she said to Naomi, *“Perhaps I'll find favor in someone's sight.”* Now she says, *“Why have I found favor in your sight?”* In other words, “I've found the one I was looking for!” But why so much favor? Boaz says, “I've heard all about you. I've heard about your willingness to leave your country because of your loyalty to Naomi.” And then he prays a blessing upon her that she might be rewarded for this. Boaz speaks of *“...the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek*

refuge.” What a beautiful way of describing what it means to trust in God. God is pictured as a large bird, say an eagle, who provides a protective shield over His young. And Ruth is described simply as one who seeks refuge under that shield. That's what faith is. That's what it means to trust in God. No heroics here. Just running to God for protection and hiding under His wings.

I love Ruth's response: *“I have found favor (there it is again!) in your sight. You've comforted me and spoken kindly to me (spoken softly to my heart).”* Notice she still doesn't feel deserving: *“Though I'm not even like one of your maidservants.”* The word she uses for maidservant is one referring to a slave woman from the lowest social caste. In Ruth's mind it's still grace. She still didn't deserve it.

Somewhere in this exchange I believe romance began to bud. The best kind of romance! The kind that surprises us. Let me just offer a footnote: Men – take a lesson from Boaz on how to talk to a woman. He praises her and he speaks softly to her heart. If you want a woman to respond to you here's how to do it. First of all, you have to talk to her. For some of us that's a leap. But talk to her heart. Praise her for those qualities you see in her. And be willing to step up as a protector and provider. Women – take a lesson from Ruth. She could have said, “You're darn right I've given up alot. Do you know what I've been through? And the Bible gives me every right to glean in your fields. But no, she shows a kind of gracious humility. She is a very determined woman, but she still had a very tender, humble heart. She was persistent yet not demanding; resourceful yet not independent; strong yet not proud. That's attractive. Here is a secret: godliness is attractive!

That's what men respond to. Look at vv. 14-16. **“At mealtime Boaz said to her, ‘Come here, that you may eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.’ So she sat beside the reapers; and he served her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied and had some left. When she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, ‘Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her. Also you shall purposely pull out for her some grain from the bundles and leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.’”** Boaz invites Ruth to lunch with him and his reapers. This was unheard of! And then we're told that he *“heaped up”* a pile of roasted grain and set it before her. She had so much that she ate to her full and had some left over. Then he speaks to his servants and tells them not to hassle her as she gleans. And then he does something that tops it all off. He tells them to cheat a little bit – pull some grain from the bundles and sort of leave it around for her to pick up. Now that's cheating. By the end of the day, she had about 25 pounds of barley. That's more than enough.

What do we learn here about God's provision? *When you take refuge under the wings of God, he provides, and not only does he provide, he provides more than enough.* Just like the disciples who fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish had some left over, so we will always have some left over. We can never exhaust God's resources. His grace can never get used up. He'll never run out. He'll never tire of giving to us. We might think we've pushed God to the limit, but He's only just begun to give to us. Everything you need

is found under his wings. What is it that you need from Him? Safety? Psalm 17 says, **“Hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who assail me.”** Do you need love? Psalm 36 says, **“How precious is your unfailing love, O God. (I) find shelter in the shadow of your wings.”** Do you need peace in the midst of the storm? Psalm 57 says, **“I hide beneath the shadow of your wings until this violent storm is passed.”** Do you need joy? Psalm 68 says, **“I sing for joy in the shadow of your protective wings.”** How about just hope that things will get better? Psalm 91 says, **“I will say of the LORD, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’ Surely he’ll save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. He’ll cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you’ll find refuge...”** Maybe you need companionship or forgiveness or wisdom. Maybe just food to put on the table. God loves to give to us. And when He does, he gives more than enough. He never runs out. There have been times in my life when I have said, “Lord, I can’t come to you and confess this sin one more time. I must be pushing your grace to the limit.” But, we can’t do that. There is always more than enough grace.

III. THE ENJOYMENT OF GOD’S PROVISION 2:18-23

We might be wondering at this point about Naomi, or shall we call her Mara? She’s back in Bethlehem wondering if Ruth gleaned enough to bring a few kernels of barley back to her. Look what happens next in vv. 17-23, which I’ve called the enjoyment of God’s provision. **“So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. She took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took it out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied. Her mother-in-law then said to her, ‘Where did you glean today and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be blessed.’ So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, ‘The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.’ 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.’ Again Naomi said to her, ‘The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives.’ Then Ruth the Moabitess said, ‘Furthermore, he said to me, “You should stay close to my servants until they have finished all my harvest.”’ Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, ‘It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maids, so that others do not fall upon you in another field.’ So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law.”**

When Ruth sees Naomi she first opens up her shawl and shows what she’s gleaned. Twenty-five pounds of barley. And then, as kind of an added surprise, she pulls out from behind her back the roasted grain she had left over from lunch. What a surprise! And so Naomi says, “Somebody’s been extra nice to you! May he be blessed! Where did you get all of this?” And Ruth describes the

day’s events but waits till the last minute to reveal the name of the man who was so kind to her: *“The name of the man is... Boaz.”*

When Naomi hears that name the wheels start turning. She says, *“He is one of our closest relatives.”* This word “closest relative” refers to a kinsman redeemer. The idea of the kinsman redeemer was a very important one in the OT. He had certain rights and responsibilities pertaining to Naomi’s family. You can see the wheels turning in her head. She thinks, “This has potential!”

And then Ruth reports some further good news – she had permission to *“stay close”* to Boaz’s servants for the rest of the harvest. That would mean plenty of food for awhile. The scene closes with the writer saying that is exactly what Ruth did – she *“stayed close”* to the maids of Boaz and lived with Naomi for the remaining six weeks.

This little word *“stay close”* is important in the book. We saw it in chapter one as Ruth stayed close or clung to Naomi. We see it in this chapter as Ruth stays close or clings to the place of God’s provision. This is a covenant word that is used often in the OT to refer to God’s relentless clinging to us and our staying close to Him. The writer is using this word to hammer home the truth that it’s only *as we cling to Him He will provide for all our needs.* More than anything else Ruth was a clinger, she was one who hung on. When we do that, he provides. What do you need from him today? Whatever it is, he’s more than willing to provide. But are you willing to move out in faith and obedience to his word? Are you willing to leave all of your other props and take refuge under his wings? Are you willing to keep clinging to him? When you do God will provide more than enough!

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