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The Nature of Saving Faith

Ruth 5

Prayer: *Father, again we just thank you for what you have done and how you have provided for your church, Lord, the ability for us to come into people's living rooms rather than to gather here at the church. We again pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit not necessarily in this building but in each of the households and homes that are receiving your word. We pray for your grace, your insight and your wisdom, and we pray again that this would be of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we're in the book of Ruth and when we last left Ruth, she and Naomi were walking into the city of Bethlehem. Naomi had left Israel some ten years earlier, she and her husband had had two sons and they were now returning crestfallen because she had lost both her husband and her two sons and she was returning with the last remaining part of her family, her Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth. And as she says to the women who are welcoming here into Bethlehem, we pick up on Ruth 1 starting at verse 19. This is *Ruth 1:19*. She says: *"Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has*

dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the almighty has brought calamity upon me?" So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

We pointed out last week what a great act of faith it was on Ruth's part to leave her home and her roots and align herself forever with Naomi and with Naomi's God, and we spoke about three different parts that make up genuine faith, that it is a God-given attitude, number one; number two, that it is characterized by a certainty of conviction; and number three, that it produces an appropriate action. And so we've already looked at, number one, that Ruth's faith was a God-given gift, and number two, that her conviction was such that she pulled up stakes and aligned herself fully with Naomi's God, and today I want to concentrate on the third part, on this idea of the appropriate action of faith.

And so we pick up with Ruth's new life beginning in Bethlehem. This is Ruth 2, starting at verse 1. It says: *Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech whose name was Boaz. 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." 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. A couple of things to notice about what's taking place here. First we get introduced to Boaz, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech. We note that Boaz had stayed in famine stricken Bethlehem while Elimelech and Naomi had left and yet clearly we see Boaz has met with great success. So Ruth asks Naomi, Ruth asked permission of Naomi if she can find a field from that someone that she can find favor with so that she might glean. And gleaning was something that was done by the lowest echelon of Israeli society, I mean, it was the poor, it was the downtrodden who were forced to glean in order to eat. And gleaning actually was a mercy given directly by God. There were specific rules that God had imposed on the nation of Israel with regard to harvesting their crops. God had intentionally made farmers sloppy about getting the very last bit of their crops, telling them to cut corners and to leave sheaves that had drops so that there would be enough crop left for the poor to come in and glean. And what stands out in this text is that the one doing all of the action here is not Naomi, the action has now shifted completely to Ruth. She's the one who approaches Naomi and says, "Let me go and glean." And so with Naomi's permission she starts out looking for a field to glean in. And I love how the scripture

puts it, it says: *And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.* And you know once again we have the benefit of being able to turn to the back of the book and of history itself and to know that God's hand was from the very start at work here. We know that God had great and mighty plans for Ruth. So there was no such thing as happenstance when it came to the field that she had selected. It was God who had put her there.

Verse 4 says: *And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you! And they answered, "The LORD bless you."* We get a simple insight into Boaz's character by seeing how he's interacting with the reapers and they are basically the poor. You know it's said that if you want to know what a person is really like, watch and see how he interacts with people who can be of no benefit to him whatsoever. And so we see this interaction, and Boaz is clearly the big guy, the boss, the reapers are clearly the underclass and yet the exchange seems to be typically one of mutual respect for both parties, and that always comes from the top. You see, Boaz was someone who could relate as a man of wealth and power to the very people who were under him. So we pick up at verse 5. It says: *Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" 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. 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."

Well once again there's two things to notice about what's taking place here. And the very first is that Ruth's reputation had clearly preceded her. She's not just a woman, she is this young Moabite woman. The foreman tells Boaz that this woman Ruth has asked permission to glean in his field and she's been gleaning all day except for a short rest. Clearly Ruth understands that the blessing of gleaning involves considerable hard work and even some risk. We pick up at verse 8. It says: *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. 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."* So Boaz instructs Ruth, telling her to stay with him in his fields and to stay with the women in his party because chances are as a Moabite woman, she was fair game for abuse, perhaps even assault. And so Boaz begins by asserting his physical protection over her and he goes so far as to offer refreshment to her from the waters the men have drawn. He is clearly pulling Ruth into his

protection. Verse 10 says: *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?" 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. 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!"* Well Boaz has clearly been apprised of everything that Ruth has been doing for Naomi including how she ministered to her while she was still in Moab. Everything she has done since the death of her husband has been told to Boaz, now Boaz has actually seen Ruth working out her faith literally by gleaning in a field. God through Boaz is basically explaining how the third part of genuine faith works, and it's all about the appropriate action of faith.

Now I want to be very careful here because it's entirely easy to make a misstep here. And I mean entire denominations have done so but I want to ask a very important question. And what I want to ask is this: The question is what was it that actually saved Ruth? Was it her faith, I mean, that she had become convinced that the God of Naomi was in fact the real God or was it her works, the actual steps that she took to leave Moab and journey to Bethlehem,

the work that she's doing right now gleaning in the fields? This is really the issue not just for her but for us. I mean the main issue that has separated Protestants from Catholics for ages is really this particular issue. Which one is it? And what it comes down to is Protestants who stand accused of easy believism, that's merely having a mental assent to a series of propositions is all that's required to get into heaven. And as Catholics who are accused of salvation by works and that is that faith is not enough, but it has to be combined with a record of works in order to earn salvation. Well we'll learn that in the end neither of those positions is correct, and here's why. I spent a lot of last week's message talking about how Ruth's faith proved itself genuine and we saw that it was clearly a gift that God had given to her and as you recall, not to Orpah. That was the very first part. And we saw the second part and that is that the convictions that Ruth had that Naomi's God was the real God, was the belief part. But then came the third part. Ruth didn't just assent to some information that she had heard about Israel's God, she acted on it. So was it Ruth's faith in God or the works that she did that actually saved her? Well the answer is yes. And let me explain by looking first at the faith or belief part.

You see, you can believe the absolute essence of the gospel, you can believe that God became a man, that he lived a perfect life,

that he laid down his life on the cross as a sacrifice for his sheep and that three days later he rose from the dead and that his sacrifice had been accepted and our sin debt had been paid. That is really the baseline truth that you must believe in in order to be saved. I mean Paul refers to this very specifically in the letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15. This is what Paul said. Paul said: *And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.* Verse 17, he says: *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.* Paul's just saying he's agreeing all of the things that you must believe to believe in the gospel and be saved, but you can believe all of that and still be completely lost. See the problem is folks thinking that simply having the right set of facts about who God is is enough. You can have the right object for your faith, and that is Christ and his death and his resurrection and still fall far short of salvation because belief alone has never saved anyone. James makes the case against those who claim that simply believing in Christ as the object of our faith is all that's necessary by pointing out the demons have the exact same belief about Christ, and that belief is rooted in absolute truth. I mean they know who Christ is. I mean they know what he has done, but it certainly doesn't lead to salvation for

them. And James puts it this way in *James 2:19*, he says: *You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe -- and shudder!*

So belief in Christ must be rooted absolutely in the propositional truths of who Christ is and what Christ did but it's clearly not enough. There's another side to the argument and the other side is this: You must add to your propositional truth a certain amount of works in order to be justified and saved. Well that's more or less the argument that Catholics get accused of and here's why adding works doesn't work. Paul was very upset with the Galatian church for this exact reason. You see, they were insisting among other things that in addition to believing in Christ's death and resurrection you also had to be circumcised. This is what Paul said in *Galatians 3*. He said: *O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?* Paul is castigating the Galatian church 'cause they're no longer hearing with faith alone. They're now attempting to perfect what they heard by adding works of the flesh, that is by attempting to add ritual practices to the simple gospel. Yes, the Galatians said you must believe the gospel, but

to that gospel you must add some Old Testament practices such as circumcision. I mean they were acting as if the gospel itself and what Christ had done on the cross was not enough, that they had to add their own works to the gospel in order to make it effective and Paul sees them as bewitched for thinking that. He goes on to increase the stakes by saying in *Galatians 3:10*: *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written: "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them."* Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for *"the righteous shall live by faith."* What Paul is saying here is if you want to add to the gospel of faith by your works, then every single one of your works had better be transcendently flawless because that's the only standard that a flawless God is going to accept. And because you and I know that nothing we do is flawless, well then your attempt to justify yourself by what you do is cursed. You might think, okay, case closed. But here's where the monkey wrench comes. You see in defense of the works position Paul also said this in *Romans 2:6*. He said, speaking of God: *He will render to each one according to his works: To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the*

Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also to the Greek. For God shows no partiality. And then to add to that, didn't James say in *James 2:17: So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* So Paul says if you try to add your works to your faith, you are cursed. But then he also tells us that your faith is going to be judged by your works. And then James goes on to say that faith that has no works to even judge is not faith at all, that it's nothing but a dead faith that is useless. Confused? Well, frankly, I don't blame you. Let me explain why these things seem confusing from a study that I did years ago on the book of James.

You see, both James and Paul are speaking about two sides of the very same coin and heads doesn't look anything like tails and tails doesn't look anything like heads but they're both part of the same thing. The coin is salvation itself. As Martin Luther said, a true believer in Jesus Christ is someone who is saved by faith alone by a faith that is never alone. It's always accompanied by works. You see faith, faith and works are two sides of the same coin. And the problem occurs when you start to draw conclusions by looking at only one side of the salvation coin. So let's take a look at some of those incomplete portraits that they paint. The very first side of this coin of the incomplete portrait by looking at one side is the faith side. It comes from seeing the coin only

from the perspective of belief alone. And it produces the very hypocrites that James was speaking of when he said this in *James 2:14*, he said: *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* You see, it's remarkably easy to confuse mere belief with faith and that's precisely what James is getting at here. And you know for many, many years now some in the evangelical community have preached a gospel that's concerned itself on a false premise that James is deconstructing in this verse. It was a gospel that said, well, if you raise your hand or if you go forward at a meeting, if you simply say a prayer, you will be saved. I mean isn't that exactly what the Bible says? I mean doesn't *Romans 10:9*, let me just read it, it says: *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* Well, what we are discussing here and what James is actually trying to clarify is what God is speaking of when he says -- quote -- "believe in your heart". Think about it. Do you honestly think the example that James has given us where faith is reduced to some cheerful slogan, "Go in peace" and an empty exhortation to "be warmed and be filled" as an example of

true faith that emanates from a person's transformed heart? Or is it a phony baloney faith that consists of a simple agreement to a set of facts: Okay, Jesus is Lord, Jesus is God, Jesus came down to the earth, Jesus led a perfect life, Jesus died on a cross and rose again. I can say yes and amen a thousand times to each and every one of those facts and in terms of faith, genuine saving faith, it means nothing. In fact I know people who could absolutely say an unequivocal "yes" to each of these facts and these folks give no evidence whatsoever besides those assents that they're even remotely Christian. Believing in a limited government and strong military may make you a Republican but believing that Jesus died and rose from the dead does not make you a Christian. Jesus himself made a huge distinction between simple belief which saves no one and the belief that is rooted in the heart. He said it is a saving belief that will always express itself in works. But works don't produce life, they merely are proof that life is already there. And that's the distinction that Jesus makes and it's the same one that James does, it centers not on what we say but on what we do. Listen to what Jesus said in *Matthew 7:21*. He says: *"Not everyone who says to me , 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who"* says a prayer? But the one who goes forward at a meeting? Not necessarily. How about the one who merely agrees that Jesus died for us and that he rose from the dead? Again, not necessarily. Listen to what Jesus actually said.

He said: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."* This is the other side of the coin.

This is the action side of faith, the works side. Well you might say, well, wait a minute. Aren't we right back where we started from? I mean is faith only now what we do? Let me remind you, we're only looking at one side of a coin. And seeing the salvation coin only from the perspective of works produces two types of doers. It produces proud doers or it produces terrified doers. And let me distinguish them. A proud doer is someone convinced that he's justified by the good religious deeds that he does. And we all know the Pharisees, they were the classic example of proud doers. I mean they convinced themselves that merely doing religious works, many of which they simply invented, made them worthy enough to stand before a holy God. Jesus said this in *Matthew 15:7*, he said: *"You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"* Now I'll admit that today's proud doer is not nearly so blatant as the Pharisees were. He's simply confident that when it comes to measuring his good deeds versus his bad deeds, you know, you got a balance scale and you got the good deeds here and you got the bad deeds here and you're

hoping things go like this, the good deeds are going to outweigh the bad deeds and therefore you'll be justified before God. A proud doer represents probably the largest cohort of people fully convinced that because of that they have the right standing before God. These are our neighbors, our relatives, our friends, our colleagues and acquaintances. They may have sat right next to you in church because they often go to church. It's one of the things that they think you have to do in order to be justified before a holy God. You see the proud doer believes he has the key to his fate in his own hands. And in *Matthew 10:39* Jesus challenges that. He says this, he says: *"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."*

Well, what did Jesus mean by saying, *"Whoever loses his life will find it?"* I mean do you have to lose your grip on your own life in order to prove that you have this new life? And the answer is, yes, you do. What Jesus is saying is if you find your life within yourself, within your own resources, within your own abilities, your own good efforts or your own good works, you will be lost. Paul says in *Romans 4:5*: *To the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.* Proud doers, they don't get that. They genuinely believe that saving faith can be reduced to a series of rules and regulations that they are quite capable of living up to, thank you.

Jesus categorically rejected that. You know, at one point someone directly asked Jesus the very question that we're battling about. *Matthew 19:16* says: *Now behold, one came and said to him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do" -- there it is -- "that I may have eternal life?"* Now you remember Jesus' answer to him? Again this was the rich young ruler, this was a decent moral person, somebody who's filled with much earthly goodness, and he wants to know what everybody wants to know, *"What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"* Jesus starts laying out all the commandments as an answer to the question and the rich young ruler says, what, I've done these things all of my life. We all know what happens next. *Matthew 19:21* says: *Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."* But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. You see the rich young ruler was a proud doer who simply had asked the wrong question. You see as soon as you reduce the faith you have in Christ down to a requirement or a series of requirements, you have started down a pathway no different than the one this young man was asking about. You've turned a relationship into a regulation. And eternal life becomes a wage that you were given for an excellent spiritual performance. And God will not accept that. I mean if we could just take a step backwards and consider the absurdity of comparing any human work to

the work that God did, it would all become self-evident. I mean just think about this. God sent his only begotten Son, his flawless One, who lived a flawless perfect life and then offered that flawless life up for us on a cross. And on the other hand, we have what we did or what we do, whatever religious activities we think have merit. And we're going to compare them? I mean consider the best things that I could ever do. Let's say I feed the hungry, I clothe the naked, I visit the sick and the imprisoned, they're all wonderful godly things but to put those things even remotely on a par with what God has done is the height of insult to God. To think that they are enough to save, justify and render me fit for heaven is an insult to spiritual common sense. I mean as someone put it recently in an article, God is not against working, he's against earning. And there's a huge difference between the two.

And those who reject this form of earning, however, they can fall prey to a different partial portrait to how the gospel works. See, instead of a proud doer they can become a terrified doer. James says *so that faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* The terrified doer, he's someone who lives in constant fear that his faith is dead or at the very least it's moribund. He or she understands that Christ has done a mighty work in dying on the cross for him. What he doesn't understand is that he is in no

position to add anything to that work. I mean the terrified doer is a doer who feels his life as a believer is about to be about the business of justifying Christ's work by his own. I'll certainly admit that that breed is quite rare today but very common when I was a brand new Christian. In fact the church that I originally attended way back when in California unknowingly leaned in that direction. We were constantly given things to do because if Christ died for me, then the least that I could do for him is just, well, whatever, just fill in the blank. You see the terrified doer is constantly trying to justify the unjustifiable. I mean the gift of God will never be matched by any human effort, and the driving force behind the terrified doer is this nagging notion that somehow or other he has to do so or die trying. I mean at my first church we would routinely go to downtown San Francisco to witness, we would go door to door, we would have these great localized evangelical crusades at our church, something, anything to prove to God that we were serious about the faith that we had placed in him. And again, I need to point out these were good things, these were wonderful things, these were not bad things at all but there was this consistent attitude that you had to spend your life giving back to what God had already given to you. And I, myself, I personally never realized that I was not remotely capable of adding to what Christ had already done because I was too busy trying, and that in itself was a form of enslavement. I mean if I'm going to

witness door to door for three hours to lead others to Christ and grow the kingdom, well then in the back of my mind there was always this logical question that said, well, if three hours was good, wouldn't four hours be better? And if four hours were better, wouldn't five hours be better still? And if I shared the gospel for five hours with no results, who's to tell if I did it for six that maybe somebody would have come to Christ. I mean I'm sure you can see where all of this is headed, but I never saw it back then. And the reason why a terrified doer is terrified is because he never knows if his doing is enough. I mean he knows that faith without works is dead and instead of trusting in the finished work of Christ on the cross, he places his trust in his own ability to be constantly working out his own salvation. Even the concept of working that way, no matter how holy and noble it may appear represents a form of enslavement that Paul railed against to the Galatians. Listen to what he said in *Galatians 2:16*. He said: *Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.* Now press a terrified doer and he will tell you in no uncertain terms that he knows that no one is justified by works of the law. He may well know that in his head but he certainly doesn't feel that in his heart. And because of that he's subject to being

enslaved all over again and that's why Paul said in *Galatians 5:1*:
For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

So here's our issue with faith. I mean we've seen that faith itself can get hopelessly twisted into either an empty faith that merely sees belief with no works as all that you need or a proud or enslaving work that says faith itself is not good enough and has to be accompanied by a whole series of works. You see, that's what happens when you take this coin and you split the coin of salvation into two separate parts. So how do you get to understand it?

Well, there is a way to understand both sides of the salvation coin to understand how faith and works work together as one, and that's to understand it in physical terms. If you want to understand the relationship of works to faith, then look no further than the relationship of breathing to living. It's amazing to think but actually the act of breathing is unique. You see every other biological process we have is either something that's voluntary or it's automatic. We don't ever think about pumping our blood or digesting our food or even fighting off sickness or disease. They all take place without our active participation but breathing, breathing is something that is absolutely unique, it's something that we all have to do and we have to do it all the time. I mean some 20,000 times a day your brain tells your lungs to exhale and

inhale. Nobody gets up in the morning and thinks oh, no, I got 20,000 breaths that I got to breathe today. How am I going to get anything done? Nobody's ever said that. You see, breathing is a work so inherently bound to living itself that you do it without giving it a second thought. You know, many, many years ago there was a simple test that was administered on the battlefield and in hospitals where folks were sick and wounded, a nurse would just simply come up to them and place a small mirror in front of their nose. If he was breathing, he would fog up a mirror and the folks would know he is still alive. Anyone knows that the simplest way to look for a sign of life is to look for breathing. Well when James says faith without works is dead, he too is describing a spiritual quest for signs of life. And just as breathing is a sign of physical life, so too works are a sign of spiritual life that we call faith. Breathing is to living as works is to faith.

Breathing doesn't produce life, breathing is merely a sign that life is already there. I mean after all, you can make a corpse breathe if you put it on a respirator. That's exactly how works works. You see, works is not faith and works do not produce faith, they are merely a sign that faith is already there. The proof that a believer is spiritually alive is his works. And that's all that James is saying when he says: *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* And this all goes back to one of the most pregnant statements in all of the Old Testament about the very

nature of salvation and saving faith. This is God's statement that I repeated many, many times in Ezekiel. This is *Ezekiel 36*, this is God telling us about the new birth, and this is what he says: *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

So let's bring this all the way back to Ruth. Remember we started talking about Ruth and her faith, and remember what we said, that faith is a God-given attitude, it's characterized by a certainty of conviction that produces appropriate action. And so we're looking at the appropriate action of Ruth's faith to see if Ruth's salvation is real, if she actually has spiritual life, if she's fogging up the mirror, as it were. And we find that Boaz is a great source for us here. You see, if you remember at the very beginning I read Boaz and he lays out for us just what Ruth's faith consisted of. Let me just re-read what he said. This is verse 11. It says: *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. 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!" You see, Boaz is saying what Paul was saying when he said to the Romans, *he will render to each one according to his works.* He's saying what James said as well when he said, *so faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* I mean do you see it? I mean what God is saying there, the only record that will exist of your faith is your works. I mean faith, remember, is a certainty of conviction and that certainty is expressed through works. I can't read the inside of your brain to see where your convictions are but I can certainly read your actions and so can God. And the actions that you take tell him and the world what kingdom you belong to. You see, if God was going to scan the world to look for Ruth's faith, he'd look no further than two women walking on the road into Bethlehem to a gleaner's field where Ruth is working away to provide sustenance for her mother-in-law. Her faith was made visible by her works. And those works didn't save Ruth but they proved something, they proved that Ruth was already saved by the gift of God. Ruth's works are simple proof that she was alive and that she's breathing. From Ruth's standpoint there was a brand new force empowering a brand new spirit within her, moving her, motivating her, and driving her towards her new passion and that's -- quote -- *"to walk in God's statutes and be careful to obey his rules."* Her journey to Bethlehem and all the subsequent works that she's done is all the proof that Boaz needs of the sincerity of her faith, and it's not at all something that Ruth's

going to offer up in return for her salvation. It's simply proof that her faith is real. I mean God's work have become for Ruth as natural as breathing. And because breathing is such a natural part of being alive, Ruth is never even going to think about taking credit for it. I mean you might brag about running a six-minute mile or maybe swimming ten laps or climbing a mountain, but you're hardly going to brag that you managed to breathe 20,000 times today. And the same way our are works are such a natural part of saving faith that it would never occur to us as something that we would offer up to God in return for heaven. And so when Boaz says to Ruth: *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!*" he had no idea of the picture that he was actually painting. What he was saying there was that Ruth had indeed come under God's wings for refuge and her reward was not a payment for services rendered but a gift given freely from the God of all grace. And we conclude with what he says in *Ephesians 2:8*. He says: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for Ruth, I thank you for the consistent statement between the Old Testament and the New Testament of just what new life in you entails. And we are delighted to see through

the works that Ruth has done the actual picture of the faith that she really has. Lord, I thank you for faith, I thank you that it is a God-given gift that is characterized by a certainty of conviction and we see the appropriate action that Ruth has taken. And we thank you for the gift that you have given her in Christ Jesus. And we pray this in your name. Amen.