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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

This is the third message in the series called Ruth: The Romance of Redemption. The title of this message is "Living in the Field of Grace." Ruth found grace in the field of Boaz, and her experience illustrates how we can live in the field of grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone loves a story with a hero. When I was just a little boy watching Saturday morning cartoons, my favorite hero was Mighty Mouse. The poor damsel would be in distress from the evil plots of the villain, a wicked cat named Oil Can Harry. He would have her tied to railroad tracks with a speeding train roaring toward her. And just when everything seemed lost, Mighty Mouse would arrive just in time. Singing, "Here I come to save the day; that means that Mighty Mouse is on the way!" Mighty Mouse would dispose of the villain and rescue the damsel. Oil Can Harry would say, "Curses! Foiled again!"

In the story of Ruth, we finally get to meet the hero. His name is Boaz. Ruth was the damsel in distress, and Boaz stepped in to become her kinsman-redeemer.

As we examine the wonderful details of the story, I want you to have a feel for the entire plot, so here is my two-minute synopsis of Ruth: The story of Ruth begins when an Israelite family left Bethlehem because of a famine. They traveled to the pagan land of Moab in search of food. The mother's name was Naomi, and her husband's name was Elimelech. Eventually, their two sons married Moabite women. But life was bitter. Naomi's husband, and then her sons died. After three funerals, Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem. She urged the two younger widows to stay in Moab. Orpah stayed, but Ruth refused to leave Naomi and traveled with her back to Bethlehem. They arrived with nothing and had to beg for food. Ruth went into the field of a farmer named Boaz to pick up leftover wheat from the harvest. Boaz was impressed with young Ruth and instructed his workers to leave plenty of wheat for her to gather each day. To her delight, Naomi realized Boaz was a distant relative of her dead husband, which qualified him to be a Kinsman-Redeemer. If Ruth married Boaz, they could legally reclaim the land that formerly belonged to Naomi's husband.

So Naomi used her matchmaking skills. Following Naomi's advice, Ruth humbly asked Boaz to accept the role as her kinsman redeemer. In other words, Ruth basically asked him to marry her! And Boaz said, "You betcha!"

But there was a problem: Another man was a closer relative and he had the first right of refusal. When Boaz explained the terms to him, he wanted the property. But when he heard that a bride came with the deal, he said, "No thanks!" This opened the door for Boaz to marry Ruth and redeem the family's land and reputation.

First came love, then came marriage, then came Boaz with a baby carriage. God gave the couple a son named Obed, who turned out to be the grandfather of none other than King David himself! In the genealogy of Jesus, Ruth is listed as one of the human ancestors of Jesus! God redeemed Ruth's life from being a destitute, immigrant widow into a woman of honor with her own book in the Bible. It's also a parable about how God lovingly redeems us.

Ruth 2:1-17. "Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, 'Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.' Naomi said to her 'Go ahead, my daughter.' So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, 'The Lord be with you!' 'The Lord bless you!' they called back. Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, 'Whose young woman is that?' The foreman replied, 'She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' She went into the field and had worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.' So Boaz said to Ruth, 'My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.' At this she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, 'Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me- a foreigner?' Boaz replied, 'I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband – how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.' 'May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord,' she said. 'You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant – though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls.' At mealtime Boaz said to her, 'Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.' When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, 'Even if she gathers among the sheaves don't embarrass her. Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don't rebuke her.' So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah."

The Old Testament provided an ingenious welfare system for the poor people who lived in Israel. In Leviticus 19 God gave instructions for a farmer to leave the corners of his fields unpicked. That way, poor people and strangers could go to the corners and pick the fruit, vegetables, or wheat he had left. The person who qualified for welfare couldn't sit at home and wait for food to be delivered—they had to go out and pick it for themselves. That's what Ruth was doing when she went out to pick up excess grain.

This is more than a love story. It's a grace story. The key word in Ruth is *checed*. It's translated "favor" in the NIV, but we're going to call it grace. First we'll look at grace from the perspective of the giver of grace, Boaz, who represents Jesus. Then we'll look at grace from the perspective of the recipient of grace, Ruth, who represents us.

I. BOAZ SHOWS US HOW JESUS EXTENDS GRACE

The Bible tells us Boaz was a “man of standing.” That phrase carried the idea of man who was wealthy and respected, a leader. The Jewish Talmud says Boaz was a middle-aged man who had never been married. He was the most eligible bachelor in Bethlehem! Boaz would have been a great candidate to star in ABC’s reality show, “The Bachelor” if it had been around then. I imagine every single woman in that region was hoping to gain his attention. But of all the women there, Ruth is the only one who will hear him say, “Will you accept this rose?”

We’ll learn all about his role as a kinsman-Redeemer in the next message, but in this message I want to examine how he extended grace to Ruth.

A. Boaz wanted to know Ruth: Jesus wants to have a relationship with us

Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, “Whose young woman is that?” Did you notice he asked, “Whose woman is that?” instead of asking, “Who is that woman?” In that time, a married woman was considered the property of her husband, or an unmarried woman still belonged to her father, or was someone’s servant. He was asking, “To whom does she belong?” If she belonged to another man it would have been socially unacceptable for him to even speak to her without first gaining permission. In his question, it’s obvious he wanted to know her. He initiates the relationship by speaking to her first.

In the same way, the Lord Jesus wants to have a personal relationship with us. He doesn’t have to ask who we are, because He already knows us. He is the one who has initiated a loving relationship with us. In John 17:3 Jesus said that eternal life is knowing God.

I was talking to a guy on an airline flight recently and he asked me what I did for a living. I told him I was a pastor. He said he didn’t need religion. I smiled and said, “Well that’s one thing you and I agree on! I don’t need religion. I’m not a religious person. In fact, religious people make me nervous. But I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.” He said, “How can you have a relationship with a dead man?” I said, “I’m so glad you asked! Jesus isn’t dead. I talked to Him just this morning.” It’s not about religion it’s about knowing Jesus.

B. Though Ruth didn’t deserve it, Boaz chose to bless her: Jesus chose to bless us even though we are undeserving

She exclaimed, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?” Ruth was amazed at the grace Boaz showed to her. People from Moab were considered inferior foreigners. There was a lot of discrimination against Gentiles. So why *did* Boaz notice Ruth and show her kindness and friendship? There’s a wonderful nuance to this story many people miss. I believe one of the reasons Boaz showed favor to Ruth was because Ruth reminded him of his mother.

There’s an old song that says, “I want a girl just like the girl who married dear old dad.” Does anyone know the name of Boaz’ mother? She was Rahab, the harlot from Jericho, a Gentile with a shady past. When Joshua led the Israelites to conquer Jericho, Rahab helped two Israelite spies. One of the spies was named Salmon and he later married Rahab, and she gave birth to Boaz, the hero of our story. Boaz was showing kindness to Ruth in the same way his father had treated

Rahab. The grace Boaz showed was simply because it was part of his DNA—he was reflecting his father's nature.

We should be asking God, "Why have I found favor in your eyes that you notice me—a sinner?" Jesus shows us grace because it is part of His Divine DNA. His grace to us simply reflects the nature of His Heavenly Father. It has nothing to do with us being worthy or deserving, it is all about His grace nature.

C. Boaz invited Ruth to share a meal: Jesus invites us to share fellowship

Boaz said to her, "Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar." In Bible times a meal was for more than just eating. Inviting someone to eat was inviting them to share fellowship as well as food. Of all the workmen and servants present, only Ruth received this invitation.

Jesus invites us to share fellowship with Him as well. In Revelation 3:20 the Bible says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." We live in a fast-food culture where people grab food on-the-go just to get calories for energy. This week, *U.S. Today* reported that 54% of Americans eat lunch in 20 minutes or less. But sometimes we slow down and sit down and enjoy a long, leisurely meal with family or friends. It's more than about just eating; this kind of experience creates closeness and friendship.

Do you have a sense of fellowship with Jesus on a daily basis? Or do you rush through your prayers and Bible reading every day so you can check it off your to-do list? Do you spend quality time in communion with the Lord every day, slowly feeding on His delicious Word? How close do you feel to the Lord today?

Mable and Sam had been married for thirty years. They lived in a rural community where most people drove pickups. They were driving along one day and Mable noticed how many other couples were sitting close to each other. Mable turned to Sam and said, "Sam, look at those couples. They're in love. They sit next to each other in their trucks. We used to do that. But look at us now. I'm on one side and you're on the other." Sam glanced over at her and said, "Well, I ain't moved an inch!" If you don't feel close to the Lord, who moved?

D. Boaz gave Ruth more than she needed: Jesus always gives us more than enough

"...pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up ... she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah." (22 liters) Ruth had been gathering fingerfuls of wheat, a kernel here, a stalk there. It was hard, back-breaking work. But Boaz told them to leave handfuls of plenty for her. She gathered the barley stalks and when she separated the barley from the chaff, she had an ephah of pure barley, about 22 liters. If you can imagine a two liter soft drink bottle, multiply that by 11 and that's how much barley she took home. It wasn't just BARLEY enough. It was more than enough for her and Naomi for many days. And Boaz had invited her to return tomorrow!

That’s the way Jesus treats us. He never gives us just enough love, peace, joy, or hope. He always gives *more* than enough. When He fed the 5,000 there were 12 basketfuls left over.

My definition of grace used to be: Grace is God giving you what you NEED, not what you DESERVE. But I’ve revised that slightly to say “Grace is God giving you MORE than you need!” Our God is a Generous Giver who is able to do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.” (Ephesians 3:20) That’s a look at the grace-giver, now we’ll notice how Ruth shows us how a person accepts grace.

II. RUTH SHOWS US HOW A PERSON EXPERIENCES GRACE

Ruth told Naomi she was going out hoping to find favor (grace). She wasn’t making demands about how much she deserved to be fed. In the same way, we can’t make any demands of God, we can only seek to experience His grace.

A. Ruth found grace in the field of a Godly man: We find grace only in the God-man, Jesus

The Bible says, “As it turned out, she found herself working a field belonging to Boaz.” She didn’t intend to go there, she just found herself there, and it “happened” to be the field of Boaz. My, what a coincidence! The word “coincidence” isn’t in God’s vocabulary. But it’s in our human vocabulary. A coincidence is a small miracle where God prefers to remain anonymous.

The first thing we learn about Boaz is that He was a man who greeted his workers with an encouraging word. He said, “The Lord be with you!” That’s a great example for everyone who is a boss or supervisor. The first thing you should say to your workers should be something positive and encouraging. He was a Godly man.

We find grace only at the feet of the God-man, Jesus. The Bible says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Boaz’s servants were laboring for a wage, but Ruth received everything from Boaz as a gift she didn’t earn. That’s what grace is. When I was in seminary I worked at an airport and I had to punch a time card everyday. I was paid based upon the hours I worked. There are still people who are working hard at religious activities and good works. One day they expect they’ll stand in front of God with their time card and say, “Look at all the work I’ve done. Now give me my payment.” But they’ll be disappointed because salvation can’t be earned. It is by grace and grace alone.

B. Ruth humbled herself before Boaz: We must humble ourselves before the Lord

At this she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?” She placed herself in the position and posture of humility. She was admitting that she needed Boaz’s help to survive. That’s not easy for us to do.

Humility is not a natural trait of humanity. Our sinful nature always pushes us toward pride and self-sufficiency. I was watching a little red-headed toddler push her own stroller the other day as her mother was walking along talking on her cell phone. The mother wasn't paying attention and kept putting her hand on one of the stroller handles. Every time she did, the little toddler would brush her mom's hand away. Her mom wasn't paying attention and would put her hand back on the handle and her daughter would push it away. It was the toddler's way of saying, "I can do it myself!" If you've ever tried to do something for a three-year-old you will probably hear them saying, "No! I can do it myself!"

That's the attitude we all inherit from Adam. Sadly some people grow up in age, but they don't develop in humility. They go through life swatting God's hand away and saying, "No, God! I can do it myself!"

Grace must always be received with humility. The Bible says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6) If you want to live in God's field of grace, you must be willing to humble yourself before the Lord.

C. Ruth looked to God for protection: We can trust Him for our security

Boaz said to Ruth, "May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge." Boaz complemented Ruth on her character and commitment. He had heard about her decision to leave her people and help Naomi. He also knew Ruth was trusting in God to give her shelter and supply. God provided supply and security through Boaz, but Ruth recognized that it came from God. She understood that God is a compassionate Father who cares for His children like a brooding hen cares for her chicks.

What a powerful image that is of God sheltering us like a mother hen. I read a story once of a fire in a barn. When the fire was extinguished, they found a dead hen. Her wings were outstretched, and underneath her charred wings they could hear the cheeps of her chicks. She had spread her wings over her chicks to protect them from the fire that killed her. That's a perfect picture of what Jesus did for us on the cross! He stretched out His arms and received the brunt of punishment for sin. He died to give us life. That's the kind of security God offers!

D. Ruth expressed gratitude to her lord: We must have a thankful heart

"May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord," she said. "You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls."

Gratitude is more than just saying, "Thanks." Ruth recounted the wonderful things Boaz had done for her: give her comfort; spoken kindly to her and had exalted her even though she didn't have the status of a servant girl. A humble heart full of grace is always a thankful heart.

CONCLUSION

I started this message by talking about how Boaz is the hero in this story. And we know Ruth is the damsel in distress. But who is the villain in this story? It's not Naomi, Elimelech, or Orpah. There were twin villains in this story: Sin and death. The reason Naomi and Ruth were starving widows is because Elimelech sinned in leaving God's plan and then death claimed their husbands. But Boaz came on the scene at just the right moment to rescue Ruth from the horrible chokehold that sin and death had on her. Boaz redeemed everything she had lost. He became her kinsman-redeemer and the result of His union with Ruth brought forth a new life, little Obed.

You might be thinking, "I wish someone would rescue me like that." Someone has. His name is Jesus. He is our heavenly Hero who came to rescue us from the sinister villains of Sin and Death. Sin and Death still threaten us and say, "You have no hope!" But at the cross, Jesus disposed of the villains of sin and death and Satan said, "Curses, foiled again!"

As I drive around Texas I enjoy reading the different signs and banners churches have out in front of their buildings. Some say, "You are welcome here," or "Come be a part of our family" or "Seven days without prayer makes one weak." But the other day I drove by a church out in the country that had a large colorful banner stretched in front of the church that said, "The wicked shall burn in hell!" I almost ran off the road to make sure that's what it said. I'll bet they get lots of visitors from that one, huh?

But the irony to me was the big sign above the door of the church announcing that this was a Full Gospel Church. While it is true that everyone who refuses to trust Christ will spend eternity in hell, that's NOT the full gospel. The Bible does say, "The wages of sin is death." But that's only HALF the gospel. The other half, and the glorious half is, "But the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23) That's the good news of the gospel of grace! Eternal life is a GIFT from God wrapped up in Jesus Christ.

Ruth found grace in the fields of a kind man. She didn't deserve any of the blessings Boaz gave her. If you will trust Jesus as your Lord, you will find grace living in His fields as well. Grace can't be earned—it can only be accepted and enjoyed!

OUTLINE

I. BOAZ SHOWS US HOW JESUS EXTENDS GRACE

A. Boaz wanted to know Ruth: Jesus wants to have a relationship with us
Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, "Whose young woman is that?"

B. Though Ruth didn't deserve it, Boaz chose to bless her: Jesus chose to bless us even though we are undeserving
She exclaimed, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?"

C. Boaz invited Ruth to share a meal: Jesus invites us to share fellowship
Boaz said to her, "Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar."

D. Boaz gave Ruth more than she needed: Jesus always gives us more than enough
"...pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up ... she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah."

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Boaz said to Ruth, "May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

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