

# Romancing Ruth

*Series on the book of Ruth*

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**Bible Text:** Ruth 2

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Take your Bibles and turn with me to the book of Ruth. You'll find it in the Old Testament just after Judges and I forget what page it's on. It's not in your bulletin what page it's on. Page 222 in your church Bible. And if you were here early enough, I know many of you weren't, but if you were here earlier enough for the Soli Deo Gloria, the prelude before the service this evening, you would have been here for Brook's Romance in F Major. I was sitting down here at the front and I was able to observe your reactions when what appeared to be a kind of normal kind of Sunday evening bit of music kind of went weird on you. I could see when it went weird that it caught you unawares. Of course, romance does that and romances do that. They catch you unawares. And there is a sense in which preaching, I talk when I'm talking to students, I talk about the romance of preaching. You may not think there's anything romantic about preaching but there is a certain romance to preaching because you just never know what's going to happen. You never know who is going to be there. You don't know what kind of reaction there is going to be. You don't know whether people are going to sleep right through it. Whether they're going to be awake through it. Whether some are going to sleep and some will be awake. Whether people you don't expect to be awake are awake and people you expect normally to pay attention, have fallen asleep. Then there is, of course, what you're going to say. You come here with a clear idea of what you're going to say, at least, apparently people have done in the past. I'm not sure that I do but when I come here with a certain set of notes telling me what I'm going to say and then I start preaching and I've been doing all this work in the background and in the middle of preaching, things happen and I say things that I didn't prepare to say like I am right now. You just don't know what's going to happen.

Well, there's a sense in which we find there is a great romance story in the Bible. The whole story of redemption is a romance story. All kinds of things are going on. We don't know where it's going to end up. When you're in the story, you have absolutely no idea where it's going and that is nowhere more obvious than it is in the story of Ruth and I hope you'll see that as we go through it this evening. Certainly, when we come to the beginning of chapter 2 or certainly if you look back to chapter 1, verse 19 and following, which really leads us into our passage for this evening, romance is the last thing on anybody's mind.

Let me remind you of the story as it has unfolded if perhaps you have just come in by webcast or you've dropped into the service tonight. The story of Ruth begins with a man who is living in Israel. Israel is afflicted by famine. The man does what he thinks is the right thing. He takes his wife and his 2 little boys and he moves out of Israel and he goes to the country of Moab where there is food. So far, so okay, except for this fact, of course, that he is an Israelite and leaving Israel meant leaving the one place in the whole of planet earth where God had promised that he would meet with his people and bless his people. He walks out on the promises of God. He walks out of Israel and he goes to Moab. His name is Elimelech and as we read the story in chapter 1, Elimelech dies. His 2 sons are married off to Moabite women and one by one these 2 sons die and so Naomi, his wife, is left with three dead men in the family and 2 daughter-in-law and she begins to make her way back to Israel. She makes her way back to Israel because she has heard some good news. She has heard that the Lord has visited Israel and the famine is over. God is now being generous to his people and something awakens within her, a conviction that she's in the wrong place and that she must go back to the right place and a kind of conversion occurs in the heart of Naomi and off she goes on the way to the Promised Land.

On the way, one of the daughters-in-law goes back to Moab and the other sticks by her. That other one is Ruth, the heroine of our story. And when that division takes place, Naomi prays a prayer. This is her prayer in chapter 1, she prays for Ruth, that the Lord would bless her, that Yahweh would bless her. That Yahweh would meet her need. And that Yahweh would give her a husband. I know that some people here, you are praying for a husband and God hasn't given you one yet and that may be a big blessing but it also may be a huge disappointment to you and you don't know how God is going to answer your prayer. We are looking at one woman this evening and the question that arises at this point in the story is: will God answer Naomi's prayer? Will God answer Naomi's prayer for Ruth?

Now, as we come into the story, I think I need to say by way of background that this whole story is governed and shaped by a particular view of God. The view is that God is sovereign. That means that God rules. He rules over the lives of us all. That he ordains. That he decides what will come to pass. And that can be both the hardest thing that you will ever learn about God in your life but also the most comforting thing that you will ever learn about God at the same time. It's the teaching that God rules over and directs our lives in every detail. In every detail for our good and for his glory. Even though I can't see what my good is in the circumstances of my life sometimes and I can't see sometimes how it can be for the glory of God so the things I pray for sometimes don't get answered and I am led to believe by the Bible that this is for my good even when I can't see it and for God's glory, even though I can't believe it.

This view of God is summarized in the Heidelberg catechism because the doctrine behind it is this doctrine of the Providence of God, that God is in charge and that God provides and that God has a plan for our lives. Here's how the Heidelberg catechism answers the question, "What do you understand by the Providence of God?" Let me read it to you, "The almighty and ever present power of God by which God upholds, as with his hand,

heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty—all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand."

Providence is actually the main theme of this little section. The God of Providence. The ways of Providence. The grace of Providence. And the instrument of Providence. Let's look at those together. First of all, the God of Providence and glance back with me, will you, at chapter 1, verses 19 to 22. In those verses, Naomi is making her way to Bethlehem, verse 19, they actually come to Bethlehem. That's where she came from. That was her home town. That name "Bethlehem" may actually alert a thought in your mind. You've heard that name before. You hear it every year as Bing Crosby sings "O Little Town of Bethlehem," in the stores as you're shopping and it's the same Bethlehem. That's where Naomi comes from. That's where she returns and she brings with her Ruth. It's very significant. Very significant for what you are hearing at Christmas when you hear, "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

So they came to Bethlehem and the whole town was stirred because of them and they asked the question. They looked at this woman Naomi who had left many, many, many years before when her children were young and now she has returned. Her husband is dead. Her boys had grown up, they had married and they are dead. And she returns back to the village she came from and the people look at her and they say, "Is it you?" This is a Scottish thing. Do you know, when you go to Scotland you go back somewhere and you see someone you haven't seen for a while and they look at you and they say, "Is that you?" And the worst thing you can say to them is if you really want to annoy them, you say, "Who?" And they'll say to you, "You." And I'll say, "It's me but who do you think I am?" And they'll say, "You look an awful lot like your mother." And I'm saying, "But you don't know who I am yet. Are you sure you've got the right person?" In fact, there is a wee saying in Scottish and I'll just tell it to you now and you can work this out. What you can do is you can listen later on and you can slow down the sound so that you can work this out. Here's how it goes: so she to me, "Is that you?" Said I, "Who?" Said she, "You." Said I, "Me?" Said she, "Aye." Said I, "No." Said she, "It's awful like ya."

Anyway, they are looking at Naomi. Did you notice this, they are looking at Naomi and they say, "Is this Naomi? Is that you, Naomi?" Naomi responds and she says, "Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara, which means bitter for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me." She's giving a statement about her bitter experience but she is also giving a statement of her acceptance and her trust in God because though life has been bitter toward her up to this point and she says that very bluntly, doesn't she? "He has dealt bitterly with me. Don't call me Naomi, call me bitter because of all that I have been through." Nonetheless, I want you to notice that Naomi gives a testimony to these people who ask her, the kind of testimony you would expect to find in someone like Job in the Bible who says, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." Look at how she calls God first of all, the Almighty. The Almighty one. The one who has power and authority. The one who does what he pleases. The one who can do what he wants. The Almighty. But she also calls him Yahweh, the Lord. You'll notice it's in uppercase letters. That means that it translates that special Hebrew word for God, Yahweh. The covenant keeping,

unchanging, faithful, dependable God. The God who breaks through all the roadblocks and barriers of our lives with fresh supplies of inexhaustible grace and help.

This is the view that Naomi has of God. She calls herself bitter, Mara, because her experiences have been bitter but she acknowledges that God has allowed it. That God is behind it. That God is in charge. Do you notice how she goes on in verse 21, "I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. He has brought me back empty. I went away full. When I left I had a husband and I had a family and we were full of ourselves and we were full of our own notions and we were full of our plans for the future and we were full of hopes that if we left the famine in Israel and went to Moab we'd be able to settle down there and eat well there and be comfortable there and set up home there. We were full of ourselves. Full of our plans. Now look at me. I have come back and I have come back empty, empty of my self-confidence. Empty. Without a husband. Without my children. Just this daughter-in-law Ruth. That's all I've come back with. I'm empty. I've got nothing. The Lord has humbled me." Then the language she uses about God is the Almighty and God is still Yahweh, God who is the covenant keeping faithful God. She is testifying to the people in the town and she is saying, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him. I can understand it. I've been through bitterness. I am bitter in my soul but I recognize the hand of God."

Soon the whole town is buzzing. You notice, the whole town is stirred because of them. There is Naomi's testimony about God as the Almighty and God as the Lord Yahweh but there is also this person who is with her. The people of Bethlehem recognized immediately here is a girl from Moab. She doesn't look like. It's like an Italian going to Scotland and immediately you see a difference. The Italians are all sleek and good-looking and handsome and beautiful and so forth and the Scots, they are plain and they are white because they have had no sunshine for about 5 to 10 years and when they had it last it was a Wednesday and that Wednesday, they happen to be working and weren't able to be outside and enjoy it. The people of Moab would just stand out in the crowd at Bethlehem when they got there. And it fixed itself in the minds of the people. They were abuzz with this, this girl who had come with Naomi had been converted to Yahweh. That didn't happen very often in the days of the judges. It didn't happen very often in the Old Testament at all, that period. But here it had happened now and we know that they were abuzz with the testimony of what was going on in Ruth's life because a man who was a gentleman and had land and was a serious kind of individual had heard the news. It was the town talk, the talk of the town, and we know later on this particular man talks to this girl and says, "You know, all that you have done has been fully told to me. A full reward will be given to you by Yahweh, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge." In other words, this very important man says to this girl later on in the story, he says, "I've heard that you have come to know the Lord. You have come to know the Lord."

Just one other little thing we're told. At the end of that section in verse 22, that when they came to Bethlehem, it was the beginning of the barley harvest. When Naomi and Elimelech and their 2 boys left, there was a famine in the land but now she comes back and not only has God visited the people, now there is a harvest. But you see, the writer as

he puts that little detail in there, he's going to use that for a number of reasons because he's got something to teach us. One of the things he's going to teach us is that this harvest was not only a physical harvest of food, this harvest was a spiritual harvest. It was beginning with the arrival of this girl Ruth in Bethlehem, this convert to Yahwehism. This convert to Israel. God had brought her there. God was working in her. God was bringing a harvest as through the dusty streets of Bethlehem, a Moabite woman was the foretaste of a great harvest of people from every language and tribe who one day would gather around the throne of the God of Israel and acknowledge him to be the only God there is because this girl is going to have a great, great, great, great, great, great grandson who will be the Savior of the world.

You know, it's the wonder and mystery of the cross that God takes upon himself, let me say it to you if you're here this evening and there is a bitterness in your spirit, that God takes upon himself in the cross not only our sin but he takes upon himself the bitterness that often creeps into our hearts and you see that on the cross when the Lord Jesus as he hangs between heaven and earth, cries out in a loud voice, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" And captured in the why of the Son of God is the why of every heart that has cried out in prayer, having seen their dreams not fulfilled, their heart longings never realized. "Why, God? Why?" The God of Providence.

The ways of Providence. Now we come to chapter 2, verse 1, which we read. And the writer is getting ahead of himself, actually. He can't wait to get to the heart of the story and so you start to read that they have come to Bethlehem and you want to know what happens next and then at the beginning of chapter 2, when the chapters aren't there, suddenly out of the blue they come to Bethlehem, it's the beginning of the barley harvest and Ruth, the Moabite, said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after the reapers or the person who shows me favor and lets me use their field." That's the way it should flow, isn't it? But it doesn't flow like that. There's a little insertion. Verse 1 is there. If only we could skip from chapter 1, verse 22, to chapter 2, verse 2, we'd get the flow of the story but chapter 2, verse 1, slips in this little detail and you think to yourself, "What is that all about?" "Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz." First mention of this man's name. And you say, "Why is it that suddenly, what is the point of this?" And what I want to say to you is that in Hebrew, they don't have, if you read the Hebrew Scriptures, they don't have anything like sidebars that we have today or little captions and you can't put something in brackets. What they did was, they would just make a random observation that has some connection to what's coming on later in the story. And what the writer is doing here is he's just throwing this out here. He wants to get your attention. He wants you to put that away, file it back in the back of your mind because this is going to be important in the future. This is going to be very important in the future. This man, Boaz, I'm going to tell you a little bit of the story in case you don't know it. I'm going to take you into the future of the story. I'm going to tell you that this man Boaz is going to be the significant other in the life of Ruth but we don't know that yet. Ruth doesn't know that yet. Naomi doesn't know that yet. Only God knows that yet and the author of the story who knows the end of the story knows that but he puts it in to kind of flag it up so that

when it happens, you'll know he knew before it happened. Of course, he's teaching us something about God. God is in the story.

You know, there used to be a TV series that I used to watch every Sunday night. I don't know if I've ever mentioned this to you but it was called 24. I may have mentioned it in passing once or twice or 100. I don't know, but one of the things about this series 24, which by the way is being aired. There is a new series coming out sometime soon in the new year, I think. I just hope it's not during church time because I'll have to skip. At the end of each episode which was based on real-time, it's what happened in one hour of real-time, at the end of that, we had been following several stories, there would be a split screen and you would see what was going on in 2 different locations. Then it would split again so that you could see what was going on in 4 different locations as different parts of the story are going on in real time. There is a sense in which that is what the author is doing here. He wants you to get a view of the story in which different things are going on from different perspectives in the story. There is God and what God is doing and there is what Ruth and Naomi are doing because God is at work and we can't see him at work.

There is a great illustration of this in Daniel 1 where we read this and I'll read it to you. "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, along with some of the vessels of the house of God, from the temple." So 2 things are happening in that story. Here's a pagan general with his army, marches down from Babylon and invades Judah. He besieges Jerusalem. Jerusalem falls. He pillages the temple and he takes the king into captivity. That's what's going on in the story. But Daniel as he writes the story, he adds this, he says, "it was God who gave the city into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and God gave King Jehoiakim into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar." God was in this story unseen. The writer is telling us that that's what's going on here.

In this story, the people involved now Ruth as well as Naomi, are true believers. They mention God all over the place. They mention him as the Lord. They trust in him. They really do trust in him. And yet, only the narrator of the story, the writer of the story, knows the end of the story. We are in a better position even than he is. The writer knows that Naomi and Boaz are going to get together and they are going to have children and they are going to have a grandchild and he's going to be King David. We know that King David is going to have a great, great, great grandson who is going to be Jesus of Nazareth, the Savior of the world. So we have an even better perspective when we come to the story. We take the story and we go to Matthew's genealogy of Jesus and we find Ruth's name right up there in that story.

The realities that your life and mine, we operate, that our lives operate at the same kind of level, 2 different levels. Only God knows the end of your story. You've got children that are wandering away, don't worry. Trust him and know he knows the end of the story. It isn't the end yet. Have you been praying for things and they haven't been answered yet? It isn't the end of the story. It isn't the end of the story. Trust even where you cannot trace. There is this unfolding plan of God in human history and we look at the story of the

church in the world and we think, "What is going on? Why is Christianity diminishing in Europe until it's virtually nonexistent?" 2% of Scottish people will have been in church today. 2%, can you imagine that? Scotland was called "the land of the Book." I don't know what book it is now but it's certainly not the Bible. And we think, "What's going on? Is the church falling apart?" But we know the end of the story. The Apostle John takes us in the book of Revelation to the end of the story and at the end of the story, Islam doesn't win. At the end of the story, Marxism and atheism don't win. At the end of the story, all of the isms of the world are crushed under the feet of the Lamb of God. And it's the same with your life and mine. There are things that you are conscious of in your life, the decisions you make in your everyday life, God doesn't give you an interpretation from heaven about them.

Nobody is giving Naomi or Ruth an interpretation about what's going on in their life but what he does do is he gives you categories of thought. He gives you assurances that he is in control so that when you are in a particular situation, when you feel it is darkness all around, when you feel there is no rhyme or reason to what's going on in your life, you need to know he's directing the story because this man Boaz walks onto the field. His name means "in him is strength," and he is a man of standing. He is a wealthy man, a relative, a kinsman of Elimelech and he's going to figure in the story and that's the nature of God. God in his ways is inscrutable but his ways are deliberate.

But then thirdly, there is grace, the grace of Providence in the story. I want you to notice that it is Ruth who comes to Naomi, verse 2. Ruth the Moabite, that's underlined. She's not an Israelite but she comes to Naomi and with a grasp of what Scripture has revealed, she says to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after the one in whose sight I shall find favor." Now, I want you to notice that word "favor." That's a very interesting word. It's a word used earlier by Naomi in her prayer, "May the Lord, Yahweh, deal gently, deal kindly, that is, show favor to you." It's the Hebrew word *chesed*. A word used of God over and over again to describe his grace and kindness, his covenant favor and his faithful love.

Naomi talks about it when she prays. Here is Ruth talking about it as she says, "Why don't I go and do this?" What we see at work here are 2 aspects of Providence. First of all, there's a general Providence at work because this woman knows what to do which means she has read the law or she has had the law read to her, the law of Moses which is a gracious law. Let me read to you some of the law of Moses here from Leviticus 19. "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest." So the bits that fall off, don't go and pick them all up. "And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner." Why? "Because I am Yahweh your God." God had made provision in his law graciously for the poor and the sojourner, the alien in the land and the book of Deuteronomy gives the rationale for this, it's in the character of God. "He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt."

Moses points to the character of God, the God who chooses the lowly and the weak of this world. The God who shapes the laws of the land to express his concern for the weak and the poor in Israel. And when Israel morphs into the new Israel or the true Israel of the new covenant where Israel is expanded to bring Gentiles into its fold under its Messiah Jesus, they immediately realize that in this new covenant community, this new shape of the Israel of God, that they have to do what they did then. Now not in a land because they didn't just occupy one land but many lands but within the church. So right in the very beginning in Acts, you find them making provision for the poor and for the widows. Right from the very beginning. That's why we have a diaconate. One of the reasons we have a diaconate is to take care of our poor, of our lonely and to comfort them. When Calvin opened up Geneva to the refugees, the Christian refugees of Europe and made provision for them, started businesses so that they would work, organized a system of relief for the poor, he was simply echoing the law, the graciousness of the law of God in Israel

So there was a general Providence at work. What strikes me as important here is that Ruth knew that. Ruth had been exposed to the law of God and she took the law of God seriously. She found in the law of God promise, hope, grace, for herself. Law is not all bad. Law is good. The law of God is good. The law of God is gracious. And Ruth found that. She comes to Naomi and she says, "You know, this is what we are allowed to do by the law of God. Let me go and see if I find favor, grace, chesed." But there's a special Providence at work. I said that the author had signaled this in chapter 2, verse 1, where we are told of this man Boaz, that he was a member of Ruth's deceased father-in-law's clan. That should make us sit up and take notice and watch for the next part. But now we come to verse 3. Why don't you follow verse 3, it's very exciting. I really get quite excited by this. "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." Well, I mean to say. I hope you've got the surprise of this. This is a really big surprise. Who is this Boaz guy? You start in chapter 2, verse 1, where he has just mentioned him. Why has he just mentioned him? Now, she's going out and, hey presto, she finds herself in Boaz' field. Can you imagine? And we're thinking, ding, ding. Bells are going off in our mind. There is something afoot here. Let's see how the story is going to unfold.

Now, I want you to put yourself in the shoes of these people. They had absolutely no idea what is going on here. The author as he tells the story says, do you notice the word he uses? "And it happened." And it happened. Literally, by happenstance it happened. By chance, she chanced. That was the way it looked. That was the way it was. From a human point of view, that was just the way it was. I don't know if you've seen the movie about William Wilberforce, the most recent movie of William Wilberforce. It's a great movie and there is a bit of romance in the movie because William Wilberforce is a workaholic, he is slaving to get the slavery issue brought up in Parliament and get slavery abolished. He is pouring his life into that great cause and was eventually, of course, after many, many, many years and ruining his health, he was eventually successful in the abolition of the slave trade in the British Isles. Well, he's driving himself so hard that his friends are concerned for him and they come up with the rather interesting conclusion that what



Wilberforce needs is a good woman to look after him and that will divert him and she'll take him in charge and, of course, that is the cure for most of us. Let's be honest.

So they set up this meeting. They go to Bath, which is a place, by the way, in England where there are hot streams and pools that go back to Roman times. In fact, the Roman baths are still in use today. They go there to take the waters which was a way of getting the therapy, the treatment. And while they are there, it happened by happenstance that William Wilberforce bumps into this attractive girl and they get on fine together until, of course, they discover that this was a set up by the friends and then they fall out and they go their separate ways and they are both really miffed with their friends and annoyed. Eventually, of course, they are brought together and they are very happily married and so on. It's a great story. I liked it anyway. But there is a sense in which that is what's going on in our story. What they don't know is this is all a set up by God. That's why the author told us in verse 1 that Boaz is exactly the right character to get involved in this story. You're going to find that out later on why he's the right character.

Now we're being told that by happenstance she goes out to glean in the fields and it happens that she is in the field belonging to Boaz. God is setting her up. Higher hands are at work in the story. And there are many things in life that happen by happenstance that are ordained of God. Look at verse 4, "And behold." "Behold" is a word that we don't use too much today but we don't really have a good alternative to the word "behold" because it's a kind of, "Surprise! Surprise!" word. Behold. Behold. Behold. Surprise everybody. Guess what? Guess what happened? Boaz happened to come along after she happened to go to that field. Isn't that really, really good? She happened to go to that field that day and, surprise, surprise, behold, Boaz turned up that day to do an on the spot visit. I mean, how often does the CEO go out to the fields to check on the workers? He's a very important man. How often did he just turn up on the job at that particular field, on that particular day, when that particular girl happens to be working in the background looking for food? Isn't that amazing? We're supposed to be amazed. You're supposed to smile, actually. Seriously, this is where the Bible lets you do it because it's part of the mystery of God's Providence.

Ruth hadn't been planning this. She just wanted to go and find food. Boaz is going about his own business. That's what he wants to do. He wants to go and see his people. But in the ordinary choices of every day life, God is at work. Let that be a lesson to you if you are struggling with the whole question of guidance. God won't tell you ahead of time what's going to happen. Basically, the way of guidance is really the way of trusting and obeying. Trusting and obeying. There is no other way to be happy in Jesus than to trust and obey and you leave it to God. And when you are worried about the future, don't rely on finding somehow or other a voice in your head or a word in the dark or a light on your path. Trust and obey that your life is in the hands of a Father who cares for you. Though Ruth doesn't know it, God had shown her favor by guiding her to this field on this day and only eternity would reveal the implications of her choice to go out that day.

Here is my last point: the instrument of Providence because God uses means to achieve his ends because this Boaz is a godly man. We've already discovered that Ruth is a godly

girl. She has been converted. We've been told right at the beginning of the story that these are the days of the judges in which most of the people of Israel were not godly people but remarkable as it is, we discover that this man, Boaz, is just the right kind of man for our girl because he is a godly man. Look, "Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, 'Yahweh be with you!' And they answered, 'Yahweh bless you.'" Do you know the amazing thing is that here is Boaz visiting his workers in the field and he greets them as if he was an elder in the synagogue greeting the people. That's normally what happened in the worship service. The priests announced the Aaronic blessing, "The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The LORD bless you." And that's what Boaz does. He's a godly man whose mind is fertile with the word of God and he calls the blessing of God down upon his own workers. He's just the right man for our girl. She's a godly girl. He's a godly man and he's the right man for our girl.

But the writer doesn't leave it there and in the minute I have left, I'm not going to leave it there because I want you to notice something. Boaz has come onto the field. He has given his blessing and this guy has obviously got a quick eye for things. I want you to notice what he does here. Do you notice, "Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, 'Whose young woman is this?'" Nod, nod, wink, wink. He has noticed. He has noticed and this guy is no shrinking violet. He wants to know not only who she is, he wants to know whose she is. Is she taken? Is she married? Does she have a boyfriend? Is she engaged? Has she got a significant other in her life? Is she free? That's what he wants to know and that's where I'm leaving it tonight.

Let's pray.

*Father, we thank you that in all the ups and downs of our lives and all the intricacies of our everyday choices that in your goodness you guide your people because you have a plan and purpose that we can't see. Neither Boaz nor Ruth saw it coming. I want to pray especially at this moment for those of us who struggle with not seeing. For those of us who struggle with the bitterness perhaps of Naomi in her heart. Who struggle, Lord, with years spent, as it were, in the wilderness. Who have been praying for and longing for something that has never come. And I pray that tonight in your great mercy you would, in your kindness, pour in the oil, the balm, the ointment of your love to soothe away bitterness, to give peace and to create joy. In Jesus' name. Amen.*