



river west church

The Miracle of Grace: God's Part and Ours

Ruth 2:14-23

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Grace Overflowing

By the end of chapter two, both Ruth and Naomi are overwhelmed. In chapter one, they had been overwhelmed by deprivation and loss. Now they are overwhelmed by kindness, provision, and the obvious blessing of God. They are simply stunned by the lavish favor poured out upon them.

The most tangible sign of this favor is the abundance of food Ruth brings home at the end of the day. It's beyond imagining. She went to work gleaning in the fields and came home with a month's worth of food! She went to the fields empty and she came back full. What a turn of events!

But it was more than the food that amazed them. It was the kindness of Boaz and his workers. The gracious provision they acquired was graciously given by someone who cared. This is rich food for heart and soul. Their empty stomachs were filled and their broken hearts were mended at the same time.

And there was an even deeper element to the day's events: this was the hand of God at work. Naomi saw it clearly. She knew this was no accident. She wanted details. She found that the man who helped was Boaz, a special relative, one designated a "redeemer" by biblical law. What an astounding turn of events! Naomi, whose heart was frozen with bitterness, couldn't help but see the hand of God in this turn of events. So much so that she proclaimed, "May he be blessed of the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" (2:20). These are not the words we expect to hear from "bitter" Naomi. But her bitterness is melting away as she sees evidence that God himself is at work in her life and her world.

Grace overflowing is the theme. It's the grace of God, for sure. But it's the kindness of a man who knows and loves God that becomes the tangible expression of God's amazing grace.

Faith That Gets to Work

Ruth is the recipient of amazing grace. But there is another key theme in this chapter: work! That sounds strange, because we don't usually put the words grace and work together. Grace is a free gift you cannot earn. But at the same time, we see Ruth as an amazing woman who made tremendous sacrifices and worked incredibly hard to do the right thing.

Ruth was amazing. Boaz saw this and he said so, several times in the book of Ruth (2:11; 3:11). Everyone in town knew that Ruth was committed, faithful, hard working, and resourceful (3:11). In fact, there is evidence in the Bible that Ruth is the ultimate paradigm of a noble woman. Consider that in the Hebrew Bible, the order of the books is a bit different than in our English Bible. In the Hebrew Bible, the book of Ruth comes directly after the book of Proverbs, which ends with a chapter about the virtuous, godly woman. Many scholars think the book of Ruth is placed after Proverbs in the Hebrew Bible in order to show Ruth as the example of the Proverbs 31 woman!

Ruth is proactive. Ruth is self sacrificing. She takes huge risks. She works. She works really hard! Ruth goes out to the fields, not actually to beg, but rather to "glean." Gleaning was a biblical paradigm instituted by God himself, so that the poor would be able to work to provide sustenance for

their families. Ruth got up and got to work. She didn't wait for Boaz to come knock on her door. She didn't wait for grain to show up in the mail. She took action.

Sure, it's all by grace. It's a miracle of God. But still, what would have happened if Ruth had done nothing?

Ruth was a woman of true faith in God but her faith found expression, in action, in what she did! The Apostle Paul put it like this:

We remember before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1Th 1:2-3)

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. (1Co 15:10)

In our study today we want to explore the riches of God's grace and also the response of faith. We want to look at how we can take action to live in that grace. Some people call it the "disciplines of grace". Everything depends on the gracious, abundant, loving work of God. But are there are things we can do to avail ourselves of His undeserved grace. This is faith put into action. This is the wonder of a woman named Ruth. How about you and me?