

# Boaz and Ruth

The Rev. David  
Jordan-Haas

Ruth 2:1-13

Sermon Series:  
Seven Greatest  
Virtues and Vices:  
Greed and Charity

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**W**e are still into Sins and Virtues here at VPC! This morning it is the Sin of GREED and the Virtue of CHARITY. We don't speak that word much, charity. We can substitute "charity" for "kindness," "love," or "generosity."

Greed is actually a good place to start. The Book of Ruth, where we find our lesson for this morning, actually takes place in the historical period of the Judges, roughly between 1200 and 1020 BC, between the death of Joshua and the kingly coronation of Saul, of Israel. It is one of the most wicked, corrupted, greed-infested periods in all of Israel's history. The people are repeatedly turning away from God. Neighboring tribes are constantly harassing and invading Israel. It is summed up in Judges 21:25: "In the days [of the judges] Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." There was moral, political, social chaos, utter lawlessness, and greed.

Here is a brief summary of the Book of Ruth. For 10 years now, mother Naomi and daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, have been living in the land of Moab, about 50 miles from Bethlehem, east, around

the Dead Sea. Naomi's husband has died, and her two sons have died—Orpah's husband and Ruth's husband. Grief-stricken and impoverished, Naomi is broke; she is destitute and desperate. Ruth vows to stay by her side. Naomi returns to Bethlehem. Her daughter-in-law Ruth insists on following Naomi home. There, in Bethlehem, out of concern for her mother-in-law, Ruth begins to gather bundles of wheat dropped by the reapers in the fields of a wealthy relative named Boaz. Boaz has heard of Ruth's kindness towards Naomi. Boaz accepts responsibility as Naomi's next-of-kin and redeems the fortunes of her family. So, here is the first encounter between Ruth and Boaz. Let's look at Boaz's kind heart of charity. As I read these verses, I'll be commenting on some things. Ruth 2:1-13:

*Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, 'Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favour.' [Judaic law allowed the poor – widows/orphans/immigrants – to "glean," to*

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pick and gather up any grain left out around the edges of an owner’s field. In the rare case, where an owner was at all cooperative, a long, hard day’s effort under the hot sun would yield only a small amount of grain to feed a family.] So, Naomi said to Ruth, ‘Go, my daughter.’ So she went. Ruth came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, Ruth came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. [There are no coincidences here but “God-incidences.” It may seem “accidental” that Ruth comes into Boaz’s field and that Boaz meets Ruth, but not from God’s prospective!] *Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, ‘The LORD be with you.’ They answered, ‘The LORD bless you.’* [How many of you get THIS kind of cheerful greeting from your boss in the morning at your workplace? This kind of blessing speaks to Boaz’s godly character.] *Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, ‘To whom does this young woman belong?’ The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, ‘She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab.... She has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment.’ Then Boaz said to Ruth, ‘Now listen, my daugh-*

*ter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.’ Then Ruth fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, ‘Why have I found favour in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?’* [Ruth’s humble response to Boaz may seem grossly exaggerated to us, but this was a typical ancient Near Eastern expression of gratitude.] *But Boaz answered her, ‘All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the LORD reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!’ Then she said, ‘May I continue to find favour in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants.’*

What an exchange between this so-called poorest-of-the-poor, widowed foreigner and

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this “mighty-man-of-wealth,” Boaz! What an exchange between this courageous, hard-working woman, this sacrificing daughter-in-law and this godly man of kindness and charity. Given this time in Israel’s history of greed, Boaz’s generosity towards “the poor” is all the more striking. As disciples in this “disciple-making church” then, with the time remaining, let me make some comments about these acts of charity on this “Labor 4 Your Neighbor” Sunday!

First, it is risky to act kindly. For Ruth, Boaz’s charity could have put her in a risky position. Ruth could have been perceived as a “special case,” as a “land-owner’s pet,” and she could have been harassed by the other women and the hired-hands for receiving favors. Also, for Boaz, extending kindness to someone like Ruth could cost him. Others sweating it out in the fields could have complained to Boaz about not getting their fair share of the gleaning. Other neighboring landowners could have accused Boaz of giving “special treatment” to so-called “welfare” cases. Acting kindly is risky; but it is worth it!

Look at the lengths and breadth of Boaz’s generosity. Boaz is generous in financial and non-financial ways. Boaz secures a place for Ruth to glean in his field, telling his workers to leave extra stalks of

grain for her. Boaz offers her protection and water, and later provides her lunch. And later, in verses 15-20, Boaz gives food to Ruth to take home [a half-bushel, or 25-40 pounds of grain!]. Full-On, Full-Orbed Acts of Kindness and Generosity!

This raises a question: How might you and I provide so-called “gleaning” opportunities for others? How might you and I provide that “leg-up,” that fresh start, some sure-footing for one who could really use it? I’ve heard and met a woman who came to one of Phil’s Jobs Ministry events, who was out of work, who was living out of her car. Eventually someone helped her find a job (a VPC member hired her); now she’s making some ends meet, and she has an apartment of her own. I know of a church member who began a quiet ministry to the Day Laborers up on Cedar Lane, outside the McDonald’s there. This quiet ministry grew into a Labor 4 Your Neighbor event last year for the children living in the Cedar Lane apartments. In July, this ministry then grew into a week-long SMP for the Cedar Lane Apartment children, with 25 VPC volunteers. By the end of the week, over 60 children were enjoying themselves! Now Student Ministries is working with the Cunningham Park School to provide an after-school “homework club” for these children!

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Second, our Christ-like actions are our greatest witness to the world. Our lives as disciples become really real through our Jesus-like actions. Ruth and Boaz, at the end of this story, end up getting married. Then Boaz and Ruth have a baby boy. And the boy is named Obed, and Obed becomes the father of Jesse. Jesse becomes the father of King David, and King David leads the royal ancestry line all the way to Jesus, the Christ. So, what if Boaz had never “walked the talk?” What if Boaz had never been generous to Ruth? What if Ruth had not been kind to Boaz? No Obed, no Jesse; no King David – you get the picture.

At VPC, we use the Disciple-Making phrase – “In Christ, Together, for the World!” We want to live this, here at VPC. There are almost 2,000 verses in Scripture that deal with mercy for the poor. Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan, because generosity is an expected character trait of His disciples. Jesus expects us to go the extra-mile, to come up alongside the most “at-risk” among us—the elderly shut-in, the day laborer, the house for abused women and their children, the mentally-ill out on the street. Our Christ-like actions are our greatest witness to the world. In Christ, Together, For the World!

Third, fear and skepticism keep us from kindness and

charity. FEAR instead of compassion keeps us from being charitable. Skepticism instead of joy keeps us from being generous. We fear what the obligations of kindness might mean for us. We’re skeptical about whether we can truly make a difference in someone’s life. Some of us think it’s just too costly and weighty to reach out, to invest and care for someone else’s life. When we are skeptical or fearful, there’s an African saying that gives us perspective: “If you think you are too small to make a difference, try spending the night in a closed room with a mosquito!”

If we claim to know and to love Jesus, then caring for the elderly, the lost, the foreigners, the poor among us is our action-imperative (1 John 3:17; James 1:26-27). John said, “Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6). Neglecting the poor is not an option for Jesus. So, how do I become a more charitable disciple? Let the Holy Spirit grow it in you! Invite the Holy Spirit to give you a greater trust of Christ growing a deeper desire in you. Ask the Holy Spirit to send you out to being the Church out there. As Earl Palmer says, “God can’t steer a parked car!” God calls Jesus-Followers to go, to serve, to share God’s saving love with the least of these!