

FIELD OF DREAMS

RUTH 2:1-18

The other night Zach and Jess were over at the house when Kevin Costner's movie, "[Field of Dreams](#)," came on television. It's a weird movie. Costner's character is an Iowa farmer named Ray Cansella. One day he hears a mysterious voice tell him to plow under his corn and build a baseball diamond. It whispers, "[If you build it, he will come.](#)" Eventually, late great ballplayers from a bygone era do come. They materialize as they walk out of the netherworld just beyond the cornstalks. These former baseball players see Ray's field as a dream come true. Several situations occur in the movie that cause Ray to think he's fulfilled his mission, but there's more to the story than even Ray knows.

Now I'm watching this movie when Zach rightly points out the new age theology that weaves throughout the story... My son the apologist! He can't believe Pastor Dad is enjoying such a confused movie... And I applaud his orthodoxy. If the movie were taken as a theological treatise he'd be right. But it's a fictional tale, and I overlook its bad theology to focus on its underlying plot. It's a story about a father and a son, and life's regrets. In the final scene one of the ballplayers stays behind. It's Ray's dad. It's his dad before Ray was born – before life beat him down. Last time Ray saw his dad he was a rebellious teen who left home after an ugly fight. Ray's entire adult life has been lived under the shadow of deep regrets. But now it all makes sense. This is what the voice meant, "[If you built it, he will come.](#)" Ray gets an opportunity to make things right with his dad.

To sum up the movie... in an Iowa cornfield, mysterious forces work in mysterious ways to redeem a family and resurrect unfulfilled dreams. And whenever I watch that final scene of Ray and his dad playing catch, I cry like a baby... because I've lived long enough now to have a few regrets of my own. I've seen how stubbornness can come between me and the people I love. I've watched life beat down hope and sever friendships. I've now raised three sons – who for the most part have gone their own way - and as hard as I've tried to be a good dad, I still have some regrets.

This fall has been particularly tough on me. For 27 years I've poured my life into my kids, and now they're all gone. My "last born" is off to college. While Mack was home on Christmas break, he asked me if I wanted to go to the park and play catch. I suppose right out of [Field of Dreams](#). I was really excited. I miss my kids, and this is the kind of stuff I miss most. We'd tossed the ball back and forth twice, when a throw got by me. The ball rolled across the parking lot and tumbled down the sewer. That's not what happened in the movie! I was so frustrated. When I threw my glove, Mack said, "[Dad, chill.](#)" He was embarrassed by my emotional meltdown. I told him, "[I miss you, man. I just wanted us to have a catch.](#)" Mack has no idea what I'm going through... He won't understand until he has a son.

But here's a truth, Life is not always a field of dreams. Life can get hard. How many times have you watched your dreams roll down into the sewer. Often our heartache is the direct result of our own poor choices... At times we're the victim of circumstances beyond our control... Even obedience to God doesn't guarantee that your life will pan out the way you wanted. We soon discover God's plan often differs from our own. Yet here's the Christian's hope... a mysterious force called God's providence is at work in mysterious ways. It's God's desire to redeem. The God of the Bible specializes in restoring broken relationships, and rebuilding lives, and reigniting hope. God likes to make dreams come true.

I love John Piper's thoughts on God's providence. "Life is not a straight line leading from one blessing to the next and then finally to heaven. Life is a winding and troubled road... And the point of biblical stories like Ruth is to help us feel in our bones (not just know in our heads) that God is for us in all these strange turns. God is not just showing up after the trouble and cleaning it up. He is plotting the course and managing the troubles with far-reaching purposes for our good and for the glory of Jesus Christ." Ultimately, God's purpose is best. The will of God is superior to a dream come true. And providence is the means of getting us from here to there.

This is what the book of Ruth is all about. It's about **a field of dreams**. In a barley field outside Bethlehem, God saves a family on the verge of annihilation. He works graciously to restore a hope shattered by rebellion. And it all foreshadows what happens in Bethlehem years later, when a child is born. And through that Child God redeems a world broken by sin...

To get us up to speed let's take a moment to review chapter 1... When famine struck the area of Bethlehem a local named **Elimelech** loaded up his family and took off for greener grass. He moved to Moab. But Moab was a pagan place – a lost land full of idolatrous people. God brought His people, Israel, through Moab into a Land of Promise. It was not His will for them to backtrack and backslide. Elimelech should've hunkered down and trusted God, instead he leaned on his own understanding and moved his wife and two sons to the borders of Moab.

Sadly, Elimelech only saw what he wanted to escape – the famine. He never looked ahead at what life would be like in the land of Moab. In essence, he shipwrecked his family. They were an island of faith in a sea of idolatry. They were surrounded by a culture of unbelief. So, when it came time for his two sons to marry their only options were two Moabite maidens... One of the sons married **Orpah**. The other son married **Ruth**.

And irony of all ironies. Elimelech had moved to Moab to save his family, yet shortly after he arrives he dies. Then to make matters worse, his two sons also die. His poor wife, **Naomi**, is left to deal with enormous grief. After burying the men in her life, Naomi, and one of her daughters-in-law, Ruth, pack their bags and move back to O Little Town of Bethlehem. These two women arrive homeless and indigent. Naomi moans her plight in 1:21, "I went out full, and the Lord has brought me home empty."

In fact, when the Bethlehem Women's Club comes out to greet their old friend, Naomi (who's name means "**Pleasant**") tells them, [SLIDE] "**Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.**" After a decade in Moab, Ms. Pleasant, is now a Bitter Old Lady. Though Naomi was too depressed to appreciate the pick-up, there was one blessing she received in Moab - a noble daughter-in-law named Ruth. In fact, Ruth converts to faith in Naomi's God. She says to her mother-in-law in chapter 1, [SLIDE] "**Your people will be my people, your God, my God...**" And God's providence uses the faithfulness of Ruth to restore Naomi's family to prominence and make their dreams come true in Bethlehem.

Chapter 2:1 introduces a new character to the story. "**There was a relative of Naomi's husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz.**" Here is where the plot thickens... Enter Boaz... He was a Hebrew hunk. Think of a Jewish Denzel Washington or Matthew McConaughey. Boaz was the Hebrew heart throb. The name "**Boaz**" means "**in him is strength.**" He was a manly man. He was strong, handsome, and wealthy. Boaz was a large landowner. He was a barley baron... And... he was single. Boaz was a bachelor.

Did you hear about the young man who said to his sweetheart, "Darling, I'm not as wealthy as Gerald Green – or as good-looking as a Gerald Green, and I don't have a mansion, a Mercedes, and a yacht like Gerald Green, but I love you with all my heart." The girl replied, "Well, I love you too, but tell me more about this Gerald Green?" Boaz was Gerald Green. You should realize how thoroughly I research my sermons... I did a Google search for back issues of People magazine from the year 1350 BC. And guess who was ranked "Bethlehem's most eligible bachelor?" Boaz! Many a girl would've loved to have Boaz as a beau!

And what makes his appearance even more intriguing is that Boaz was a relative. Boaz will play the role of Hebrew "Goel" or "kinsmen redeemer." According to Israeli culture it was the obligation of the nearest family member to marry a widowed wife, and sire a child to preserve his brother's limb on the family tree. Hebrews called it the Law of the Levirate. "Levir" means "brother-in-law." Deuteronomy 25 describes the custom in detail. This is why the first words in chapter 2, "There was a relative of Naomi's husband..." tip us off, that God is up to something special. Not only will a woman meet a man, but a disgraced family is about to be restored.

It's interesting, when Ruth left Moab she thought she'd sacrificed her best opportunity for remarriage to stay loyal to her mother-in-law. Not so! It's just like God to reward someone who puts commitment ahead of convenience – who values loyalty above self-interest – who refuses to opt for the easy way out. Ruth forfeited a privilege to remain true to a principle. And before we're done God will bless Ruth with the man of her dreams.

Chapter 2:1 is inserted for the reader. Boaz has yet to cross the mind of either Ruth or Naomi. These girls came to Bethlehem dirt poor. And now they're getting hungry. They need food. There's two stomachs growling. Verse 2, "So Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor." Ruth has no idea who that "him" might be. She'll join the labor pool and work her assigned field. "And (Naomi) said to her, "Go, my daughter."

"Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers." Understand how welfare worked in ancient Israel. Rather than passing out checks and food stamps – a needy person had to put forth some effort. When the crop was harvested the landowner was not allowed to strip the field bare. He was required to leave a little behind for the poor. But it was their responsibility to enter the fields behind the reapers and "glean" or "gather up the leftovers." This is what Ruth does. She goes out to glean. Ruth is hoping to scrape up enough barley for her and Naomi.

"And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech." Notice the wording, "she happened..." Ruth had gone out with the day-laborers. She had no idea who owned the field in which she worked, but God did. The author's wording is deliberate. He uses the phrase tongue-in-check to grab our attention. In light of God's sovereignty nothing ever just "happens."

As we discussed last week, God is in control over all our circumstances. Proverbs 16:33 puts it, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." There is no such thing as luck, or fate, or chance. Every roll of the dice – every bounce of the football – is overseen by God. The Jewish rabbis put it this way, "Coincidence is not a kosher word." It's been said, "God's ways are behind the scenes, but He moves all the scenes He is behind." Ruth is unaware, but God is directing her steps.

It reminds me of the little boy who climbed a tall tree. He was leaping from limb to limb when he slipped and fell. He was pummeling toward the earth when someone heard him scream, "God, save me!" At that very moment his belt got caught on a limb. It stopped his fall. He sighed, "Never mind Lord, my pants just got caught on a branch." We can be so blind and oblivious to God's gracious maneuvers. We cry out to Him when we need Him, then when He comes through we chalk it up to luck, or chance, or even our own where-with-all... Shame on us!

Verse 4 "Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered him, "The LORD bless you!" Apparently, Boaz was not only a good guy, but a good boss. He loved to bless His employees, and they loved to return the blessing. One day, Boaz leaves the home office in downtown Bethlehem, for a field trip. Harvest is crunch time in the barley business. He wants to do an on-site inspection. But it's not the work that catches his eye, it's a worker!

"Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" I'm sure Ruth was one of many gleaners. There were probably dozens of young women in Boaz's field. But Ruth is the one who grabs his attention. He turns to his assistant and asks, "Who's the new girl? Who's the babe among the barley?"

Understand the story of Ruth is a romance novel of epic proportion. Boaz the barley baron is Lord of the harvest. Ruth is a Gentile woman who's hungry, and hurting, and a stranger to the things of God. But they're both so much more... In a sense you and I are Ruth. We come from a pagan land. We once served empty idols. We were grieved, and poor, and hungry when we came to our senses and turned back home. And guess who this Boaz is who saw us... Jesus is Lord of the Harvest! He's strong, winsome, wealthy. He's full of grace and blessing. Jesus is a Gerald Green. He's a most eligible bachelor, who woos a Gentile bride.

When we come to Jesus we're a stranger to the things of God. We're hungry for His blessing. And just as Boaz finds a way to marry Ruth and redeem her family, Jesus has found a way to make our dreams come true. The love story between Ruth and Boaz provides us insight into how Jesus chooses to redeem and restore you and I to the family of God. The barley fields of Bethlehem are not too far from where we live.

And I love this first parallel... Before Boaz says a word to Ruth - before they even meet - before Ruth even knows that Boaz exists – He sees her! He picks her out of the crowd, takes the initiative, and inquires of Ruth. And do you realize this is how you came to Jesus' attention. I recall the day I knelt at a park bench and surrendered my life to Jesus. I admitted my sin had made a mess of my life, and I asked Jesus to take me as is... I came grieving, and poor, and hungry... just like Ruth.

But here's what I didn't realize until later. Jesus saw me before I came to Him. Ephesians 1:4 tells us God chose us before the foundation of the world. That means when Jesus went to the cross He had you in mind. When I was born my dad loved me, but he didn't have a choice. He wasn't able to browse the maternity ward and pick out a kid. The nurse handed me over, and he was stuck. But my dad loved me just the same. God on the other hand, had a choice. He knew the mistakes we'd make. He saw our sin. He knew our history in advance. Yet He still chose us!

This is why Boaz is the perfect type of Jesus. How do think Ruth looked when Boaz first spotted her? She'd been working the fields. She was hot and sweaty. She stunk. Her hair was nappy. It was probably in a ponytail.

Ruth had dirt smudges on her face. She wore a work skirt. Her hands were cut and bleeding from rummaging in the stalks. She was a mess. When she saw Boaz drive up in the company limousine, she couldn't run to the restroom to freshen up, or do her hair, or paint on some lipstick. She looked like the back side of a muddy shovel, yet Boaz loved her anyway. This is how Jesus saw us, and He's loved us just the same.

Verse 6, "So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, 'It is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.' So she came and has continued from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house.'" Boaz' superintendent was impressed. Ruth was a hard worker. "Then Boaz said to Ruth..." Apparently, he went out to meet her... "You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women. Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them." Boaz isn't sure what will happen in this relationship, but he's seen enough not to let Ruth get away. He tells her not to wander off. She needs to stay put in his field.

He assures her, "Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you?" Here's the first sexual harassment policy in corporate history. The boss makes sure his minions understand this girl is off-limits. And not only protection, Boaz also orders provision. "And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn." Usually, a mere gleaner would fetch water for the hired-hands. But Boaz flips it around. He order his workers to draw plenty of water for Ruth.

Notice all Boaz does for Ruth... she joins Boaz' gleaners (a privilege). Boaz orders hands-off Ruth (protection). And Ruth can drink from the water the workers draw from the well (provision). Ruth hits the jackpot. Yet there's just one catch... She can glean only from Boaz' field. If Ruth wanders off to another man's farm. If she starts to glean from other fields, she forfeits Boaz' privilege and protection and provision.

This is what the NT means when we're told to "abide in Christ." As Christians we've also been given abundant blessing. We're gleaners in God's field. We're secure in Christ. He satisfies our deepest thirst. We've been given privilege, protection, and provision – but there's on condition... Stay put... The object of our faith has to be exclusively Jesus.

We have to put all our hope in Him. Trust our dreams and needs to Him alone. Glean in another field and we forfeit the blessings He's earmarked for us. Don't be tempted by greener grass... Don't be lured away by a lying wolf in sheep's clothing... Don't doze off and drift beyond God's fence... Remain steadfast, unmovable. Look to Jesus alone to meet your needs. Whether that's love, or strength, or joy, or peace – learn to lean on Jesus.

In verse 10 Ruth responds to Boaz' obvious show of generosity.... "So she fell on her face, bowed down 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?'" In typical oriental fashion she bowed low to the person in authority. Ruth showed Boaz the customary token of respect. But the question she asks indicates her street-smarts. She doesn't know Boaz from the man in the moon. Ruth is from Moab where unscrupulous men don't hesitate to butter up a woman to take her to bed. She needs to know is he a Boaz or a Bozo? What are his intentions?

Which reminds me of a riddle, “What was Boaz before he met Ruth?” Answer, “Ruthless.” And let me suggest every woman should assume the same about a man until he proves otherwise. Men can be ruthless. Single ladies, need to ask men question Ruth asks Boaz, “Why are you favoring me? I like candy, but don’t think I’m a sucker. Flowers are great, but I’m not a blooming idiot...” It’s a girl’s right to know a guy’s intentions. Often a girl is thinking a lifetime, while the guy is thinking a good time. Ladies, assume the guy is Ruthless, until he proves you can trust him.

And notice what causes Ruth to question Boaz’ motive. Why have you taken “notice of me, since I am a foreigner?” In the dating game Ruth didn’t have much going for her. She’d probably been adding this up in her mind... Why would Bethlehem’s most eligible bachelor be interested in a widow from Moabite? She’s a foreigner. She’s no longer a virgin. She’s a little older, and poor, and needy, and dirty. She’s got callouses. And to top it off, there’s Naomi... Ruth is packaged with a bitter old lady for a mother-in-law. Ruth was suspicious. Why would Boaz be interested in her?

And I’ve asked myself the same question a million zillion times about my relationship with Jesus. Why would He love Me enough to die a hideous death He didn’t deserve - for sins that were never His fault. Why? And just put your pride to rest... The only answer is amazing grace! So often we ask God the wrong question. “God, why was I laid off?” “Why did I get cancer?” “Why did my spouse die?” “Why is my child ill?” We bombard God with questions about situations that seem illogical to us. But to be consistent, ask God one more question, of which there is no logical explanation... “God, why did you love me enough to send your only Son to die in my place?” That answer may end all the other questions. Understand the grace of God, and you’ll find it sufficient for every situation.

In verse 11, “Boaz answered and said to her, “It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before. The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.” He saw past Ruth’s messy appearance and soiled pedigree. He spotted a woman with inner beauty. He was attracted to her integrity and loyalty.

Over the years I’ve had lots of single men and single women ask me to pray for them. “Pastor Sandy, please pray God gives me a godly spouse.” But I can’t pray that prayer for some people, because if God gave them a godly spouse it wouldn’t be right for the godly person to marry them. Before you ask for a godly spouse you need to be a godly person. Boaz was a quite a catch, but Ruth was the kind of bait to hook him.

“Then (Ruth) said, “Let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you have comforted me, and have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants.” Boaz treated Ruth as if she belonged.

And you know a romance is heating up when the guy takes the girl to dinner. That’s what happens in verse 14, “Now Boaz said to her at mealtime, “Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.” So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed parched grain to her; and she ate and was satisfied, and kept some back.” For Boaz to invite Ruth to his table was an incredibly gracious gesture. Jews were usually forbidden to break bread with Gentiles. Eating together was a sign of oneness. An invitation to eat spoke of acceptance.

And notice the two elements used to demonstrate Boaz' acceptance? **Barley bread and vinegar** (or **sour wine**.) Notice, **the bread** and **the wine**... Whenever we take communion the bread and wine speaks of our Lord's acceptance. His body broken... His blood spilt... the work has been done, the price has been paid, now God's acceptance is offered... eat and drink. And when we do, like Ruth, we always come away satisfied. When you feed at the Lord's table expect to experience a deep fulfillment in your heart. At His table we sense God's love and acceptance.

But notice Ruth doesn't forget Naomi. Picture her at dinner, allowing a few morsels to spill over into her hap. She plans to smuggle them home. **"And when she rose up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her."** This was an extraordinary blessing. Rather than glean from the leftovers, Ruth has first crack at the harvest. She's no longer grubbing through trampled down grain, she's walking off with the best of the crop.

And as if that weren't enough. Verse 16, **"Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her."** I get the feeling that Mr. Boaz is smitten with a maiden named Ruth. Here he pours it on. Let there be no doubt in Ruth's mind. Boaz has a crush. She's not only invited to harvest the best of the crop, but the other harvesters make it easy on her. They're ordered to drop grain in her path. And our Lord Jesus is just as lavish in His love toward us. Spend time with Him. Study His Word. And you'll walk away with treasures left there on purpose. He'll speak words especially for you. Promises will jump off the page, straight into your heart. The Holy Spirit personalizes the blessings.

Verse 17 **"So she gleaned in the field until evening, and beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah (or a bushel) of barley."** **"Then she took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. So she brought out and gave to her what she had kept back after she had been satisfied."** She shares her meal with Naomi. Ruth saved the leftovers - and there are always leftovers at the Lord's table. You'll find more than enough when you bring your needs to Jesus. He's more blessing than we need. He's more love than we can handle.

But what should we do with the leftovers? Save?... Horde?... Waste?... The answer is share... You and I need to take the abundance we've found in Jesus, and spread the grace to everyone we meet. Spread the bread. Let the love of Jesus overflow to those around you. Here's what happens next... Naomi is impressed with all the barley. Obviously, Ruth has a serious suitor. And she's excited he's a relative. Ruth has hooked a husband. Next week Naomi helps her reel him in.