

# INDUSTRIOUS, LUCKY, OR BLESSED?

## PART I

### Ruth 2:1-13

*EVEN THOUGH THIS IS ALL LAID OUT FOR US CLEARLY,  
IT IS STILL HARD FOR US TO UNDERSTAND HOW GOD'S  
SOVEREIGNTY  
WORKS TOGETHER WITH OUR FREE WILL.*

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# **INDUSTRIOUS, LUCKY, OR BLESSED?**

## **RUTH 2:1-13**

Sometimes I think we get stuck in life by over-thinking things or over-theologizing things. Some people look at what others achieve and think to themselves, "That woman is really lucky." We get to that kind of conclusion by analyzing her qualities with mine. Since she has gotten more, the only conclusion I can come to is that she was luckier than me. She wasn't smarter than me, she didn't work harder than me, and she certainly isn't more competent than me. The only answer is luck. And I'm sure if we were honest with ourselves, we can see that we received many things in life simply because we happened to be in the right place at the right time. When I tell Luig that I feel extremely lucky, her response is, "Stupid people are always lucky." I'm not sure, but that may be true.

Many of us, including me, come from cultures that emphasize hard work. We were

taught from a very early age that if we work hard, study hard, and continue to apply ourselves to whatever we do, we will be successful. And for the most part, that holds true in the United States . Most of us have applied that principle to our lives and have enjoyed some measure of success.

And to round out the process, we feel obliged to throw God into the mix. When something goes well in our lives, we attribute it to being blessed. So everything that happens in life is a result of being cursed by God, being punished by God, or being rewarded by God.

This passage demonstrates the combination of three different forces at work. The problem comes in when you try and explain them or try to teach them to your children.

Since I come from a family that puts a lot of emphasis on hard work, we sat our children down one day to give them the "hard work" lecture. We said to them, "Why don't you get yourselves a job?"

They responded, "Why?"

"So you can earn some money," we said.

They continued to ask, "But why?"

"So you can put some money in a bank account and earn interest," we patiently answered.

"But why?" they pressed us.

"So that when you're old you can use the money in your bank account ... so you will never have to work again."

Their final answer was, "But we're not working now."

I'm sure if you are a parent, you have had or you will have these types of conversations.

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Let me just point this out before we get started. Since I have preached through Hebrew poetry before, I'm sure that you understand the concept of parallelism. A

great deal of the book of Ruth is written in poetry. Large sections and even small sections contained within the large sections are written in parallel poetry. If I were to address the poetic structure of the book it would take us at least four times longer to preach through this book. Even though I would like to do it, I am not going to do it because, knowing me, we would end up missing the big picture concepts here. But I would challenge you to get some commentaries out of our library and study the book on your own.

Theologians and Philosophers recognize that events in our world appear to be a result of God's powerful control, human freedom, and luck. Some will overemphasize God's power to the point they deny human freedom. Others will emphasize human freedom to the point that God doesn't even interact with human events. And then there are those who believe simply in random chance.

For me, this passage is interesting for this reason. It also becomes the main idea of this morning's text. **EVEN THOUGH THIS IS ALL LAID OUT FOR US CLEARLY, IT IS STILL HARD FOR US TO UNDERSTAND HOW GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY WORKS TOGETHER WITH OUR FREE WILL.** In other words, I think we can see God's hand in this, we can see all the characters in the story acting freely, and we can also see just plain dumb luck work itself into the story. Listen to what the Apostle Paul tells the members in the Ephesian Church , "8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:8-10/ NIV).

We are blessed because we are saved by grace through faith. God prepares us by giving us gifts, talents, abilities, and resources. Further, by providence or chance, we will find ourselves in places where God can use us. In fact, it almost seems that He has ordained we be in these places. We are then required to faithfully complete the good works He prepared for us in advance.

In the book of Ruth there are no prophets speaking the word of the LORD, there are no priests, no mysterious holy men or angels. It is a combination of God working behind the scenes, human beings acting freely, and a good dose of good luck. I am

going to show how all three of these seem to be working themselves out in each section.

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## I. OVERCOMING VICTIM THINKING

### *Continuing To Act As A Victim Denies All The Gifts And Provisions God Is Making For Us.*

Verses 1-3 teach us that overcoming victim thinking is necessary to find God's blessings. In other words **CONTINUING TO ACT AS A VICTIM DENIES ALL THE GIFTS AND PROVISIONS GOD IS MAKING FOR US**. I think that one of the most difficult and frustrating situations pastors, psychologists, doctors and teachers face is getting people to quit thinking of themselves as victims. When we face difficult situations in life, it seems that our natural instinct is a desire for people to feel sorry for us. We want to be babied, we want to be coddled, and we want to find excuses why we can't go on. I think that is our natural response, even though most of us would want to deny that. We find all sorts of excuses why we can't get back on track with what God wants for us. We have all sorts of excuses why we can't let go of the past. We have all sorts of excuses why we can't forgive. We have all sorts of excuses why we cannot move forward. It becomes extremely frustrating to get these people to move. Their response is always the same, "You just don't understand." The problem of remaining the victim is that it denies who God is and what He wants to do in our lives. People in pain almost always fail to identify their resources.

#### A. **BLESSED (1)**

And just like verse 1 points out, Naomi is blessed. The problem is that she is stuck in self-pity and she can't see through her pain. Look how God has already provided for her. We know from a couple of weeks ago that Naomi understands the Levirate marriage laws but doesn't seem to understand that her husband still had living relatives that could fulfill the role. But the author takes an aside in the narrative and lets us know that there is at least one resource for Naomi that she has not identified. God's providence is all over this. Naomi's husband had a relative. They were both from the same clan. And like Elimelech had been, his relative Boaz was also a man of standing.

We said that Elimelech was probably from nobility. First of all, his relative's name is Boaz, which means *strength*. Boaz is described as a "man of standing." The range of this word includes something like a prince, a knight, someone who has character, wealth and power. He is truly a nobleman in every sense of the word.

Most of the book of Ruth is written in dialogue, "He said, she said, etc." But here the author has introduced us to a nobleman who has received blessings from God, kindness from God, and grace from God. And as we will see later on in the story, he knows what to do with all these. God has placed a real potential blessing in the life of Naomi.

## **B. INDUSTRIOUS (2)**

Verse 2 reminds us that we are not simply to sit on our cans and wait for God's blessings; we are required to be industrious. Naomi is stuck in self-pity. In fact, she doesn't even want to be addressed as Naomi; she wants to be addressed as Bitter. For her, there is no hope and no future. Keep in mind; I said that it was part of human nature to wallow in self-pity. "Woe is me, life is hard, I don't think I can go on," are all phrases that too easily come to our mouths. Naomi easily falls into a victim attitude.

But not Ruth. Ruth refuses to become a victim. She too has lost everything, just like Naomi. And to add to it all, she left the comforts of her family, friends, and familiar surroundings, to journey with Naomi. Yet, she is the kind of person that survives. And let me say this as well; the kind of person who finds God's blessings. We will not find God's blessings while wallowing around in self-pity.

I know that I often feel handcuffed by my training as a pastor. I know that we are supposed to be compassionate and empathic, but sometimes the best gift we can give someone is to tell them to quit feeling sorry for themselves, to quit wallowing in self-pity, and to quit hanging around people who indulge and encourage that "feeling sorry for yourself" attitude. Sometimes the best gift someone can give us is to refuse to feed our self-pity and tell us to get up and get going.

Ruth has no desire and no time to get all caught up in self-pity. And the neat thing is that she doesn't indulge Naomi's self-pity either. Ruth recognizes an opportunity to take charge of their destinies. In the laws of Israel, during the harvest, owners and

workers were to leave the fruit and grain they drop accidentally on the ground. They were not to go back and pick it up. Further, they were to intentionally leave fruit and grain behind as well. This was to be for widows, orphans, and foreigners. Ruth was both a widow and a foreigner. She approaches Naomi and says, "If you will give me permission, I want to go and gather food for us with the rest of the widows, orphans, and foreigners. With your permission, I want to go work in the fields."

Here is a principle for all who are stuck in feeling sorry for themselves or stuck in some old patterns. If we wait around to feel like changing, it will never happen. We will never feel our way into changing our actions. We must act our way into new feelings. As we take steps in faith to acting the way God wants us to, our feelings will follow. We will never feel our way to new actions. We must act our way into new feelings. Victims wait for feelings. Overcomers take action.

Ruth is not living in a fantasy world. She knows this will be extremely difficult and perhaps dangerous. She is hoping to find someone in whose eyes she might find favor. That word for "favor" in Hebrew is the word for grace.

Let me take this opportunity to point out three words that seem to reappear throughout the book and are synonymous in some ways, and enrich one another in others. We have already talked about the word *hesed*. That word is translated as kindness or loving-kindness. The word used here is *hen*. It is translated as favor, but also means grace. And *baruk* will also be used. It means blessings or rewards. I think this concept plays itself out in the book of Ruth, and we must recognize the principle in our lives as well.

God is the primary giver of loving-kindness, grace, and blessings. He does not give us these to hoard. He gives us these so we can pass them on. God has given Boaz many graces and blessings. God has been kind to Boaz. God shows grace, kindness, and blessing to Ruth through Boaz. God shows grace, kindness and blessing to Naomi through Ruth. Loving-kindness, grace, and blessings are meant to be passed on. God gives these to us to pass on to others. God chooses to bless us through others. If you are the type of person who is not willing to ask others for something, and then you can never experience the fullness of God's loving-kindness, His grace, and His blessing. Some people are too proud and some people feel they don't want to impose on

others. It doesn't matter what the reason, if we are not open to receiving from others, then we can never experience the fullness of God's love, care, and blessing.

Naomi is stuck at home. Ruth is going out to look for grace.

### C. **LUCKY** (3)

Verse 3 reminds us that a healthy dose of good old-fashioned luck is involved as well. I think by the language, the author wants us to experience this from Ruth's perspective. Ruth went out, found a field, and started to work. Now she doesn't know this but again the author injects his knowledge into the story. Look at the second sentence in verse 3. "As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz." Feel the force of that sentence. Lo and Behold! As luck would have it, she accidentally ended up in Boaz' field. We already know that he is a relative. Ruth has no clue.

Add this fact to luck. In chapter 1 we learned that they arrived in Bethlehem just at the start of the barley harvest. The barley harvest starts right around Passover and goes for 7 weeks ending on the Feast of Pentecost. Ruth will be able to work for the entire 7-week period. Judging by what she gathered on the first day, she would be able to harvest enough food to feed her and Naomi for a whole year. They didn't arrive during the planting season. They didn't arrive towards the end of the harvest. They arrived just on time.

Think about this. Naomi decided to leave Moab and return home. Even though she tried to talk Ruth out of going with her, Ruth refused and freely decided to accompany her. It just so happened that they found themselves in Bethlehem at the right time. Ruth freely went out to work. She had no clue where she was, but "*budda bing budda boom*," she finds herself in a field that belongs to a relative. That is some kind of luck.

The author wants us to know that everyone is acting freely. The key is that God is blessing us. His desire is to show us loving-kindness, shower us with grace, and bless us in all sorts of ways. We must be diligent in pursuing His provisions. If we get all caught up in self-pity and allow others to indulge us in this; we will never identify all our resources. When we get all caught up thinking like a victim, Satan will continue to

keep us down. **CONTINUING TO ACT AS A VICTIM DENIES ALL THE GIFTS AND PROVISIONS GOD IS MAKING FOR US.**

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## **II. OVERCOMING SELF-PITY**

*Actively Engaging Life Demonstrates Our Faith In God.*

Secondly, if we want to overcome the disappointments in life, we must overcome self-pity. We talked about this in the last section because self-pity is the attitude we develop when we feel and act like a victim. **ACTIVELY ENGAGING LIFE DEMONSTRATES OUR FAITH IN GOD.** Somehow, we have come to equate faith with belief. In other words, when we say we have faith in Jesus, we mean that we believe in Jesus. Naomi believed in God, yet she stayed home and felt sorry for herself. Ruth had faith in God. She went out and sought God's blessings. I have said this before, but let me say it again. My definition for faith is "action that is based on a belief." Many people believe in Jesus. In fact most people believe in Jesus. But it only becomes faith when I act on that belief. In other words, if I believe Jesus tells me to be sexually pure, I can only be said to have faith when I act sexually pure. Our actions demonstrate what we have faith in. Ruth is not sitting at home feeling sorry for herself. There are all sorts of blessings out there. She is going to find them.

### **A. BLESSED (4)**

In verse 4 we run into someone who is blessed and enjoys passing the blessings on. I think that we can see that Boaz is not just a man who believes in God, he has faith in God. We will see from the rest of the book of Ruth that this is the case. Boaz comes to the field to visit his workers. He greets them with a familiar phrase to all of us; "The LORD be with you!" I sometimes think we read over these phrases too quickly. First of all, look at the punctuation. The sentence ends in an exclamation point. Boaz has a genuine interest in his employees. Secondly, the LORD is in all capital letters. Boaz is blessing them in the Name of Jehovah. This is not some generic god. This is the personal God of Israel. Boaz greets them with love; "May Jehovah be with you."

His workers must like him as well. They respond in kind. They ask God to bless him. It seems as if the workers recognize that as God blesses Boaz, he in turn blesses them.

They seem to identify Boaz as a conduit for God's blessings.

I would like us to remember that we are conduits of God's blessings. We must continually assess the loving-kindness God is bestowing on us, the grace He is showering on us, and the blessings He sends our way, and figure out how to pass them on.

## **B. LUCKY (5)**

Next, verse 5 seems to point to some more good luck. Remember, Ruth just happened to be working in Boaz' field. She has no clue as to who he is. Look at the first phrase in verse 4. It just so happened that Boaz arrived from Bethlehem on that particular day. And in verse 5, it just so happens that Boaz notices a new woman in the field. I know we religious people don't like to talk about luck, but I can't help but think that every person has made a free choice. Ruth chose this field to work in. Boaz just so happened to go out to the field that day. They are there freely. God has been doing His thing all along as well. However it happened, Ruth and Boaz are there. I understand that Boaz freely was there. I understand that Ruth is freely there. I understand that God has provided Boaz with all sorts of resources and that God is there. However, I don't have a clue as to how all this has been orchestrated.

## **C. INDUSTRIOUS (6-7)**

And let's also keep this in mind. As verses 6-7 demonstrate, none of this would have happened had Ruth not been so industrious. In other words, if she had been infected by Naomi's self-pity and victim attitudes, she would not have been in a place to receive God's blessing. The foreman gives a description of Ruth's day. She is the foreigner who came back from Moab with her mother-in-law Naomi. She is a Moabite. She asked for permission to work here, and I said it was O.K. She didn't dilly-dally a bit. She has been working steady except for a short bathroom break. She is a working machine.

The point is this. She wasn't there trying to impress anyone. She was working for herself and her mother-in-law. She wasn't trying to be noticed. Jesus tells us that when we go to work, we are not supposed to be trying to impress anyone. We are working for Him. We are not called to schmooze our way to the top. We are not to

be playing politics. We are to be kind, diligent, and quiet. Here again is where all three forces work together. Ruth was industrious. God caused her to find grace in the foreman's eye and it was luck that Boaz was there and inquired about her.

Instead of trying to figure everything out in life, perhaps we should just have faith in God, work hard, continually try to please God alone, and let the chips fall where they may. But the point is this. No matter how much God wants to bless us, and no matter how much luck is out there, we must get out there and live in faith. **ACTIVELY ENGAGING LIFE DEMONSTRATES OUR FAITH IN GOD.**

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### **III. OVERCOMING PRIDE**

*People Who Really Understand Grace Never Cease To Be Amazed At The Abundance Of God's Grace.*

We have seen that in order to enjoy life to the full we must overcome victim thinking and we must overcome self-pity. Those are hard to overcome. However, as we have seen before time and time again, verses 8-13 illustrate that overcoming pride is crucial if we are to enjoy God's blessings, grace, and love. In other words, **PEOPLE WHO REALLY UNDERSTAND GRACE NEVER CEASE TO BE AMAZED AT THE ABUNDANCE OF GOD'S GRACE.** I have found that the more we mix Christianity with our Western lifestyle concepts, the more perverted our theology becomes. We have come to think that if we read our Bibles every day, if we pray, if we give 10% of our money to church, if we come to church every week and do a lot of good things like visit the sick, give money to the poor, and on top of it all, live good pure and holy lives, then God should bless us with good health, money, and prosperity. In other words, the more "religious" we are, the more we expect from God.

However, it seems to me that the people who are truly getting closer to God never stop being amazed that God would continue to bless them in spite of how sinful they are.

#### **A. LUCKY (8-9)**

Again, in verses 8-9 it appears to be Ruth's lucky day. The foreman calls her over and Boaz addresses her. Now watch this very carefully. Ruth continues to refer to herself as a foreigner and a servant; two designations that demonstrate a lowly status in life. Both Naomi and now Boaz, refer to her as, "My daughter." Picture this. In the morning, Ruth wanders into this particular field, asks permission to work, and starts working. Out of the blue, the owner of the field calls her over to talk to her. He then tells her to stay in his field. He will make sure that she is safe. He has given the men orders not to harass her in any way. He has informed her to stay with his girls. And she has been given permission to drink water designated for his workers.

If you were to go back and read the harvest regulations, we could easily see how over and over again Boaz goes way beyond the required kindness, grace, and blessing the law commands.

We will talk about Ruth's response later but suffice it to say that she is surprised by his kindness and generosity.

## **B. INDUSTRIOUS (11-12)**

But in verses 11-12, we should not be surprised to see that Ruth's kindness, grace, and industrious nature has been noted by many people. Word had spread all throughout Bethlehem what Ruth did for her mother-in-law. Ruth left her own family, friends, and country to come and care for her mother-in-law. She may be a foreigner. She may be broke and destitute. But she is a noblewoman. She is humble. She recognizes that Boaz is a powerful nobleman. However, as Boaz looks into her eyes, he sees a noblewoman. Even though they are worlds apart from a monetary and social perspective, they are equals on a spiritual plane. Here are two giants meeting. The world may not recognize that, but certainly we know that money and power do not noblepersons make.

Look at this recognition verbalized by Boaz in verse 12. He says, "May Jehovah repay you ... and may you be richly rewarded by Jehovah, the God of Israel." Here we run into another famous Hebrew word, *shalom*. Different forms of this word are used to describe rewards from God. Of course we recognize this word as the word used for peace. This kind of peace comes from God and does not simply mean the

absence of conflict or trouble. God's peace transcends all circumstances. God's incredible peace, grace, and love are all over Ruth. God has taken Ruth under His wing and is ready to take her on a ride beyond her wildest imagination. We don't have to do anything to impress anyone. God knows exactly where we are and He knows exactly what He is doing.

### C. **BLESSED (10 & 13)**

But here is the key. Let's look at verses 10 and 13. They contain Ruth's response and her attitude. She could easily have noticed that she was working harder than everyone else. She could have realized that she was doing a noble thing by caring for her mother-in-law. And when Boaz approached her, she could have felt, "It's about time God and all you people finally took notice of me." Instead, look at her response in verse 10. She falls face down to the ground and says, "Why have I found grace in your eyes?" In other words, she is acknowledging that she has no status and no rights in this field, in this city, or in this country. She is a foreigner and she has been granted the privilege to gather food. She is astonished that someone would first of all give her the privilege to gather up some food, and then she is further astonished that the owner of the field would grace her by even talking to her.

This is exactly the attitude we are to have in life and to have in our relationship with God. I'm always a little concerned when I see these emotional preachers get up there and demand things from God. I like to call them "the name it and claim it" preachers. Listen, we should never stop being amazed that God continue to shower His love, grace, blessings, and peace on us. We do not deserve any of them. It doesn't matter how good, or how hard working, or how religious we are. We are never entitled to one of God's blessings.

Look at Ruth's further response in verse 13. It is humility upon humility. She says, "May I continue to find grace in your eyes," and then she addresses him as, "my master." That word for *master* is *lord* with a small "l." The Hebrews distinguished *lord* with a small "l" from *Lord* referring to God by making it plural. In Hebrew both words have the same root word. Think about the humility here. She says that Boaz has demonstrated grace towards her. He has comforted her and spoken to her heart. He has given all this to her even though she is simply a foreign servant girl.

Please think about this verse. She has really found favor in the eyes of the Lord (with a capital "L"), who is by the way Boaz' Lord as well. God has given grace, comfort and peace to Ruth through Boaz. In reality, they are both servants of God.

I think there are two lessons in humility here; one for the giver and one for the receiver. For the giver, we must remember that all we have and all we are, come as a direct result of God's grace, love, and blessings. In reality we are simply a servant. We are to become conduits of God's blessings. When we help someone in any way, we must remember that whatever we are giving them is from God, not from us. If we feel in any way that we are higher or better in any way, then we are too proud to be used as God's partner.

As givers, we must continually assess all that we have and all that we are and ask how does God want to bless others through me?

As receivers, we must realize that all we have and all that we are comes from God. Does that sound familiar? It is just like the giver. We too are servants as well. We must be humble enough to allow God to give us grace, blessings, and love through other people. That is the way God designed life. If you are too proud to receive anything, then you can never really experience the love of God.

If we will be humble enough to be used by God to bless others, and if we are humble enough to receive God's blessings through others, we will be amazed at how much grace God has for us. **PEOPLE WHO REALLY UNDERSTAND GRACE NEVER CEASE TO BE AMAZED AT THE ABUNDANCE OF GOD'S GRACE.**

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## IV. EPILOGUE

After reading this, studying it, and preaching it, I have to say that I recognize that God works out His will in all of human history. I recognize that all of us have free will and we act out our lives according to what we believe. And I recognize that there is such a thing as luck. However, I still do not have a clue how to explain it. I have to admit, **EVEN THOUGH THIS IS ALL LAID OUT FOR US CLEARLY, IT IS STILL**

## **HARD FOR US TO UNDERSTAND HOW GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY WORKS TOGETHER WITH OUR FREE WILL.**

There are a lot of things I don't understand in this passage. However, there are a lot of things that are clear to me. First of all, if we are God's children then we must get rid of victim thinking because our God is in control. When we think of ourselves as victims, we cannot identify all the resources and blessings that God is providing for us. Secondly, we have to let go of self-pity. We must actively engage life in order to demonstrate our faith in God. And finally, we must be humble enough to both give and receive.

Look, I know how hard it is to overcome pride, a victim mentality and self-pity. But we must overcome it all and give it our best shot. I would rather die a free man in the wilderness rather than live any kind of life under the slavery of Egypt .

Teddy Roosevelt has stated what I feel about moving towards God's blessings. He said,

*"The person who succeeds is not the one who holds back, fearing failure, nor the one who never fails ... but rather the one who moves on in spite of failure. Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows no victory or defeat."*

I never want to find myself making excuses not to move forward. I never want to let Satan stop me from experiencing the fullness of life because I get caught up in self-pity, fear, or thinking of myself as a victim. We are children of God. There is nothing He cannot do. Let us leave pride and hurt behind. There is a glorious life waiting for us to live. There are many good works, that God has prepared for us in advance, to do out there just waiting for us to accomplish. Let us get up and go.

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