

A Love Story Begins

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Preacher: Oscar Chow

[0 : 00] Good morning. That was pretty good, actually. Great to be here together with everybody, and a privilege for me to be delivering God's Word to you today.

So as Kevin did mention, this is my first time preaching, and as I was talking to the elders about potentially preaching today, to be honest, I was a little bit hesitant, kind of like a little bit anxious, a little bit apprehensive, but actually the elders were very encouraging.

They said, you know what, Oscar? It's not your work. It's not your Word. It's not your voice. It's the Spirit of God that speaks to us and leads us. Isn't that so true?

And then one of the other elders, who I won't name, was also very gracious, and was also being very encouraging, and then he said to me, Oscar, you know what? Tim Keller said that his first 200 sermons were rubbish.

So I thought about that, and I realized what that means is that if I preach once every six months at Watermark, which don't get any ideas, Kevin and Chris, okay? But if I preach once every six months at Watermark, in 100 years, I'll have a decent sermon.

[1 : 24] So come back in 2118. Mark your calendars for that. And with that, let me pray for myself and for us. Father God, you know me.

You know that with my own strength, using my own ability, I cannot deliver your Word this morning. So Father, I beg you, I desperately need you to speak through me, Lord.

I desperately need for your Spirit to inspire me. I pray that your Word, your Word would be front and center of my mind, God, and that your voice would be heard today, God, and my voice would actually just fade into the background.

I pray that our hearts, our minds will be open to hearing your Word today, Lord. I pray that we'll see, Father, how much we need you, and how beautiful and majestic our Lord Jesus Christ is.

Amen. Amen. Amen. So, we've been doing a sermon series on the book of Ruth. And last week, last Sunday, we studied Ruth chapter 1.

[2 : 41] And in chapter 1, we learned that Ruth was set in the time of the judges, where Israel had no king, and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

And it was with that mindset that Naomi, her husband Elimelech, and their two sons left Bethlehem, the promised land of God, to try to find food in the land of Moab.

But Moab was an enemy of Israel. Its people were founded upon incest. Its woman in days past had seduced the men of Israel and caused them to worship pagan gods.

And in Moab, tragedy struck. Naomi's two sons married Moabite woman. But ten years later, her sons die.

Naomi was left with her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. And when Naomi hears that God brought food back to Bethlehem, she decides to return, but tells Orpah and Ruth to stay in Moab.

[3 : 44] She says to them, in Moab, at least you'll have a chance of finding a future. At least you'll have a chance that someone would marry you, someone will continue on your family line.

Orpah says, great, I'll stay in Moab. But Ruth, she clings to Naomi. And in Ruth chapter 1, verse 16, we read that wonderful, timeless statement of commitment, faithfulness, and loyalty.

As Ruth says to Naomi, don't urge me to leave you. Where you go, I will go. And where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.

Where you die, I will die. And there, I will be buried. And so Naomi, along with her daughter-in-law, Ruth, the most unlikely couple, journeyed to Bethlehem, the house of bread, in search of food.

And they returned just at the right time, just as the barley harvest was beginning in early spring in Bethlehem. And that is where we find ourselves, in Ruth chapter 2.

[5 : 03] Where Ruth 1 was chaotic and tragic, in chapter 2, the narrative begins to shift. Light begins to shine on a dark situation. Harvest time means food for the people.

And of course, Boaz shows up. Oh, Boaz, the man every father wants his daughter to marry. I think about that stuff just a little bit now that I have a daughter of my own, Kiva.

Is the book of Ruth a love story between Boaz and Ruth? Yes, it is. Sure it is. It's a wonderful love story of how Boaz showers unprecedented favor on Ruth.

But if we think of Ruth as just a traditional love story, we will miss the deeper meaning. The book of Ruth tells a much bigger story.

It's about how in the midst of despair, in the midst of hopelessness, in the midst of tragedy, God wants to redeem us. In the midst of pain and brokenness, he wants to draw us close to himself.

[6 : 17] He wants to shower us with his loving kindness. It's a story of the whole Bible, isn't it? And for today's passage in Ruth chapter 2, what I hope we'll see is that God is constantly working behind the scenes, showering kindness upon Ruth.

And this man, Boaz, this guardian or kinsman redeemer, he's there to show us a glimpse or a shadow of the ultimate redeemer to come, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's dive into it. Let's go to Ruth chapter 2, verse 2 and part of verse 3. And Ruth, the Moabitess, said to Naomi, let me go into the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.

Naomi said to her, go ahead, my daughter. So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. So, we start chapter 2 with Naomi returning to Bethlehem and Ruth by her side.

And one day, Ruth decides to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. God gave Israel the law of gleaning as a way of providing for those in society that were financially broken, specifically orphans, widows, and foreigners.

[7 : 40] And it meant that landowners, instead of maximizing profits by picking every last bit of grain, would leave some for the poor to pick up or to glean. And this was intended to reflect God's mercy on people that did not have the economic means to support themselves.

But for Ruth, gleaning in the fields was dangerous. And that is why, in verse 8, Boaz tells Ruth to, stay in my fields. And he also says to her, in verse 9, I have told the men not to touch you.

He said this because at that time in Israel's history, at the time of the judges, lawlessness abounded. And so, though there was a law to allow for gleaning, women who gleaned in the fields were oftentimes abused, physically, emotionally.

But in spite of these obvious risks, Ruth had the courage to step out into the barley fields to glean. Why? Well, first, she was hungry.

She had a real need. She was a normal person who had a normal, everyday need. And second, Ruth had made a promise to be faithful to Naomi, and her gleaning and gathering barley for food was a way for her to show love and kindness to Naomi.

[9 : 04] She was looking after her. She was keeping her promise. But the amazing thing here is that Ruth wasn't doing this alone. God was right there.

Ruth did not choose this field. God chose this field. Let's look at the end of verse 3. It says, As it turned out, she found herself working in the field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech.

I love that phrase, as it turned out. The literal translation is chance chance, which is an exaggerated expression to convey just how unlikely it was for Ruth to stumble upon Boaz's field.

As Ruth took that step of faith to go out and glean in the fields, it was clear that God had paved the way for her and allowed her to meet Boaz and to find favor with him.

Of all the fields she could have stumbled upon in that dark land, she finds herself in the one field owned by a godly man. This wasn't just chance. This was God's intervention.

[10 : 17] Ruth was just going about her day, trying to put food on the table, being faithful to Naomi. Naomi, and God met her need. And where did he lead her?

Right to Boaz's field. Now let's rewind for a second and go back to verse one. Let's look at Boaz. Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing whose name was Boaz.

Three things here to mention about Boaz. Number one, in terms of family relations, Boaz was a relative of Elimelech from the same clan.

Now in Israel, there were the twelve tribes of Israel, the sons of Jacob. Below that were the clans of Israel, and below that were the families.

Boaz was from the same clan as Elimelech. Second thing is, the text says that he was a man of standing. So Boaz was a landowner.

[11:24] So he was wealthy. We know that. But he wasn't just some rich guy. The Hebrew for man of standing can be roughly translated as a man of wealth, but also a man of character and of integrity.

Third, what does he say? What are his first words? You can tell a lot about a man by what he says. Look at verse 4. I love his first words.

He arrives back from Bethlehem, and I can imagine Boaz standing at the edge of his fields, looking out at his harvesters and saying, the Lord be with you. He blesses them.

How many bosses in Hong Kong do you know that bless their colleagues? I hear Pat laughing over there. Most bosses in Hong Kong lord over or domineer over their subordinates and colleagues, but not Boaz.

Boaz is kind to them. And the best example of Boaz's kindness is how he treats Ruth. In verse 5, Boaz notices Ruth in his body field, and when he realizes who she is, the Moabite widow and daughter-in-law of Naomi, he immediately showers her with kindness.

[12:44] What does he do? First, Boaz protects Ruth. Verse 8 and 9, Boaz says to Ruth, don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here.

Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the fields where the men are harvesting and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. Now we know Ruth needed to gather food for her and Naomi, but the only way she could do so safely was if someone protected her.

And Boaz offered that protection. But you know what's so powerful is that in coming under Boaz's protection, Ruth was actually coming under the protection of God himself.

Look at verse 12. Boaz, in acknowledging Ruth's loyalty to Naomi, he says to her, may you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

Under whose wings you have come to take refuge. As Ruth gleaned in Boaz's field, she thought she was coming under Boaz's protection, but in actual fact, Ruth was coming under the protection of God, under his wings.

[14:11] God was right there. And the second way that Boaz shows kindness to Ruth is that he accepts Ruth.

Boaz didn't tell Ruth, hey, stay in my fields, you can glean as you like, my guys will take care of you, but I got to go take off and do the financial audit because it's the year end.

No, Boaz takes another step and invites Ruth to dine with him at his midday meal. Verse 14, at mealtime, Boaz said to her, come over here, have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.

When she sat down, he offered her some roasted grain. In any culture, when you invite someone to dine at your table, you project a sense of inclusion, belonging, acceptance.

You eat with who you want to be associated with. I can imagine guys like Boaz, landowners, they would dine with other landowners or perhaps with customers to whom they want to do business. Actually, it's not that different from modern day Hong Kong, is it?

[15:25] And third, Boaz abundantly sustains Ruth. As we just saw, at the midday meal, Ruth eats right at Boaz's table.

Verse 14 says, she ate all she wanted and had some left over. Ruth wasn't just full after eating with Boaz. She was given so much food, she had leftovers.

And then, after the meal, verse 15 16, Boaz instructs his men to pull some stalks of barley from the bundles and to leave them out in the field for Ruth to pick up.

He made her job so much easier for her. He doesn't just allow Ruth to glean in the traditional way according to the letter of the law. He works behind the scenes to give Ruth abundantly more.

And at the end of that day, in verse 17, Ruth gleaned about an ephah of barley. An ephah of barley is roughly 10 to 15 liters, which is 10 to 15 times more than one person's daily ration in those days.

[16:39] And if that wasn't enough, Boaz goes further. Because of his protection and favor upon Ruth, Ruth was able to safely glean through both the barley and the wheat harvest, which was about seven weeks.

And therefore, at the end of seven weeks, she would have gleaned about eight months worth of food. What favor? What blessing? At the beginning of Ruth chapter two, Ruth went out to glean

because she was hungry.

She had no food. But by the end of the two months of gleaning, she had more than she needed because Boaz had abundantly sustained her. Look at Ruth's response.

She says to Boaz in verse 10, Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me, a foreigner?

She is genuinely surprised at Boaz's kindness, confirming that Boaz has indeed given her so much more than she expected. And then later on in verse 13, she says, You have given me comfort, have spoken kindly to your servant, though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls.

[18:06] Ruth comes to Boaz with such humility and no sense of entitlement. She never thinks she deserves favor.

She never thinks she can earn favor. She recognized who she was, foreign widow, someone unworthy of even being called a servant girl, someone broken, someone in need of grace.

And in verse 18, Ruth returns to Naomi. Naomi. You can imagine Naomi sitting there waiting for Ruth to return, unsure if Ruth would be successful that day in gleaning, unsure if God would provide, bitter, resentful against God for the predicament that she's in.

But all of a sudden, Ruth returns home with this massive, huge bounty of barley, and she tells Naomi she has gleaned in Boaz's field.

Naomi can't believe it. She tells Ruth, this man is our close relative. He is our kinsman redeemer. There is hope after all.

[19:28] Now, we'll be unpacking this very important concept of a kinsman redeemer or guardian redeemer in detail in the next two weeks, so you'll have to wait for that.

But just to give you a quick preview, the concept of a kinsman redeemer was based upon the Jewish law. Under the law, male clan members had certain responsibilities towards their relatives. They had the responsibility to help out a fellow clan member who faced certain adverse circumstances. Two in particular. One, if a relative fell into extreme poverty such that he was forced to sell himself or his land to repay a debt, a kinsman redeemer, a relative, was expected to buy back the family member or buy back that land, whatever the case may be.

And second, if a male relative died, the kinsman redeemer was expected to marry the widow to carry on the family name of the male relative.

But as you can imagine, both of these things were costly. And Naomi recognized that Boaz was a relative of her dead husband, Elimelech, and therefore was one of her family's kinsman redeemers.

[20:55] You can sense the excitement and anticipation from Naomi. Could it be, could God be calling the kind and good man Boaz, our close relative, our kinsman redeemer, to redeem our land, to buy back our dignity, to carry on our family line, to save us?

Maybe God is at work in our lives after all. Maybe Ruth happening to stumble upon Boaz's field wasn't random. Did you notice that in the entire chapter 2, there isn't even one instance of God intervening in an obvious supernatural way?

God didn't speak audibly to Ruth or to Boaz like he did to Abraham. He didn't appear to them like he did to Moses in a burning bush.

And yet, God was very much still at work. Of all the barley fields outside Bethlehem, God led Ruth to Boaz's field at the exact time Boaz showed up.

Even though we don't audibly hear God's voice or we don't visibly see him in action, God's fingerprints are all over the narrative of Ruth. Proverbs 16.9 says, I love this passage, a man's heart plans his ways, but the Lord directs his steps.

[22:25] I don't know about you this morning, but that verse is very comforting to me. I feel like recently I've had to make so many big and small decisions about my family, my job, a lot of things going on in my life.

Recently we decided to move, we decided to send Kiva to a certain school, so many things going on. My day job, it's just taken up so much of my mental capacity. And on top of that, my wife and I are expecting twin boys.

Thank you. Praise God. We're very excited about this and feel very, very blessed. But you know, with the twin boys coming, to be honest, I have more questions than answers.

I was talking to my wife the other day and we're just saying to each other, how are we going to get to church on time on Sunday? How are we going to get anywhere on time? But you know, when I look at Ruth, I realize God cares about every decision we make.

He cares about every aspect of our lives, even the mundane, everyday details. I think oftentimes we think God only cares about the really big things in our lives, so therefore we only pray when we're really in trouble.

[23 : 47] But when we fail to believe God is working in the everyday aspect, everyday aspects of our lives, we end up complaining.

When we fail to believe God is working, we oftentimes put more undue pressure on ourselves to do things with our own strength. faith. Or maybe some of us feel God is so far away, he's up in the clouds, and so therefore we lose hope and we drift away from him, from the church, from our community groups, from reading his word, from pursuing him.

But if we look at Ruth, that morning she seemed to make a mundane decision to go glean for barley. But God honored that.

And God was right there, directing her, guiding her, even in this small decision. And he led her right to Boaz, where God blessed Ruth through Boaz.

When we believe that the sovereign God of the universe is in control, we don't worry about our decisions. We don't worry about the outcomes. We go through our day knowing that he cares about every mundane event and our hearts are at peace because he cares.

[25 : 07] He cares about that conversation you're having tomorrow with your boss. He cares about where you're going to send your kids to school. He cares about the dinner you're going to have with your in-laws.

I know life in Hong Kong is often a grind. But be encouraged that God is not just there in the big things. He's there in the thousand small moments of every single day working in our lives.

So as we've seen in Ruth chapter two, Boaz was a faithful man of God, a good man, a kind man. Remember, Boaz was merely a man.

Boaz just gives us a glimpse of the redeemer who was to come over a thousand years later who would redeem not just one family but the world. Boaz was just a type and shadow of the greatest redeemer, Jesus Christ, God himself, who would redeem mankind from our greatest tragedy, our own hearts, our own brokenness, our own fractured nature.

You see, in many ways, you and I were like Ruth. Ruth was not a Jew.

[26 : 36] She was a Gentile. When she first came to Israel, she was a foreigner, without rights, without hope. She was an outcast, looked down upon by society.

The apostle Paul, he writes in Ephesians 2 that we too are Gentiles by birth and that before we knew Christ, we too were excluded from citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world.

Like Ruth, without Christ, you and I, we too, are broken. We too are in desperate need of a savior. But unlike Ruth, we weren't just struggling with hunger.

We weren't just victims of our relatives' misfortune. Before we knew Christ, you and I were enemies of God. Every time we said in our hearts, I want to do this my way, I want to be in charge, we are guilty of mocking Christ, of beating him, of setting that crown of thorns upon his head.

But we have hope. In that same passage from Ephesians, Paul goes on to say, Paul goes on to say, but now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

[28 : 07] Without doing anything on our own accord, without justifying ourselves, we who were once far away have been brought near to God through the blood of Jesus Christ. Ruth's redeemer was Boaz, but our redeemer is one who is far greater.

Our redeemer is Christ himself, who is seated at the right hand of God in heaven. Boaz protected Ruth and said to her, stay in my fields.

And remember, in verse 12, he acknowledged that Ruth came to Bethlehem to seek refuge under the wings of the God of Israel. What did Christ say about this?

In the Gospels, as Jesus lamented how his Jewish brothers rejected him as their Messiah and Savior, Christ, he cries out in Matthew 23, he says, how often I long to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, for you were not willing.

The theologian N.T. Wright said this, he said, this image is of a barnyard fire. When the fire breaks out, the mother hen would gather her chicks under her wings to protect them.

[29 : 32] But when the fire had run its course, there will be found a dead hen, scorched and blackened. but the chicks will be alive and well under her wings.

It's a picture of Christ, God in flesh who would protect us under his wings, taking the punishment of death for us, even when we had rejected him.

Now, Boaz, he accepted Ruth at his dining table. He welcomed her, he included her. But Christ says, my father has prepared a banquet for you in heaven where we will dine together for eternity. Christ says, my father's house has many rooms and I am going there to prepare a place for you. Christ says, you are welcome, you belong, and he says, because of me, my father sees you as my brother and my sister.

You are my family. Now, Boaz sustained Ruth with a huge bounty of barley. He fed her for weeks and months at a big cost to himself.

[30 : 45] Boaz could have sold that barley for money. But Christ sustains us with his very body. Christ says, I am the bread of life, and I give you my body on the cross.

I've paid the ultimate price. Boaz was a good man. You could even say he was a great man. But Jesus Christ is a hero of this story.

He embodies loving kindness. Jesus Christ is loving kindness. So as we close Ruth chapter 2, let's ask ourselves a question.

How has God called us to share his loving kindness to those around us? As we've seen this morning, God displayed his kindness to Ruth through Boaz.

Ruth, the Moabitess widow, Gentile, an outsider in Israel. She saw the kindness of God through this God-fearing man, Boaz. So, who are the Ruths around us?

[32 : 01] Who are the outsiders? And how will they experience the kindness of God? There are people around us every single day, even right here at church on Sunday, that the world would judge as outsiders.

others. But let's ask ourselves, can Watermark Community Church be a place that welcomes all peoples, all nations, all demographics?

Can our Sunday service, our CGs, be a place where every man and every woman is equally shown the kindness of God? God? Jeremy and Soda talked about social justice earlier.

out there in the city, there are so many people crying out for the kindness of God. There are so many pockets of society here in Hong Kong that struggle economically or socially.

Think about the women that work in the red light districts, minorities that have few rights, the elderly, the widows, the orphans, single mothers. As Christ followers, God has called us to care for and to show kindness to these people.

[33 : 18] Otherwise, how are they going to receive kindness? You see, when we truly understand the kindness of Christ, when the truth of Christ's sacrifice, pain, what he went through for us on the cross, when that is so deeply rooted in our hearts, then we can show kindness to the people around us, just like Ruth showed kindness to Naomi, and Boaz showed kindness to Ruth.

Ordinary people living faithful, extraordinary lives. God using faithful people to show his kindness to the world.

So this week, as you go about your daily lives, at home with your families, at work, when you meet strangers on the street or in the MTR, can you allow God to display his kindness through you?

Let's pray. Father, we do thank you for your word, which is living, which is active, and powerful.

Father, I pray that as we receive your message, as we receive your word, and as we digest it this week, Lord, I pray, Father, that at first, Lord, we would see our own brokenness, Father, our own need of you.

[34 : 59] You would see how we're like Ruth. Before we knew you, we were a foreigner, to your kingdom. But, Father, through the blood of Christ, through his sacrifice, through the cross, we have been brought near to God.

And I pray, Lord, that as we think about and meditate upon the kindness that we see in this passage that Boaz has shown to Ruth, I pray, Father, that we'll just see the kindness of God through that.

infinitely greater than the kindness that Boaz, that good man, showed to Ruth. And I pray, Lord, that we'll just see the beauty of Christ, that we'll be more in awe of him.

God, that we'll do it. And I pray, Father, that as we go out into Hong Kong during this week, wherever we are, Lord, Monday to Friday to Saturday, I pray, Father, that you would use us to show your kindness to those around us, Lord, in every situation, Father.

And, Lord, for some of us, that's difficult. that's a challenge. Sometimes, Lord, I admit, it's hard to be kind to those that are not kind to me.

[36 : 26] But then I look at Christ, and I see, on the cross, on the cross, that you were beaten, Lord Jesus.

You were mocked, you were whipped, you bled for me, God. You showed me, you showed all of us ultimate loving kindness through what you did.

And I pray, God, that we would receive that message today, Lord, and we would go out into Hong Kong and to show your loving kindness to those around us, to those you have placed in our lives. In your name we pray. Amen.