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## GOD'S HAND IN OUR LUCK

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### Part 2 of Redeeming Ruth

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Ruth 2:1-13 | January 14, 2007

You're listening to "Redeeming Ruth," a sermon series following the events from the Book of Ruth, presented by Pastor Mark Driscoll. Follow this wonderfully written story of the redemption to be found in Jesus and his people, and learn how it applies to everyday people today. This is a presentation of Mars Hill Church in Seattle. For more information, go to [marshillchurch.org](http://marshillchurch.org).

"Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech who's 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 and 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. And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and he said to the reaper, 'The Lord be with you.' And they answered, 'The Lord bless you.'

"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.'

"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.' 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 to be given you by the Lord to the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.'

"Then she said, 'I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants.'"

Good evening, Mars Hill. Isn't that beautiful? I love that. We are blessed with some amazing talent. Everything was done internally, including the music. Welcome. Good to have you. If you are new, my name is Mark. I'm one of the pastors here. We're in the Book of Ruth and we are in our second week. It'll take six weeks to study the entire book, so we'll be in chapter 2 tonight. If you gotta Bible, you could turn there. I'll go ahead and pray and I'll introduce you to a guy named Boaz tonight. Even his name's cool. So you'll meet Boaz tonight. I'll go ahead and pray and we'll get right to work.

Father God, we begin by thanking you for scripture, and thank you that we have a copy, and thank you that we get to read it, and thank you that through it your Holy Spirit does its work in our hearts and our minds and our lives. And God, as we study tonight, it is my prayer that we, in the example of Boaz, would learn something of Jesus, and in the example of Ruth, learn something of how we are to respond to Jesus as she responded to Boaz.

And for that to occur, Holy Spirit, we ask you to inform and instruct us, to lead us and guide us, to illuminate the scriptures which you've inspired to be written. And God, it is my prayer that we would learn about Jesus tonight through the pages of Ruth, so we ask these things in his good name. Amen.

If you weren't here last week, I'll catch you up on chapter 1, then we'll get into chapter 2. The story of Ruth – one of the most well-written stories in all of scripture and all of history – and it begins by telling us that the story takes place – the true story takes place – in the time of the Judges, which is about a thousand years before the birth of Jesus. To read more on the time of the Judges you can actually just read the Book of Judges and you will find therein that that was a time of sin and rebellion and folly. It's one of the darkest periods in the history of God's people.

And the story tells us that in the town of Bethlehem, which is ultimately where Jesus was to be born, there was a family, a very ordinary family. They weren't kings and queens and the rich and affluent. Fairly normal and average family headed by a man named Elimelech, who's name means "My God is King." He had a wife named Naomi, which means, "Sweetheart," and he had two sons with cool, sort of Star Trek Klingon names named Mahlon and Chilion, but their names mean "Sick" and "Dying" so don't name your kids that even though those names are pretty cool.

And what happens is that a famine comes into the land of Bethlehem, which is ironic because it's the House of Bread. It's what it literally means. And so a famine breaks out, possibly God's judgment against his people for their continued hard-heartedness and stubbornness and sin. Elimelech makes a

foolish decision and decides to relocate his entire family some 50 miles away to a small town called Moab. That is not where God's people are supposed to go. And it is named after a guy named Moab who was a descendent of Lot and we read in Genesis 19 that he actually was the product of incest between Lot and his daughter.

And the Moabites were a confused, perverse, pagan people. They worshipped a false god named Chemosh, not the God of scripture, and not Yahweh. And Elimelech made this fateful, tragic error of relocating his family from Bethlehem to Moab because there was food there.

What happened is they located there, perhaps the only worshippers of God in the whole town. His sons grow up, marry two Moabite young women, Ruth and Orpah. What happens then is utterly tragic. We know not the details, but Elimelech moved there to preserve his family's life, and tragically he, and then ultimately his two sons as well, all die. That leaves three women in destitute and devastated circumstances, Naomi and her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah.

Naomi then hears that God has visited his people in Bethlehem, that he's blessing them, that the famine is over, and so she desires to return home to be with God and his people, and to be blessed. So, she takes her two daughters-in-law and they begin the journey home. Along the way, it dawns on Naomi that she has nothing to offer these young women, and so they probably shouldn't venture to Bethlehem with her. So she stops along the road and she tries to encourage Orpah and Ruth to return home.

Orpah does, because even though she appears to be a worshipper of God, she's really not. She returns to her false religion and her old way of life, so we call her Oprah. And so Oprah returns home, she's a faker, she's not really a Christian, and Ruth, though, has a genuine conversion experience, and she decides that she will continue in faith to Bethlehem to be with God and his people. So the two women make the journey home; the town is abuzz. Everybody's wondering what Naomi's life was like, and she tells them that she's not happy with God and she's changed her name to Mara, which means "Bitter Old Hag."

And that is the end of chapter 1. Then, in chapter 2 we pick up the story in verse 1. You ready? Great book. I hope you're enjoying it. Chapter 2, verse 1, we pick up the story. "Now Naomi," – all right? The author calls her Naomi, she calls herself Mara. He's fairly kind. Mara means bitter; she's a bitter old woman – "Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man" – we'll talk about that – "of the clan of Elimelech from her husband's side whose name was Boaz." All right.

He's a worthy man – what does that mean? He's worthy of respect. He's worthy of trust. He's worthy of imitation. So I would say, gentlemen, many of you are single. Imitate Boaz. Boaz is the dude of dudes, right? So far in the book, Elimelech – tttffffbbb. Mahlon – tttffffbbb. Chilion – tttffffbbb. Boaz – dude of dudes. His name literally means "strength, mighty one, man's man." We love this guy. He doesn't own a sweater vest. He doesn't drink decaf, he's never heard Mariah Carey or the Spice Girls. He has never physically been in a Volkswagon Cabriolet. He's a man. He is a man. He's the dude of dudes, okay? That's Boaz.

Now, furthermore, when it says that he's a worthy man, that phraseology, used elsewhere in the Old Testament, sometimes refers to a man of war – so he could fight. He's a dude. He also – it is used of men who are men of wealth. So he runs a good business. He's good with his money. And men of wherewithal – notice the three w's? It's called alliteration. I went to college! He's a man of war; he's a man of wealth; and a man of wherewithal, meaning if there's hardship, difficulty, oppression, he gets things done. He is the guy who delivers results. Boaz. Boaz is the dude of dudes.

And what's weird, he's a little bit older, and rich, and loves God, and successful, man of war, man of wealth, man of wherewithal, and he is what? Married or single? Single. Hmm. I don't know if he's got a goiter on his head or what, but it seems – he's got a horn or something, I don't know what's going on with this guy – but he doesn't have a wife, in God's providence. Some of you ladies are like, "I cannot find a good man." Maybe you'll find Boaz. Welcome to Mars Hill. I'll do my best.

Verse 2 – there's Boaz. He makes his entrance. "And Ruth, the Moabite," – the gal from the bad family, the bad town, the gal with nothing going for her, who's a brand-new Christian – "said to Naomi" – her bitter mother-in-law – "'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, here, the women are gonna have a conversation, right? 'Cause they're women. And throughout the book, half of the book is conversation, 'cause the two primary characters are women and they gotta talk about things. And they're talking about this, and the fact is they're very hungry. They have no food. They're flat broke. Usually your husband, your father, your sons, are your, sort of, protector, defender, and they have no husband, no father, no son. They're all by themselves. They're flat broke. They're getting hungry. There's no money in their pocket. There's no food on the shelves. The fridge is bare. Ruth looks at her mother-in-law, says, "I'm asking your permission to go out in the fields and glean." And she, in faith, she in faith is trusting, "When I get out there, God's gonna give someone a heart for me and you, and we'll find favor in their eyes." This is faith. She's saying "I didn't move all the way from Moab to Bethlehem and give my life to the Lord for the Lord to let me down. I'm gonna go out there and he's gonna introduce me to somebody who's gonna take care of us, give me a job, give me dinner, give me something. Do I have your permission to go glean?"

Now let me explain gleaning. Gleaning is the equivalent to social services, food bank, homeless shelter, soup kitchen, food stamps. That's the Hebrew equivalent. And the way it works is this. God, in the Old Testament, he told his people, "The land belongs to me. So if you own a piece of land, actually I own it, too, and when you work the land, harvest what I give you for food, but don't take all of the food. Leave a little bit so that the poor, the widow, the orphan, the alien, the oppressed, the immigrant, the needy, can work" – not just get a handout, but work – "come to the field, and take some of the food home for themselves and their family." This was the Hebrew welfare system.

They have hit rock bottom. The equivalent would be one of you young ladies, moving to Seattle, only knowing one person, and being flat broke, out

collecting aluminum cans to scrounge together a few bucks, sleeping at the mission, eating at the soup kitchen, I mean, these are women who are in a devastated, very difficult place. But here's Ruth, willing to work hard, do anything, venture out in faith, and hope, and trust, and pray that the Lord gives them away to have a meal. And she's willing to work to also feed her mother-in-law.

So, verse 3. "She set out and went and gleaned in the field, after the reapers, and she happened" – we'll talk about this. I love the way the scriptures say this. Lo and behold! "My Name is Earl" karma kicked in. Lucky her, what chance! What good fortune! That's what it means. "She happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech." No where in the Old Testament is any event described in these sort of peculiar terms. She happened to go – she happened to move from Moab to Bethlehem. She happened to not have any food. She happened to go out into the field. She happened to see that all of the fields were lined up one to the other. She happened to just randomly, by chance pick a field, and she happened to pick the field of Boaz, the rich, single guy, who loves Jesus. She just happened to pick that field.

You say, "Why does the Bible say it that way?" It says it in an ironic way to get our attention. This isn't happenstance, circumstance, fortune, chance. This is providence. Again, it's not happenstance, circumstance, or chance, it's providence. But it's the providence of God, which is the theme of the Book, that God sometimes works through his visible hand of miracle, sometimes works through his invisible hand of providence. Here, what it looks like, from the human perspective is this hungry, homeless, broke girl goes out, looks at a bunch of fields and says, "I guess I'll go glean in that one." She makes a free-will choice to go to that particular field. No angel spoke or led, there was no miracle, she didn't see a burning bush in the field, "Oh, that must be the one!" She just picked a field.

And here what it is saying is what looks to you and I like chance, circumstance, free will, decisions, good karma, lucky day, is really what? The gracious providing hand of the God of providence, who is both sovereign and good. As James says, every good and perfect gift comes from God. Isaiah 65:11 rebukes those who believe in good fortune or chance. He says, "No, no, it's the Lord. It's God."

And in this – I've shared this analogy before, but I'll share it again – what we're looking at here is a human perspective, and it's like peering underneath a loom, just loose ends of twine and string and yarn and knots of free will and choice, and it just looks like a mess. Yet from above the loom, from God's perspective it's this glorious tapestry as he's weaving together all of the details of our life. Just so happens – see, you and I, we don't believe, if we're Christians, in chance, circumstance, karma, fortune, luck. We believe in the gracious hand of a providential, good, sovereign God. It doesn't mean we don't make choices. Ruth did. But it means that God also is at work in our lives. And I love how it says it in verse 4, "And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem." Huh-ho! Lucky for her. She happened to pick the field of Boaz out of all the fields; she happened to go there on the day that Boaz happened to be riding out in his Escalade with rims to see how his business was going. He happened to get out of the Escalade at the time when she happened to be working and he happened to see her. Awww, this is good. God's a great, great God.

"Boaz came from Bethlehem." Here comes Boaz, stepping out of the Escalade, coming to check out his field, to see how things are going at the business. A very important man, a very rich man, a very successful man. "And he said to the reapers," – who were his what? Employees. What's he gonna say to them? "The Lord be with you." How many of you – that is not your boss? He doesn't walk in quoting verses, right? You're going, "No, he's the devil. My boss has a tail." "The Lord be with you." This is a good, godly man. He gets out of his Escalade. "The Lord bless you!" And what are they gonna say, all his employees? And these are blue-collar guys, working in the field. What do they say? "And they answered, 'The Lord bless you'" – which is the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24. "Oh, and the Lord bless you, brother!" How many of you, this is not your job? You know, you're not sitting in your cubicle, and the boss walks in, "Oh, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!" And you all pop out of your cubicles like moles out of holes, "Oh, and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you, too, Mr. CEO! Let's sing a psalm." Right? He's a good dude. He shares his faith with his employees, loves 'em, blesses 'em, quotes scripture to 'em. He's a good guy, decent boss.

"Then Boaz said to his young man" – Johnny College, the guy with the clipboard sitting there taking notes. "Then Boaz said to Johnny College, who was in charge of the reapers, 'Who's young woman is this?'" He looks up. "All these people work for me. Who's that? I never hired her. What's she doing?" Typing in the cubicle – who's that gal? What's she doing out there in the field?

This is the first sight – love at first sight. This is Boaz seeing Ruth for the first time. Ladies, does she look her best? Is she all dolled up? No. What is she? Working in the fields! She's all covered in dirt and mud. Her hair's in a ponytail. She's got no makeup on. Her one peasant dress is just covered in filth. She's funkified. She's all pitted out. This is, this is not her finest hotty moment. That's what I'm saying. Most ladies, if you said, "Boaz is coming here," you'd be like, "I'll be ready in four hours." And it's like sandblasting and spray painting. I mean, just a lot of things have to happen. Right?

No. She's funkified. She's all pitted out. She's all muddy and dirty. She's been working in the field all day. Boaz is like, "Who's that gal? Hmmm. Who is that, Johnny College?" Verse 6, Johnny College, who was in charge of the reapers answered, "'She is the young Moabite.'" She's that gal we heard about, that met the Lord and moved from Moab, and she came back with Naomi from Moab and she said to me, "Please, let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers." "So she came, and she's continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest." She's worked hard all day. She's an honest gal. She's just trying to make ends meet, she's trying to feed her crazy mother-in-law. That's what he's saying.

Now in this, what we see is that Ruth is a woman of outstanding character. She's not looking for a handout. She's working hard. She's honest. She's worked hard all day to feed herself and her mother-in-law. She, in many ways, illustrates the Proverbs 31 sort of great woman with a great work ethic. Let me say this. Most of you guys – how many of you guys are single? Okay? Put 'em up. Okay. Okay. There's like two married guys here. You're all single, okay? Now, you single guys, two things I'll say here. One, what is going to attract him to Ruth is her character. You need – gentlemen! You need to marry a woman who's not just attractive – you need to be attracted to your wife, she would appreciate that. Right? But not just attracted to her physically, you also gotta be attracted to her character and her work ethic and her, her devotion to the Lord, because there are some women who are a good time, and there are other women who are a good legacy. Right? Most 20-year-old guys are like, "Good time!" No, good legacy! Which means you

gotta ask questions like, “Can you read? Are you sober?” Right? You go, “What does that matter?” Well, if you wanna have kids and grandkids and have that – you know, you’re gonna have to have a woman who, you know, knows how to work and how to have integrity, and how to be devoted, and how to endure hardship. And we see all that in the character of Ruth. So don’t just look, “Well, she’s hot.” Well, so’s hell, you know? You gotta get beyond that. You gotta look at character.

In addition to being attractive, you gotta look at character. And also, too, Boaz is gonna go after the woman that’s in front of him. So many guys are like, “I have a list and I’m looking for the perfect woman.” Look, if she exists, she’s not looking for you, right? If you ever met, she’s like, “Puh-leeze.” You gotta look at the woman in front of you. So many guys are like, “I can’t find a good a woman.” Whoa, I hate to break it to you, look around! I mean, how many guys are like, “I cannot find a nice girl.” Well, that’s like going to the supermarket and saying, “I cannot find cereal.” It’s like – there’s a lot of options. You need to look at what is in front of you. Who do you work with? Who’s in your community group? Who’s in your church? Who’s in your circle of friends? Who has God put in front of you? Take a look at the ladies that God puts in front of you.

Now, God has put Ruth in front of Boaz, and now he’s gotta talk to her. They’re gonna have their first – Verse 8 – conversation. It’s awesome. But, hear me, single men! Look at the progression. Before he talks to the woman, he’s a Christian. He’s not going to hell. He has a job. Write that down. Stops going to hell; starts going to work. Has a job, and then he talks to a woman. That’s step three! Some of you guys are like, “I’m gonna talk to her” – no, no, no! Get a job. ‘Cause if she goes to Mars Hill, first two questions will be, “Do you love Jesus? And where do you work?” Ladies, ask those questions. A guy comes up, “How are you doing?” “Jesus? Job?” I got two J-questions, another alliteration, Jesus, Job. “You answer those, we’ll talk. Till then, you got stuff to be doing.” You think I’m kidding. I’m not.

So he’s gonna talk to her, verse 8, they’re gonna have a conversation, the first conversation. “Then Boaz said to Ruth,” – I kind of hear this James Earl Jones/Teddy Pendergrass voice, “Now,” drops his voice, “Now, listen my daughter, do not go to glean in another field.” Don’t go over to Hank’s. Stay right here, I got me a nice field. Stick close to Bo. Bo knows gleaning, you stick close, baby doll, you be fine. That’s how we roll here in Bethlehem. You’ll be just fine. “Now, listen my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women.” He’s providing community for her. She doesn’t have any friends. She doesn’t know anybody. She’s new to town. “These ladies, they work for me, they love the Lord, they’re good gals. Stick close to them. They’ll be your friends. They’ll be your community group. Stick close to them. Here’s some friends for you.” And “Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping and go after them.” Stick close to the gals. They know how to get the most for their labors. If you want to make some money in my field, stick close to these ladies and you’ll take more of my money. Good man.

“And have I not charged the young men not to touch you.” First sexual harassment policy in all of scripture. He makes this rule. He gets all the young guys together, “Hey, boys. You see that Moabite? Oh, yeah. She’s cute, yeah. If you touch her, I have a big field. They will never find your body. That’s what I’m saying. I’m Old Testament. That’s how it’s gonna go.”

“I told the young men not to touch” – what’s he doing? Protector, provider, defender, Boaz, man of war. Love that! One of the things that has died with feminism is chivalry. We’re not for chauvinism, but we’re for chivalry, right? Chivalry, right? A lot of women are like, “You need to treat me like a man.” You don’t want that. We give each other wedgies and play pull-my-finger. Is that what you want, deep down? How about we love you as an equal, image-bearer of God, but we treat you like a lady, chivalry, kindness, love, protection, affection, sweetness. Chivalry’s good. He’s a man of chivalry.

Paul says in the New Testament that gentlemen, we’re to treat Christian ladies as sisters. Boaz does that. He treats her like he would want his sister to be treated. Loves her, speaks to her, he’s gonna feed her, and care for her, and give her a job, and give her friends, and make sure no boys are messing with her. That’s a good guy. He’s a godly man. He’s not doing this for any ulterior motive. You’ll see later in the book, he doesn’t have any clue that she would ever be interested in him. This is just how he treats all women, with great dignity and respect, and chivalry, and kindness, and masculine defender/protector. That’s Boaz. I dig him.

“And when you are thirsty,” he says, “go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn.” See, in that culture, her being a Moabite woman, typically she would draw the water out of the well to give all the men something to drink. And he is saying, “No, let the men go do the work. You sit here, sweetheart. They’ll give you something cool to drink. You can be part of this community. You’ll be honored, you’ll be treated as an equal, we’ll take good care of you.” This is like inviting someone, not only over to dinner, but seating them at the head of your table and giving them great honor and dignity and respect. I mean, he really is a gracious, good man.

So, she has to respond. How will she respond? Verse 10. “Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground.” Ancient Eastern custom, still pretty cool, though, right? Respectful, grateful, saying, “This was very nice of you.” “And said to him, ‘Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?’”

Here’s what I love, ladies, you see this? She doesn’t go, “Oh, Boaz! My ring’s a size 8.” I mean, she doesn’t just, “Do you have a tux?” I mean, she doesn’t just go to the altar emotionally. She doesn’t just throw herself at Boaz. She asks a question: Why are you being so nice to me? Good question, right? Some of you ladies are like, “He’s so nice!” Well, ask why. See what the end game is. You want to sleep together? You wanna live together? You looking for a good time, or a good legacy? Where are we going with this? What’s your motive? Every woman has the right to ask that. You’ve initiated, you’ve been very nice, thank you. What’s your plan? Where are we going? Why are you doing this? She asks him. And you think about it, from her perspective, doesn’t this seem odd? I mean, how many of you men, and some of you men have a mental or an actual list of what you’re looking for in a wife. How many of you’d include pagan family, most of her life spent in a cult, homeless, flat broke, pitted out, dirty, with a crazy, angry mother-in-law as a bonus prize. How many of you are like, “That’s what I’m looking for!” Right? I don’t know of any guy in this room who’s like “I wanna homeless girl with a crazy mother-in-law, pitted out, digging in a dumpster for dinner. If I could find me one of those, thank you Jesus! All my prayers would be

answered!" Right?

Ruth looks at herself and is like, "He's Boaz, and I'm Ruth, and I'm not a virgin, I come with this Naomi baggage and carry-on, I'm out here dumpster diving at his place of work, why you being so – and I'm covered in funkifiedness. Why are you being so nice to me?"

So Boaz has to answer her question. How he answers will make or break the future of the greatest love story in all of scripture. Verse 11. "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.'" "Ruth, your character, your reputation precedes you. Everyone is talking about you. You just met the Lord. You've had a hard life, but you love the Lord. You serve the Lord. You've come here to go to church. You've come here to walk with God. You've come here to walk with God's people. You've been loyal and faithful to your mother-in-law. You're a hardworking, wonderful woman. I respect you. I admire you. I'm not trying to flatter you, but I want to encourage you." Ho-ho-ho, that is a great man.

"And how you left your father and mother" – how you risked everything and trusted the Lord – "and your native land." "You've come to our town and God has brought you to my field, and you are here taking a tremendous risk, and I want to honor that," he is saying. "And came to a people that you did not know before." He says this publicly. Others get to hear it. He's not a flatterer, but he's an encourager. He is esteeming, honoring, loving her, and he is speaking well of her in public. I mean, Ruth has had some very hard days. She buried her father-in-law. She buried her husband. She buried her brother-in-law. Just a few hours before this she was hungry, possibly starving to death. She had no hope, no friends, no job. She took a big risk, ventured out into a new city, hoping that she wouldn't get raped or beaten or ripped off. And she meets Boaz. And this is how he treats her.

And the deep desire of her heart, that God would give her favor in someone's eyes, has been answered in the kindness of Boaz. And if this wasn't enough, in verse 12, he is then going to pray for her. This is a beautiful beginning to any relationship. I assure you, this is not the first person Boaz has prayed for. Boaz is a man who prays for people when he meets them. He asks them, "How can I pray for you?" and when they say a request he actually prays for them. This is just part of his character. This is how he operates. So in verse 12 he prays, "'The Lord repay you for what you have done.'" You know, Ruth is filled with prayers. Every prayer is for someone else, and every prayer, by the end of the book, is answered by God because, as I told you last week, the flipside of providence is prayer. Because God is sovereign and good, which is my definition of the providence of God, we can ask him. He will hear and answer because he can and he wants to. He prays this, "'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've come to take refuge.'"

I'm gonna say something that will sound crazy, but stick with me. Boaz prays that God would bless her in every way. He is essentially saying, if I might extrapolate, "I pray that God would give you food. I pray that God would give you a home. I pray that God would give you friends. I pray that God would give you love. I pray that God would give you a husband. I pray that God would give you children. I pray that God would bless you in every way that God can bless." Did that prayer of Boaz come true? Did God answer that prayer? Yes. Who did God send to answer the prayer of Boaz? Boaz. I will argue, based upon this text, that sometimes we need to answer our own prayers.

There are many functions of prayer; I'll give you two primary. Sometimes prayer moves the hand of God, and sometimes prayer changes the heart of the one who is asking, that as we pray for God to do something, we realize, "That's why I'm here! I shouldn't just pray that God will do something. I should acknowledge that God works through his hand of providence, oftentimes through his people. And if I'm one of his people and I'm here, maybe I'm the one who's supposed to answer the prayer." So Boaz is essentially saying, "I pray that God will feed you." He will feed her. "I pray that God will give you a home." He gives her a home. "I pray that God would give you a husband." He's that husband. You'll read that later – I don't want to give it all away. "I pray that God would give you a baby." They're gonna have a baby. And he will be the father, and the husband that is prayed for.

So oftentimes Christians pray for things that are not wrong to pray for, but then fail to act to answer that prayer. How weird would it be if I went home and said, "God, please send a man to hug my wife!" God would be like, "Duh! Duh! That's why you're there. That's your job. I sent you there. Don't pray for me to send backup. That's your job." I can't go home and pray, "God, feed my kids," unless I'm also willing to go to work, make some money, and feed my kids. Canned goods don't fly out of the sky. If they did, it wouldn't be good. It's my job to put food on the table because I pray that God would feed my kids and God sent me there, and sends me to work to make money to feed my kids. That's my job. So here's how it works in the Driscoll home. Every time I do something nice for my kids, I tell them, I ask them this question, "Why did I do that?" They'll say, "'Cause you love us." "And why do I love you?" "Because God sent you here to love us." We do this all the time in the Driscoll home with my five kids.

Just yesterday, I took 'em sledding. We're sledding, sledding, sledding. We get all done, take 'em to Starbucks, get hot chocolate, take their picture, I'm all happy. It's a dad thing. I'm all geeked out on my kids. I love my kids. We get all done. I look at 'em all, and they all, you know, got the chocolate face and everything, and I'm like, "Why did I take you sledding? Why did I take you to Starbucks?" "'Cause you love us!" Yes! "And why do I love you?" "'Cause God loves us and he made you be our daddy, and he sent you here to love us." Yes! Again, I can't just pray, "God, love my kids." God would be like, "That's why you're there." Don't just pray, answer the prayer.

Jesus did the same thing. I'll tell you where he did it. On the cross, Jesus prays, "Father," what? "Forgive them." And then what does Jesus do? Answers his own prayer by dying for the forgiveness of sin. Boaz prays for Ruth. Boaz answers that prayer.

I'll give you another example of how this has happened in the history of Mars Hill. I think it is illustrative of my point. A little over a year ago we told you about a young woman, a single mother, who is a member of this church and loves Jesus, who had a son, young boy about the age of my oldest son, actually looks like him. Her son got diagnosed with cancer, and it was serious. Very scary. A year of chemotherapy treatment, not sure if this little boy was going to live. I mean, very scary stuff. We asked the church, "Please pray for this woman and her son." It just so happens – I'll use the language of Ruth – that a couple had recently started attending the church. It just so happened that this couple was financially well-off, they were doing

pretty good. It just so happens that they had just bought a brand-new truck. It just so happens that as they were sitting in this room, praying for that boy and his mother, that God convicted them to not only pray, but answer the prayer. It just so happened that they took the truck back to the dealer and the dealer refunded all of their money. It just so happened that they brought the money to the church and they told us, "Make sure that that woman gets a year off of work to take care of her son. We're gonna pay for her expenses." See, that's not just praying, it's answering the prayer, knowing that perhaps God has brought this information to you and this person to you so that you can be the blessing to them.

Well, it just so happens that she took the year off of work. It just so happens that her son got better. It just so happens that another guy who goes to the church that works in the kids' ministry and loves kids, decided to pull a Boaz and marry her and adopt the kid and now they're a family. It just so happens. Okay? And it's a beautiful story, but that's the providential hand of God. What looks like a bunch of amazing coincidences ends up being a tapestry that God weaves together as both sovereign and good.

And so, I would just encourage you, don't just pray for people, but in as much as God would enable you, answer those prayers. Don't just pray, "God, lead my friend to salvation!" Also, in addition to that, go talk to your friend about Jesus. Don't just pray, "God, please comfort my friend, they're hurting." Go sit with them. Put an arm around them. Love them. Pray for them. Answer that prayer. That's what Boaz does, and it's a great example.

So then she is going – oh, what I love here, too, he uses this great analogy that appears throughout the Book of Psalms, and that she is like a little bird that has no nest, and is in danger in the big, wild world, and that God has put a wing over her and he has brought her close to him so she would be loved and protected. It's a beautiful analogy, and I like it 'cause I love wings. I'm gonna get some on the way home, seriously. But I just love the fact that our God would compare himself to a wing. Deep down, that means a lot to me. God's a good God. Next time you eat wings, think about Ruth and the Lord.

Verse 13. "Then she said," – last word. Next week they're gonna go out on their first date. And then they're gonna go to the threshing floor. You know what happens there! We'll get there. "Then she said," – last words for this week – "'I've found favor in your eyes.'" What was the request of her heart? That God would give her favor in someone's eyes, and here is the answer to the prayer of her heart. She has found favor in the eyes of Boaz. And I think she's looking at him right now, those big doe eyes, maybe a little tear. Sweet. "I have found favor in your eyes." She says, "My lord." That's good right there. A lot of you women are like, "Oh, that's crazy talk." Now. Men like, "my lord, my protector, my defender, my man's man, my dude of dudes." You say, "That's silly." Yeah, we still like it, though. A lot of guys are like, "Oh, yeah. Under my wing." You know, we like that!

If it sounds a little corny, a little cheesy, a little over the top, perfect. Men like nicknames. She calls him "my lord." That doesn't mean he's God. That means that he's a respectable, dignified, protector, defender, masculine, honoring man and not just a lord. "My lord." I love that. It's personal. She's sort of opening her heart a little bit. "We're connected now, right? You're looking after me." Wink, wink, wink.

"For you have" – what? "Comforted me." Well, I'll tell you what, gentlemen. Women are looking for a man who's masculine, but can comfort, and speaks kindly. He's not a thug or a brute. He is a man's man. He comforts her. He respects her. He cares for her. He's a defender, protector, provider. He's a man who speaks kindly. He's an encourager. "Though I am not one of your servants." What she is saying is this, "You don't owe me anything."

See, the law states that he needed to allow the poor, and the widow, and the orphan, and the alien, to glean in his field. Boaz has gone far beyond on the law, all the way to grace. He's done way beyond what she could have asked, or hoped for, or even prayed for. The question, then, begs to be answered, why would Boaz do this? Let me tell you that Boaz understands the gospel. Some of you say, "No, no, no, the gospel's in the New Testament." No. The New Testament says that the gospel was preached to Abraham.

The gospel is that you and I are Ruth, that we're pagans, we're sinners, we're rebels. We come from the wrong background. We come to the Lord empty-handed and needy, and that the Lord Jesus is Boaz, that's the gospel. In fact, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the great English preacher and one of my all-time favorites, calls Jesus Christ, "our glorious Boaz." And as Boaz went to survey his fields, so the Lord Jesus came to survey his proverbial field here. And as Boaz looked out and saw Ruth, so Jesus has seen us, and as Boaz pursued Ruth, so Jesus has pursued us, and as Boaz spoke to Ruth kindly, so Jesus has spoken to us kindly, and as Boaz went beyond the requirements of the law, all the way to grace, so the Lord Jesus has gone beyond the requirements of the law, all the way to grace, and we've found, to use the words of Ruth, favor in the eyes of the Lord Jesus, our glorious Boaz.

Now Boaz understands that he comes to God empty-handed, and that everything he has belongs to the Lord. And because he has received everything as a gift, he is very generous, and he is a gift-giver. He's a man of grace, or favor. The reason this is important is that the main thread of the book is the providence of God. Some of the secondary themes are God's care for the poor and the widow, elsewhere he says also the orphan. And also, this issue of finances and material possessions, and how our distribution and use of what God has given to us physically and financially is indicative of our understanding of the gospel. You say, "Where's he going with this?"

Let me leave the text and move into a short bit of theological work. Here is my fear. Many of you are young. Many of you are poor. Many of you are in Seattle. Many of you come out of more socialistic thinking politics. Many of you perhaps even come into this church with what I will call a Robin Hood theology. Okay? Robin Hood theology is that rich people are bad and that poor people are good. Okay? And there are two theologies within Christianity that hold these kind of positions. One, we will call a prosperity theology that looks at men like Boaz and says, "See? He's rich, he loves God, God wants all of his people to be rich." Prosperity theology. Others look at Ruth and say, "Ruth loves the Lord. She's godly, she's poor. Godly people are poor people. Poor people are closer to God." Let's examine that.

Boaz. Is he rich or poor? Rich. Is he righteous or unrighteous? Righteous. He earns his money fairly. He shares it gladly. He distributes it – he's a righteous man. Ruth. Is she rich or poor? Poor. Is she righteous or unrighteous? Righteous. Righteous. She doesn't have much, but anything she does have, she will even give to Naomi. She's hardworking. She's honest. She's not poor because of sin in her life. She's poor because her husband died,

and she's an immigrant in a brand new country. In the Bible – I've told you this before, but I'll repeat it – there are two kinds of rich people and two kinds of poor people. There are righteous and unrighteous rich. Unrighteous rich people rip people off and don't share. Righteous rich people earn their money honestly and share it generously. Likewise, there are two kinds of poor people, righteous and unrighteous poor. The unrighteous poor drink all their money, are too lazy to get a job, they do drugs and squander it away gambling. They're poor because of sin. There are also righteous poor people who are first-generation immigrants, the elderly, the sick, the infirm, the hardworking, blue-collar guy who's having a hard time making ends meet to feed his family, but is an honest, hardworking man, like my dad was. My dad was a construction worker, hung drywall. My dad was righteous and poor.

The issue is not rich and poor. The issue is righteous and unrighteous. And what infuriates me among some young Christians, some more urban Christians, is this issue that poor equals righteous and the poor are close to God. Some poor people love the Lord, some rich people love the Lord. It's not rich and poor, it's righteous and unrighteous. We can't allow socio-economics and politics to dictate our gospel, our understanding of how we get close to God. It's not through how much money we do or do not have. It's through Jesus. So, let's talk about him.

2 Corinthians, chapter 8, verse 9 says that "Jesus Christ, though he was" – remember the verse? He was what? Rich. Jesus was rich. In heaven, Jesus was rich. He's God. "Though he was rich, for our sake he became" – what? "Poor." He came into human history as a human being and was a poor, homeless guy. You look at the Lord Jesus, was he rich or poor? Yes. He was both rich and poor, but he was always righteous, perfectly righteous, sinless.

You say, "Why does that matter? What does this have to do with anything?" The issue is this. Whether or you are rich, or whether you are poor, that does not make you any closer or further to God. It does not necessarily indicate whether or not God loves you or not. We receive salvation as a free gift, that Jesus is our glorious Boaz. He gives himself to us, his life, death, burial, resurrection. He forgives us, saves us. We, like Ruth, might look at Jesus as she looked at Boaz, and say, "Why have you been so nice to me?" And he would say, "It's grace. It's love. It's mercy. It's favor. I don't owe you anything, but I love you. This is who I am."

Then you and I have the great opportunity to be like Boaz and to be like Jesus, and to love people. And that love includes giving them money, and food, and help, maybe letting them borrow our car, or giving them our car, letting them crash at our house, bringing groceries to them. If they're in the hospital, visiting them. Even if we don't have much, we can still be righteous even though we're poor and we can share. And when we share, and when we're generous, and when we give, particularly to the poor and the needy, we may be doing the same thing as those who are not Christians for entirely different reasons. Not so that God will love me, because he already has in Jesus. Not so that God will favor me, because God has already given favor in Jesus. Not so that I can earn karmic points with God. Not that others will think well of me. Not so I can have a big check and be on the news. Because it's an understanding that, like the field, everything belongs to God, and God gives some to me, and God gives some to me to share.

Boaz gets that. So Boaz is, in the words of Corinthians, a cheerful giver. He doesn't say, "Why do I need to give a portion of my earnings to the poor?" What he says is, "It all belongs to the Lord. This portion God has given me; this portion God has given me to share." Why would God give us a portion to share? Because the providence of God works through us, oftentimes. That is, God's hand is extended to us, we put our hand in God's hand, and then God uses us, not to just pray for people, but to care for them. Food, shelter, water, the kinds of things that dominate the Book of Ruth. And then when someone should ask, "Why are you being so nice to me?" The same question that Ruth asked Boaz. The answer is, "It is the gospel." God has been good to me and he has sent me here to tell you that he loves you, that he sees you, that he knows you, that he is pursuing a relationship with you, and he cares about you. And so, it is the gospel. No one owes you anything, but we will give you what we have because that is grace. That is mercy. That is favor. That is Jesus. And you can do that if you're rich or poor. Like Boaz and Ruth, whether you're rich or poor, you could still be righteous.

How does this work itself out at our church? I'll give you a couple examples in closing. This works itself out on a personal level. Boaz had an informal ministry, right? I mean, he had a ministry to Ruth, ultimately to Naomi, to his employees. This is his informal ministry. He feeds people. He houses people. He cares for people. He takes care of people. He looks after people. You and I, some of us don't make much, some of us make much, will have different degrees to which we can do this, but we can all be righteous, not that we have to, but that we get to. God's a cheerful giver, and he gives some to us to share so that we can share in the joy of giving.

I don't want you to walk out of here thinking poor people are good, rich people are bad. You probably think that only if you're poor, which is more than a little bit self-righteous.

In this church we have some people who are both rich and righteous. They're like Boaz. You never hear of them because they're not looking for accolades. They're just looking for opportunities. You know, we have a ministry to those who struggle with same-sex attraction, for example. And we had someone who had a brother who died of AIDS, and he sent us a very generous check saying, "Use this money to help people who are struggling with same-sex attraction, so that they know the love of Jesus and have a new life." That's very generous. Didn't owe us anything. Never even met this guy – what is that? Righteous rich. That's a kind thing. That's a nice thing to do, because he understood the gospel.

We, one of our ministries is to those who have been sexually abused, raped, or molested. About a third of this church, as far as we can tell, has experienced those horrific sins. So we have grace groups to meet with people, to help them overcome the sin that was committed against them. But to get the whole thing kick-started, we need to get a team of leaders to send out for training, but most of the people being sent out for training were poor, couldn't afford to go to the training. And then they could work through their own issues of abuse, come back, and then lead groups to help other people who had been abused, so that Jesus could change the lives of people who had been sinned against grievously. And lo and behold, it just so happens – to use the words of Ruth – a very generous family that will remain unnamed says, "We'll pay for that." It allows a great number of our people to get trained, to come back to lead Grace Groups, to help those who have been sexually abused, so that that can be a part of our Boaz-type ministry to those

who have need.

This happens personally in big and small ways. When you help someone move, when they've had surgery and you visit them, when a mother has given birth and you bring meals, when the single mom is looking for a job, so you help her with her resume, or you watch her kids, those are all informal ways that we get to do Boaz, which is ultimately doing the work of Jesus.

This happens in community groups in our church. It's like little house churches that get together, and people love one another, and help one another pay their bills, and move, and, and work through the issues of life. I mean, people have been given cars and lent cars, and crashed at people's houses, and gotten help with their light bill, and groceries, and the community groups are informal ways that this happens.

It also happens in varying ways where we take days that we designate to partner with ministries to give. Okay? So coming up, February 4th and 11th, we're calling it "Give Love." It's on our website. Each campus is partnering with another nonprofit, so if you're in West Seattle, bring food for the Salvation Army. The Shoreline campus has partnered with the Northwest Help Line; they're raising food and clothes for women and children. And here at Ballard, February 4th and 11th, bring food for the Union Gospel Mission. Okay?

What am I saying? I'm saying do your part with the people that are in your life. Give to your church. Beyond that, have a global heart for widows, orphans, the poor, and those in need, not 'cause you have to, 'cause you get to. You say, "Well, this is my money." No, it's all the Lord's. And, like Boaz, if we have that attitude – God loves a cheerful giver – and he who has been entrusted with little can be entrusted with much more. And the context there, according to Jesus, is money.

But what a blessing it is to have God take your hand and to put something in it, and God allow you the privilege of sharing it, and sharing in the joy of being a person who gets to do the gospel. Hey, Jesus has done so much for me, and now he's doing this for you, and he's doing it with me! And I get to have joy because I get to work with Jesus, and I get to have joy because I get to see the gospel. And I have joy 'cause I remember that my salvation was a gift, and every time I give a gift, I'm reminded of my salvation. I'm reminded of Jesus, my glorious Boaz.

You and I have a wonderful opportunity, whether we are poor, like Ruth, or rich, like Boaz, to do the same thing that many other people would do – that is be generous and kind – but to do so for the purpose of the gospel. It's not about rich and poor. It's about Jesus. It's about grace. It's about favor. It's about mercy. It's about not just praying that God would change the world, but then participating in the work of God and sharing in the joy of God as he uses us as instruments in his hand to be about the transformation of people's lives.

I invited you to Jesus. I invite you to his mission. I invite you to be people of grace and generosity and lavish favor and kindness. I invite you to the kingdom lifestyle of Jesus. If you don't know him, you need to. He gave salvation as a gift. Just, don't come to him with hands full. Come to him with hands empty, as Ruth came to Boaz, and he will exceed all expectations. Confess your sin, and the Lord Jesus Christ will forgive you. When you're ready, partake of communion, which is remembering the gift of Jesus' body and blood, salvation by grace, through faith, in Christ. We'll give of our tithes and offerings, not because this is what we give to the Lord, it's because this is what belongs to the Lord, and this is the part he has given us to share, in addition to the part he has given us to spend for our own needs. And we'll sing, and celebrate, to Jesus Christ, our glorious Boaz, as we take the posture of Ruth, and fall down on our faces and declare, "My" what? "My Lord." Like Ruth. I'll pray.

Lord Jesus, thank you for being our glorious Boaz, for coming out to survey this Earth, your proverbial field, for seeing us in our place of need with our hands empty. Lord Jesus, having favor toward us, calling for us, speaking to us, blessing us, giving grace and mercy to us, entering into a relationship with us, and being our Lord. Jesus, it is my prayer that we would see you as our glorious Boaz, that we would respond to you as Ruth did, that we would fall face down and proclaim, "My Lord!" And Jesus, we pray, not because we have to, but because we get to, that we would learn the joy it is to be people of lavish grace and kindness, whether we're poor, like Ruth, and only have a little bit to share, or rich, like Boaz, and have much to give. I pray, God, that our hand would be in your hand, and that you would place in our hand resources, opportunities, to bless others.

I pray that we would be a church that would share in the great joy of doing the work of the gospel, and following the example of Boaz, and proclaiming the love of Jesus. Amen.