

## Introduction

I've shared with you before that I do not like preaching about money, whether about giving or about being generous or especially when a text is about providing for those set apart for preaching and teaching. There are worse topics, of course. When we were in Judges 19 several weeks ago I told you I would rather preach about money than preach that text—and I meant it.

We come today to the second half of the second chapter of Ruth. It's a lovely text. We see God's people acting like God himself, doing the very thing he gave them to do. It's a beautiful story about kindness to foreigners, about generosity to strangers, about Israel showing the world what God is like. As we will see, the generosity on display in our text is profound.

The problem is I think I would rather preach Judges 19 again. You see, as much as I may agree—intellectually—with the text, I don't really believe it. In my head it's a wonderful text! I would readily affirm everything it says about God—unless it applies to me. Then my lived experience makes living by faith very difficult, for my heart is prone to wander after vain things. I've *experienced* God's generosity many times. That's not the issue. My problem is God is usually not generous in the time or manner I want him to be generous, even though when he is generous it is overwhelming.

For example, in 2014 Dawnae and I were planning to celebrate our twentieth wedding anniversary. One Sunday morning someone asked us what we were planning. New City was only three years old at the time and had a much more limited budget, which meant our personal budget was more limited. We were happily planning to go out to eat at a really nice budget restaurant and then eat mac & cheese the rest of the week.

We had seen God provide in amazing ways for us prior to this. We were not complaining about our plans in any sense. We were excited for being able to celebrate twenty years of marriage, regardless of how we celebrated. I was especially grateful that she had not smothered me with a pillow in my sleep in those twenty years! God had been extraordinarily kind in multiple ways over those twenty years and we were truly thankful for all he had given us, even a nice meal at a budget restaurant.

One individual overheard the conversation and told us we couldn't celebrate that way. We assured him we fine with our plans. We were looking forward to a nice evening out together. He insisted, however. He told us he would take care of the details. The next thing we knew we were staying at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in Chicago—all expenses paid!—in a suite that was larger than our first apartment. The shower was larger than our first bedroom! We had generous gift cards to eat at restaurants we could never afford. He gave us spending money. He even provided a really nice car to drive there, which was great because we didn't like the idea of a valet parking attendant parking our hoopty minivan—not that we complained about that minivan. That, too, had been a gift from God!

We were overwhelmed with the extravagance of God's kindness to us. If this man had simply offered us a gift card to a local restaurant we would have been extremely grateful. The three days in this luxury hotel were truly over the top. It is, in every way, a luxury hotel. It is so luxurious they don't allow *tipping*—and they do everything for you!

So here we are, in a text about the generosity of God on display in his people, and I don't really believe it. Oh, I've experienced it! As I just told you, we stayed at the nicest hotel we've ever stayed at, all expenses paid. I also mentioned the van God had given us—literally, *given* us. The problem with the human heart—with *my human heart*—is how quickly it descends into the spiral of what-have-you-done-for-me-lately.

We can have faith God will provide and we will be happy, provided he provides in the time and manner of our choosing, whether that provision is for financial resources or health or the sort of relationships we want or the pace of career advancement, etc. If God will give us what we want when we want it, we will gladly praise him for it. This is the idol my heart worships.

This morning we're going to see God's generosity in the life of a foreigner in Israel. We will see how God continued to pile his kindness on top of his kindness, and then we will see what it means for us. We're in Ruth 2.

Ruth 2:14 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. <sup>15</sup> When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. <sup>16</sup> And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her."

<sup>17</sup> So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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." <sup>20</sup> 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 also said to her, "The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers." <sup>21</sup> 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.'" <sup>22</sup> 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." <sup>23</sup> So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Ruth 2:14-23

## The Law's Requirement

When God rescued Israel out of Egypt, he led them to Mount Sinai. There at Mount Sinai God would give a great gift to Israel: he would enter into a covenant agreement with them. He would be their God and would dwell among them in the tabernacle. By dwelling in the tabernacle God could be close to Israel and Israel could be close to God—but not too close. To be too close would be dangerous, so with the priesthood and the tabernacle in place Israel would be safe while also having God in their midst.

In response to who God is and what he would do for them, Israel was to become like him. The covenant *is* the Ten Commandments. Moses later referred to the stone tablets with these commands written on them as “tablets of the covenant”. In Exodus 34 God gave the tablets to Moses and it says, “And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments”. These commandments described God and his character in the form of instructions.

Israel should not murder because God is not the sort who would take life unjustly. Israel should not to lie or steal because the God of Israel is not the sort to do those things. By keeping these commandments Israel wasn’t simply being obedient; they were being like God. The whole point of the covenant was for Israel to be holy, for God is holy. As we’ve seen, however, Israel was not holy.

Throughout their time in the wilderness they rebelled against God. During the initial days of Joshua they were, more or less, faithful-ish to the law. Then Joshua died. The very next generation did not know the Lord. They rebelled against everything they knew about their own history, about their parents’ experience with God, and they worshiped and served other gods. This did not go well. They were frequently oppressed and frequently suffered.

God’s default mode is to bless. He claimed them as his people in order to bless them, but to receive the blessings required they first receive him. God himself is the blessing he offered; to reject him is to reject his blessings, while also seeking them from elsewhere. As we’ve seen in the book of Judges, that did not go well.

We’ve seen throughout the time of the judges that Israel was largely unfaithful and so Israel largely did not receive the covenant blessings. This is how the story of Ruth begins. Israel was suffering. Some scholars believe this was during the time of Gideon. The Midianites were stealing their crops at harvest, resulting in insufficient food. A man named Elimelech chose to take his wife and sons to Moab where the Midianites were not stealing food.

While there Elimelech died and his sons married Moabite women. Then they died, leaving Naomi and her daughters-in-law. One returned home to find another husband but Ruth insisted on following Naomi back to Israel, for Naomi had heard the Lord’s blessings were abundant once again. This is likely after Gideon’s success in defeating the Midianites.

We saw last week that Ruth was able to work in the fields, harvesting crops she did not plant. The law indicated that widows and orphans and poor people and even sojourners—*foreigners*—like Ruth were allowed to profit off the hard work of others. These are known as the gleaning laws. This instruction was first given in the book of Leviticus:

Lev 19:9 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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.  
Leviticus 19:9–10

Notice God identifies himself after giving the command. The reason they are to leave some of the harvest in the fields and vineyards for others to gather wasn't because there's a law requiring they do so. The reason given is YHWH is God. Leave them for the poor and the sojourner, God says, for *I am YHWH your God*. God is the sort who takes care of the poor and the sojourner and since the purpose of the law was for Israel to become like God, Israel must also take care of the poor and the sojourner.

This was in the days of the judges, however, and it's not a given that the Israelites were keeping the law of Moses. Ruth asked permission to glean the edges of the field and it was granted. She began gathering the bits left on the edges of the field and in the corners—the part that was to be left for people like her. In her case, she was poor and a sojourner and a widow. She worked hard and impressed the others in the field.

As Will shared last week, it just so happens that she found herself in the field belonging to a man named Boaz. He said she had come to take refuge under the wings of the Lord, for she was a convert to Israel, a worshiper of the God of Israel. She was not treated like a foreigner, but like one who belonged.

## Generosity

Our text picks up here. Boaz has instructed her to stay in his fields, to remain near his young women, young women from his extended household and clan, along with those he likely hired to work during the harvest. And like Jesus with the Samaritan woman, Boaz offers her to drink from the same cups he and his men were drinking from, further indicating his acceptance and welcome of her.

Mealtime arrives and in verse 14 it seems Ruth is keeping her distance. The text doesn't indicate she brought a lunch. She was quite poor, after all. Being a single woman and a foreigner and being well aware of the world at that time, she understood how vulnerable she was. This is the world in which an Israelite man would offer his own daughter as a sacrifice. This is the world in which a Levite would give his concubine—his secondary wife!—to a violent mob and then butcher her body to summon an army to avenge her death on the mob he gave her to. This is the world in which a man like Samson would simply demand a woman be given to him and she would be. Ruth knows her place. *So does Boaz*.

In verse 14 he calls her to join him and his people. Don't stay by yourself, Ruth! Come, join us! The ESV renders this as “eat some bread”. It's more literally, “Come here and eat *from the* bread”—the bread he provided for his workers. Understand that in our world today many would accuse her of being a moocher. A deadbeat. *Lazy*. You see, she didn't plow that field. She didn't plant that crop. She didn't water and nurture it as it grew. She showed up during the harvest and asked to profit off everyone else's work. However! That is not how Boaz saw it!

Not only does she have a right to his crop, he shows generosity to her and gives her *the* bread he had provided for his workers. Then he tells her to dip her morsel into the wine.

We're not sure what this is. It could be a wine sauce or a vinegar sauce. Some wonder if it's a forerunner of hummus, flavored with wine. Whatever it is, it appears to be something like a condiment. It made the bread even better.

So there's Ruth, *an immigrant*, sitting beside the reapers as one who *belonged*. She's well aware of who she is and who they are, yet Boaz is treating her as one who belonged there. He demonstrated this further by passing roasted grain to her. The author says she ate until she was satisfied and "she had some left over". This means he didn't merely pass her a communal bowl with roasted grain to serve herself a scoop or two, like you'd expect at a community meal. He gave her a container full of roasted grain—so much that she had leftovers! She has enough to take home to Naomi, that Naomi might have a meal, too!

Boaz isn't finished with his kindness and generosity, though. As she was getting up to go back to work, Boaz spoke directly to his young men, his employees, right in front of her. Notice carefully what he says: she must be allowed to glean "even among the sheaves".

Normally a gleaner would work the edges of the field. The Israelites were told to leave the edges unharvested. As they cut the barley in the field they would gather it into bundles and these bundles would be tied together into "sheaves". After the cutting and bundling were finished, the sheaves would be gathered. When Moses repeated the law's instructions in Deuteronomy, he clarified further what Israel was to do with its harvests:

Deut 24:19 When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. <sup>20</sup> When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. <sup>21</sup> When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. <sup>22</sup> You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this.

Deuteronomy 24:19–22

As they were gathering their sheaves, it would be easy to miss some. God said they must not go back to collect them. Instead, the sojourner, the fatherless, the widow had a right to that sheaf. They must not gather every bunch of grapes. They must intentionally leave some. It would be so easy to focus on leaving the edges while maximizing profit in the rest of the field. God says it's not about maximizing profit but about providing for those in need. The spirit of the law was to be like the Lord, and the Lord is the sort who provides for those in need.

Ordinarily a gleaner would work behind the reapers, gathering what fell and did not get bundled up into sheaves, or perhaps a sheaf that was forgotten and therefore left behind. Boaz chooses to be like God and tells his men to let her gather where the crop was being cut—before the bundling into sheaves! In other words, let her *harvest*, not merely *glean*. That's not all, though. In verse 16 he tells them—again, *in front of her, giving her instructions as well*—to "pull out some from the bundles for her".

As the crop was cut, others would gather the stalks into bundles to be tied together into sheaves. They were to leave even more for her to gather for herself! Boaz also gave the men two further instructions. He said she must be allowed to glean among the sheaves as they

were being tied, and they must not *reproach* her for it. That is, they must not mock her or make fun of her or make her feel poor. They must not make her feel like an outsider. Act as though she were one of us! The last thing a poor person needs when receiving charity is to be made to feel poor.

When he told them to pull some out from the bundles he added, “and do not rebuke her”. If she happens to grab another handful, don’t rebuke her. If you think she’s taking too much, don’t rebuke her. Let her harvest alongside you! In a subtle way Boaz is reminding his men the harvest isn’t theirs. This isn’t their field and it isn’t their crop. He’s not suggesting it is his, either. Boaz knows the Lord is the one who blesses; he is insisting his men let her share in this blessing.

## Bountiful Harvest

Ruth gleanes until evening, and then she began to beat out what she had gathered. What she collected was stalks of barley. She used flails to knock the grains of barley from the stalks, so she could gather the grains and leave the stalks behind. The grain was the food.

The author says she harvested about an ephah of barley. That’s like saying your car gets, say, four kilometers per liter. Is that good? (No; that’s about ten miles per gallon!) An ephah of grain is about 30 pounds. Again, we don’t tend to buy grain so this measurement is hard to grasp. We don’t really have a reference point for how much she harvested in a single day. This was enough food for two adults for an entire week. It is an extraordinary amount!

In 1 Samuel 17 young David is sent by his father to take food to his three oldest brothers who were part of the army and there to fight with the Philistines, who had Goliath with them. David took an ephah of grain to them to eat. Ruth harvested enough food for three grown men to eat, and she did it in a single day! This was the generosity of Boaz.

In verse 18 we read that Ruth took this grain home to Naomi. Naomi saw the harvested grain and she saw the roasted grain Ruth had been given, and she exclaimed, “Where did you glean today?” Her exclamation has more of the tone, “Where *in the world* did you glean!? How did you get so much!? And *roasted* grain!? Whaaat?”

She further adds, “Blessed be the man who took notice of you”. Naomi knows this was not a normal harvest for a woman in a single day. The only way she could have gathered that much, threshed that much (knocking the grain from the stalk), and winnowed that much (separating the grain from the chaff), is if someone had helped her. She calls upon the Lord to bless whomever showed her this level of generosity. It’s amazing to me how generosity can push away the pain of bitterness. This is the same woman who tried to rename herself from “Pleasant” to “Bitter”—“Don’t call me Naomi; call me Bitter”. When she sees the man’s generosity, she knows the Lord has not accepted her name change. He will not call her Bitter; he will call her Naomi.

Ruth responds to Naomi’s incredulity by giving the man’s name: “Oh, I was with some guy named Boaz”. Naomi knows Boaz. He and her late husband are from the same clan. He’s a close relative. She knows the law of Moses. Because family lines were important to covenant blessings, a family line needed to be maintained. As a widow, she was facing having to sell her husband’s ancestral land. Only a kinsman redeemer could claim it and restore the family name. Boaz happens to be one of those close family members.

Ruth blows right past that, likely not seeing the significance of it. She was, after all, a new convert. She doesn't understand the implications for herself and her future. When Naomi tells her he is a close relative, one of their redeemers, she seems to think this explains Boaz's other instruction: "Oh, that must be why he also told me to stay close to his young men throughout the entire harvest season". He must have done this because he is a close relative.

Naomi is floored by who the man is while Ruth is floored by the man's generosity when he told her to stay close to his young men, to continue harvesting all she could. The harvest would last another two or three months. If she could, in a single day, harvest enough food for her and Naomi for a week, in just 60 days she could harvest enough food for 60 weeks—that's more than an entire year! If the harvest goes longer, they would have so much food they could sell some of it to purchase things they would need!

Naomi tells her it is good for her to stay by the young women. Ruth said she was to stay by Boaz's young men, but Naomi says to stay by the young *women*. It is the time of the judges, after all. Young men—men of any age—can be very dangerous to a young woman like Ruth. That's why she says to stay with his young women, for in another field she could be assaulted. Naomi knows Boaz is a good man.

Ruth did what she was told and verse 23 tells us she finished the barley harvest. Normally there's a bit of a break in between the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. That would give them time to thresh the barley and winnow it before harvesting the wheat. The threshing seems to be delayed as we'll see in chapter 3, because there was so much barley to harvest it went right up to the wheat harvest. Ruth spends these months working with Boaz and his crew, caring for her mother-in-law, and taking refuge under the wings of the God of Israel.

## Application

I struggled with this text all week. I had a horrible week. I was a bear to be around. (Dawnae made me put in that exact line.) The problem wasn't that I did not understand the text. The problem was that I did understand it and what it revealed about me.

We tend to think generosity is primarily about giving financial resources. It does include that, but it is so much more than money. The truth is God gives himself. He is generous with himself. This generosity ought to motivate our generosity. When the apostle Paul was collecting resources to provide for the Jerusalem church as it was experiencing a famine, he could have simply ordered people to be generous. He told Philemon he had the authority to tell him to free his slave but he chose to allow him the opportunity to do the right thing, which he did. Paul didn't use this authority with his collection, either.

2 Cor 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

2 Corinthians 8:9

You probably know the story of the rich young ruler who asked Jesus how to inherit eternal life. After acknowledging he kept the commandments Jesus told him he lacked one: he must sell all that he has and give the money to the poor. The man went away sad for he

was very rich. Paul says Jesus was simply telling the young man to be like Jesus. Do what I would do, he says. Jesus gave up everything for his people. This motivates and compels our own generosity, but generosity is about more than money.

We fail to remember this and so we sometimes desire God's stuff more than we desire God himself. God is most generous with himself, for he promises he would never withhold himself from anyone who comes to him in faith. That stuff we want, the stuff we'd rather have, is often financial resources, whether cash or a car or a house or a vacation or retirement funds. It is also other stuff we want from God. Good health. A relationship like theirs. Children. That job. Physical attractiveness. Peace of mind. Freedom to travel. We wonder why God didn't give *us* parents like he gave *that guy*. Why does *that guy* get all the athleticism or physical fitness? Why is *she* so pretty? Why do the *neighbor kids* have such nice toys?

It is so easy to begin to think God is withholding from us if he doesn't give us the stuff we want when we want it. We might even think we *deserve* those things for all our service and hard work and zeal and commitment and even suffering. Surely we've *earned* more than we've received? We're mistaken in one significant point, however. When God "withholds", he is offering us something greater than the thing we're desiring. When God offers us more of himself through our lack, we get frustrated and angry and discontent.

The thing about discontentment is it does not come from lack. Discontentment comes from ingratitude for what we have. It grows out of a seed of unmet expectations—expectations that we ourselves set. Again, we want God to provide what we want, when we want it and if he holds out on us...

The incredible thing in all this is God calls us to be like him in generosity, and generosity is a significant weapon against bitterness and envy. When we give, whether financial resources or our possessions or our most precious resource of all, our time, we fight against ingratitude and bitterness. By sharing our resources, by giving time to others, whether helping them move or sharing a meal or praying for them, we can overcome a lack of generosity and become more like Jesus.

Understanding God's generosity properly only has one response—worship. Generosity doesn't make comparisons. Generosity doesn't foster an attitude of entitlement or pride. Generosity doesn't seek recognition. Receiving God's generosity lights the fire of worship in a believer's life. The response then is to worship and demonstrate that same generosity that has been received.

If you've received financial help from others, look for ways to be generous to those in need. There are often those in need in our church and it is a great privilege to be able to help one another. We can also help those outside the church. I find it very interesting that this is the text we happen to be in on a fifth Sunday in which we collect a benevolence offering. We have another opportunity for generosity over these next few weeks. On July 30, St. Gianna's No Cost Baby Boutique—right across the street from us—will have their "Top Off The Truck" event.

Gianna's gives away diapers and baby clothes and offers free lactation counseling. It's an amazing ministry—all at no cost. Like Boaz with Ruth, they offer the poor great dignity as they receive charity. If you ever see inside it, it looks like a high end consignment shop rather than a Goodwill on a Saturday evening!

Over these next few Sundays let's bring in baby diapers of all sizes. The goal is to fill their tractor-trailer on July 30 so they have sufficient diapers to give to their clients. It is a



practical way to be generous together. We are one of their donation sites.

If you've received God's generosity through the sharing of spiritual gifts in the body, look for ways you can serve others with your gifts. If you've received an encouraging word, be generous and grace-filled in your conversations with others instead of criticizing. If you've been comforted, offer comfort. If you've learned something in Scripture, share it with others.

In a few minutes we are going to serve communion. We have yet another gift from the Lord, one that is physically tangible and demonstrates God's generosity for in this meal God invites sinners to eat with him—a meal that only he can provide. God invites us to join him, to take from the bread and dip it into the wine, so to speak. In this meal we discover there is nothing God would truly withhold from us, for he has given us his body and blood, that we might be reconciled to him.

God has shared all things with us in Christ. Whether he slaughters all his cattle on a thousand hills for us or not, he has given us himself. Giving us himself is not merely a lot; it is *everything*.