

When The Righteous Fall
Ruth 2:1-23 (Pastor Mark Alvis)

If you are not interested in helping the poor, then this message is not for you. **Proverbs 24:16** says “For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity.” God does not forsake His people. In Ruth chapter 1, we learned that when Naomi was engulfed in pain and anguish over the loss of her husband and sons, she could not see or appreciate the work of God going on in the life of Ruth, her daughter-in-law. As a Moabite, Ruth had undoubtedly grown up worshipping idols, but verses 16 and 17 of chapter 1, demonstrate that she had abandoned her idolatry and had become a follower of the true and living God – most likely due to Naomi’s influence. And because of Ruth’s growing love for God, Naomi will begin to see clear and compelling evidence that God had not abandoned her or His plans for Israel.

In Ruth 2, we are going to discover important truths and Godly principles that if embraced, will not only bless each of us individually, but could also mend some of the current flaws in the culture of America. The setting of chapter 2, is that Naomi and Ruth have providentially arrived in Bethlehem – when the barely harvest was just beginning,

“Now Naomi had a relative of her husband’s, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz [the Hebrew word translated “worthy” can also speak of a man of “wealth” or a man of “valor” – but I like worthy, because Boaz was a man worthy of Ruth].² And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, ‘Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor [grace].’ And she said to her, ‘Go, my daughter.’”

For people living in America today, it is important to understand that 3,400 years ago, one of God's provisions for **the poor** in the land of Israel, was to be able to glean in the fields of compassionate farmers. Farmers were business people. They provided jobs and were to treat their workers well. But besides that they were also to help the needy. To apply this principle to America today, we should encourage business owners to provide good, honest jobs, treat their workers and customers well and show compassion to the poor. Let's listen to **Leviticus 19:9-10**,

“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 [gleanings are grain that accidentally fell to the ground].¹⁰ 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: I am the LORD your God.”

We should note that God's blueprint for compassion, required the poor, who were able, to go to the fields of generous farmers and pick grain or fruit to feed themselves and their families. God expected people who could work – to work. Work is good. Mankind's fall into sin has made work more difficult, but it is still good and necessary.

Verse 3, which tells us more about God's ways for helping the poor, “So she [Ruth] 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 [a relative] of Elimelech [Naomi's deceased husband].”

From Ruth's perspective, she randomly came to the field belonging to Boaz. In reality, God directed her steps to that field, but He did so in such a way that Ruth did not feel like a robot who had no choice but to go that

field. Friends, there has always been a mystery concerning man's free will and God's sovereignty. Both of those realities got Ruth to where she needed to be.

Please notice that the field "belonged" to Boaz. Biblically, we can say the field actually belonged to God, because God created the earth and everything in it – therefore it all belongs to Him. But God had given Boaz stewardship over that field, which includes ownership rights. In other words, there were landmarks and boundary stones, proving that field belonged to Boaz. The people of Israel were to respect those boundary stones – particularly the civil leaders, whose job was to protect the rights of private property, by punishing people who tried to steal for themselves what God had given to someone else. Moving peoples' boundary stones was a form of thievery.

The second half of verse 3 tells us that Boaz was a relative of Elimelech. This brings us to another means God established for helping the poor. It is recorded in **Leviticus 25:25**,

"If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem [buy back] what his countryman has sold."

Relatives of the poor were supposed to step up to plate and help them. Was that just an Old Testament principle? No. Listen to the Apostle Paul's counsel in **I Timothy 5:4**, concerning widows in the church,

"But if a widow has children or grandchildren let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God."

Some of the wisdom behind family helping family in times of need is that normally they know IF there are underlying factors behind their relatives's predicament. Listen to some of the self-imposed reasons for poverty listed in the book of Proverbs:

Proverbs 28:22, "A stingy man is eager to get rich and is unaware that poverty awaits him."

Proverbs 21:17, "He who loves pleasure will become poor"

Proverbs 13:18, "He who ignores discipline [has an unteachable attitude] comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored."

Proverbs 10:4, "Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth."

Proverbs 23:20-21, ". . . drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags."

Throwing money at people who are poor because of self-imposed reasons, will not lift them out of poverty. The root issues behind their poverty must be dealt with. Ruth was not poor for self-imposed reasons. She lost her husband and she chose not to abandon her mother-in-law. And God made sure she ended up gleaning in the field of Boaz, who was a good and generous man – and a close relative of her deceased husband.

Before we continue, let's review a Biblical truth concerning peoples' character. Character is not solely determined by what a person has done in his or her past. Ruth's past idolatry did not dictate her future character. She had become circumcised in heart, or in New Testament terms – she was born again – and that always changes and strengthens a person's character. The Bible clearly teaches that people can change because of

God's grace. Let's read verses 4-7,

“And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, ‘The LORD be with you!’ And they answered, ‘The LORD bless you.’ [Boaz had a great relationship with his employees. He prayed for their welfare and they prayed for his].⁵ Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, ‘Whose young woman is this?’⁶ 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.⁷ 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.’”

I want to pause here and point out some more principles regarding God's way of helping the poor. First, we should note that Ruth did not come to the field of Boaz demanding her right to glean. She could have quoted Leviticus 19:9-10 to support that claim. But she didn't. She asked for permission. Nor were there elders from Bethlehem checking to make sure the farmers were leaving the edges of their fields unpicked – and handing out fines if they didn't. God told farmers what they could do to show compassion to the poor and promised to bless them for doing that. But if a farmer decided not to be generous, then his decision was respected – because the property belonged to him.

Here is what I pray America can learn. Compassion cannot be forced, because forced compassion is not compassion. There is a similar principle to God not forcing people to love Him, because genuine love must include the freedom not to love. If God forced love or generosity, it would be the death of love and generosity.

I personally believe that when civil government became deeply

involved in financially supporting the poor, it was a horrible blow to genuine compassion. Friends, when money is forcefully taken from a person who has worked for it, in order to be given to a person who has not worked for it, then neither generosity or justice is being served.

Deuteronomy 27:17 says, “Cursed be anyone who moves his neighbor’s boundary stone.” The way America is presently helping the poor, disrespects private property – it moves peoples’ boundary stones – which brings curses upon our nation. How can I love my country and be happy about that?

Please understand that I am not putting down everyone who receives help from the government. There are good people who do. My plea is that when individuals do receive government help, and are told that it is their right to have it, please don’t believe that. Where does that thinking end? We are now being told that medical insurance and college tuition are “rights” for every American – even though the money to pay for those “rights” will come out of the pockets of people who do not agree with that thinking. Biblical generosity never violates the right of private property.

Let me explain something very important to understand. Governing officials have the right to tax the people they serve [Romans 13:6-7]. But what is civil government’s job? It is to protect law abiding citizens from law breakers [Romans 13:1-4; I Peter 2:13-14]. This is what we pay them to do. Governing officials do not have the authority to determine that some people have more money than they deserve – and therefore civil leaders can take some of their money and give it to those who need it.

Friends, if I decided that Chris Petschke had more money than he deserved, and I got a hold of his wallet and emptied it out and gave that money to Pastor Matt, because he could use more money – then I would be arrested – and rightly so. Why then are we saying that civil leaders who do that are honoring God? Biblical generosity never violates the right of private property.

Let me give you another example of compassion as defined by God. In Deuteronomy 15:7-10, God says it is generous to give a person who can work, but has fallen into dire straits, an interest free loan. Yes, the loan was expected to be repaid. But if the person could not repay the loan before the year of forgiveness came [which was every seventh year], then the one who gave the loan, forgave the debt. Listen carefully. If a person was not in a position to kiss that loan money goodbye, then he was not in a position to give a loan. I say that because if not getting the loan money back, caused the person who gave the loan – to fall into debt, then his loan would ultimately be counterproductive.

The Apostle Paul says in **Romans 13:8** [NIV], “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another” Let me ask two application questions: (1) Are you living with unpaid bills that are past due? (2) What are you doing to get out of that situation? Our national debt is now at 22 trillion dollars. I believe that is part of God’s curse upon our nation for violating His laws and principles.

Before I read further, let me remind you that true compassion cannot be demanded. Ruth understood this, which is why she asked permission to

glean, and was truly grateful when that permission was granted. Watch and see for yourselves as I read verses 8-23,

“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.’⁹ 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? [they were not to bother her or tell her she had to glean in another field] And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn.’¹⁰ 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?’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, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before.’¹² The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!’¹³ 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.’ [may I add here – that it is really easy to help hardworking, grateful people]¹⁴ And at mealtime Boaz said to her, ‘Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine.’ So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. [This is another indication of the generosity of Boaz toward his workers. I did farm labor all of my growing up years. It is what helped pay my way through college and seminary. I was grateful for those jobs, but I normally brought my own lunch. Boaz, on the other hand, furnished lunch for his workers and ate with them. He did not have to do that – he wanted to do that. That is what defines good character and true generosity].¹⁵ When she [Ruth] rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, ‘Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her.’¹⁶ And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.’ [Boaz gave his employees permission to be generous with the barley growing in his field. Again, that is true generosity]¹⁷ So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley [a little over a

bushel, which is a lot].¹⁸ And she took it up and went into the city. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied.¹⁹ And her mother-in-law said to her, ‘Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you.’ So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, ‘The man’s name with whom I worked today is Boaz.’²⁰ And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, ‘May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!’ [Naomi was beginning to see that God had not abandoned her] Naomi also said to her, ‘The man is a close relative of ours, one of our **redeemers** [I love that word].’²¹ And Ruth the Moabite said, ‘Besides, he said to me, “You shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.”’²² And Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, ‘It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted.’ [which is the opposite of compassion]²³ So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests [April through May and into June]. And she lived with her mother-in-law.”

Let me make a final observation. Boaz was both generous and compassionate to Ruth, but he did not enable Ruth to be lazy or irresponsible. He did not tell Ruth that she could stay at home with Naomi and he would deliver grain to them everyday. No. Ruth labored in the fields of Boaz for months in order to help herself and Naomi, who could no longer do that kind of work. Ruth’s character grew stronger because of her honest labor and genuine kindness to Naomi. If Naomi did not have Ruth to help her, I believe Boaz would have given Naomi grain.

When I was a pastor in Vista, CA – our church fed over a hundred poor people twice a week in our gymnasium. The congregation started that program before I became their pastor, and there were a number of our members who were uneasy about some of the people we served. One

morning, as I headed for my office, a young woman was waiting outside and wanted to speak to me. As I listened, she clearly confessed that she had been selling drugs to many of the people our church was feeding. She curtly informed me that the money those people saved by eating our free meals, enabled them to sleep in the park all day and buy their drugs and alcohol – to party at night. When God convicted her of her sin, she repented and informed her buyers that she could no longer sell them drugs. After they punched her to the ground and kicked her around for a while, they found someone else to sell them drugs.

When our elders learned what was going on, we decided to work with a faith based organization – that understood the difference between helping and enabling. Anyone who was looking for help was welcome to come to our gymnasium for food, but they had to agree to be drug tested. Our numbers decreased immediately. Those who were drug tested and failed, were invited to come to meetings designed to help them overcome their addictions. But until they tested clean, they did not get fed. Those who were clean, received a meal and instructions on how to fill out job applications and do interviews. After a few months, many people who had been homeless, were working and getting off the streets. We noticed that some people were drug free and working – but were not quite able to make it to the end of the month. We also gladly helped them as well.

May God guide and assist us as individuals and as a nation to practice Biblical compassion to those in need. Good things will happen if we do, and things will get much worse if we don't. Let's pray.