

Surprised by Grace

[Introduction]

Our trip to Scotland unforgettable. For all the right reasons. But the 11-hour flight home from London to Seattle could have been unforgettable for all the wrong reasons. I had a first-class seat and Stacy had economy. So, I decided to ask if the airline would downgrade me from first-class to economy. But I wasn't sure what I'd find. Would the ticket-agent allow a swap? Were there even seats available? So, when the ticket agent replied, "OK, you're all set, two seats in first-class" – you can imagine our surprise. Wait. What? We didn't expect to find Stacy upgraded. And for free. But it was sweet. Upper deck of a 747. Sleep-pods right next to each other. Hot face towels. It was a surprising and amazing experience.

At the end of Ruth chapter 1, Naomi and Ruth return to the promised land at the beginning of barley harvest. That's the good news. But for both these women, life's been hard. Both have buried husbands. Naomi has also buried two sons. They've just left a famine in Moab. These are desperate and destitute women. In their culture, to be without a man was to be without protection or provision. So, they return to the promised land in hopes of finding their next meal.

It's a picture of returning to God. For Naomi, it's a return to Yahweh after a season of wandering. For Ruth, a new convert, it's a costly act of faith. She turns from country, family, and better prospects for marriage, to Yahweh and his people. And the question for both Ruth and Naomi in chapter 2 is: what will they find when they return? It's an important question for them. It's an important question for us. Whether you're a follower of Jesus who is wandering or a new convert, what will you find when you turn to God and his Son, Jesus? Like our surprising upgrade to first-class, Ruth chapter 2 tells us that **when we turn to God, we find surprising grace!** It's a story in four acts. In the first act, we learn that **Ruth hopes to find grace.**

Surprised by Grace

1. Ruth hopes to find grace (v. 1-2)

Everything about Ruth chapter 2 speaks to surprise. And the chapter itself opens with a surprise. We expect to hear about Ruth and Naomi but instead we're introduced to a guy. We learn three things about him.

Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. (Ruth 2:1)

First, we learn he's a 'relative'. He's 'of the clan of Elimelech'. Elimelech was Naomi's husband. There's a relational connection with Naomi. Second, we learn he's a 'worthy man'. It means that he's prominent, rich, a man of status, and a man of high character. He's kind of a big deal. Third, we learn his name: 'Boaz'.

Having introduced Boaz, we rejoin Ruth and Naomi. And the thing to notice in verse 2 is that **Ruth hopes to find grace.**

And Ruth the Moabite [just in case we forgot she's from Moab] said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." (Ruth 2:2)

Ruth says, "let me go to the field and glean...after him in whose sight I shall find favor. She's going to go out to a field. Any field. And she hopes she'll find a field where the owner will look on her with 'favor'. This word can also be translated 'grace'. It means 'to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior.' Think of grace as 'undeserved kindness.' And remember that Ruth is from Moab. Moab and Israel have 'history.' Bad blood. Kind of like Seahawks and 49er fans, but worse.

Surprised by Grace

And Ruth goes to a field to 'glean.' Remember, Ruth and Naomi are starving. Not like we say, "I'm starving" as we look into a fully stocked fridge. They literally don't know where their next meal is coming from. So, Ruth needs to glean. To glean was to pick up ears of grain that harvesters dropped or left standing. In Leviticus (19:9,10; 23:22) and Deuteronomy (24:19) God instructs his people to leave the edges of a field unharvested and to not pick up whatever is dropped by the harvesters. This way the poor, and foreigners passing through, will have something to eat. God creates gracious rules for his people so that his kindness is demonstrated to those in need. So, **Ruth – a foreigner – hopes to find grace** so that she and Naomi can eat.

Ruth steps out in faith. Big time. She trusts that Israel actually follows God's gracious rules. Which, in the period of the Judges, isn't a sure thing. And being from Moab doesn't help. Ruth doesn't know what she's going to find. But **she hopes to find grace**. And Naomi says, "Go, my daughter."

But how does she know where to find grace? She doesn't. But we learn that Ruth is guided by Someone who does. Which brings us to the second act of the story, **Ruth's guide to grace**.

2. Ruth's guide to grace (v. 3-7)

Having Naomi's blessing, Ruth heads out to a large area of farmland outside of town. Maybe something like Peone Prarie. Except the fields aren't divided by fences but by boundary stones. So, which field? Ruth does what any of us would do. "Eeny-meeny-miny-moe to which field should I go?" Look at verse 3.

So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech. (Ruth 2:3)

Surprised by Grace

Ruth's guide to grace leads her to Boaz's field. Notice the phrase, "she happened to come." The Hebrew literally says, "her chance chanced upon." In English we might say, "As luck would have it." Chance. Luck. Those aren't words we expect from Scripture. The author uses this phrase to highlight that even the 'accidental' is directed by God.

Theologians call this God's providence. Providence means that God guides and cares for everything in his creation. God's providence is invisible and often mysterious. And so, even though Ruth isn't aware of it, she is being **guided to grace**.

That great *Talking Heads* song, *Once in a Lifetime*, poses a similar theological question.

And you may find yourself living in a shotgun shack
And you may find yourself in another part of the world
And you may find yourself behind the wheel of a large automobile
And you may find yourself in a beautiful house, with a beautiful wife
And you may ask yourself, "Well...how did I get here?"

How did you get here?

Unbelief answers, "coincidence." Coincidence says all is random, accident, luck.

Faith answers, "providence." Providence says all is guided and cared for by the living God.

Surprised by Grace

That doesn't mean we always feel providence, or understand providence, or even like providence. But Scripture is very clear. God guides and God cares. If you are in your teens or twenties, I hope this is especially encouraging for you. It means you don't have to be paralyzed by fear. You don't have to figure everything out. Work hard. Plan. Get input. Try to be wise. But you can make decisions trusting that God guides and God cares. You are not alone. I'm not saying trusting God this way is easy. But let this text in Ruth remind you of what is true! We all need to fight for faith in God's guidance and care. Ruth's experience with providence includes the loss of her husband. But God presently **guides her to grace.**

To Boaz's field. Where she meets Boaz's foreman. He graciously agrees to let Ruth glean. And she goes after it. The foreman's impressed with her work ethic.

And it just so happens that Boaz comes to the field while Ruth is there.

And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered, "The LORD bless you." (Ruth 2:4)

This exchange suggests that, even in the time of Judges, there were some who were walking with Yahweh. This is a man – and a community – of faith. Therefore, a man and community of grace.

And it just so happens that Ruth is alone taking a break under a shelter so that Boaz would take notice.

Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" (Ruth 2:5)

Surprised by Grace

This might sound like a sexist question. But recall that in this culture, without a man a woman was in deep trouble. Men protected and provided for the women in their family. As one author put it, “Boaz is basically asking, ‘who’s looking out for her’? Which father or husband or brother’? It’s actually a very kind question.” So, who’s looking out for Ruth? No one. Yet. But God guides her to a man who will.

Ruth needs grace. She hopes to find grace. And she’s guided to grace. But nothing could have prepared her for a **surprising experience of grace**. That brings us to the third act of the story, **Ruth’s surprising experience of grace**. Look at verse 8.

3. Ruth’s surprising experience of grace (v. 8-17)

Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn.” (Ruth 2:8-9)

Boaz calls Ruth “my daughter.” Ruth – a foreign woman, a nobody – is called “daughter.” She is noticed, welcomed, given protection and provision! It’s a demonstration of such surprising grace that it should move us. It certainly moves Ruth.

Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favor [there’s that word again] in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?” (Ruth 2:10)

Surprised by Grace

But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" (Ruth 2:11-12)

Boaz knows the story. He knows Ruth's love for Naomi. He knows that Ruth could have looked for security in Moab. She had family, familiarity, and better prospects for marriage. But instead, Ruth turns to Yahweh and his people for refuge. A refuge is a place of safety, security, protection, and provision. So, Boaz prays that Yahweh will be faithful to respond to Ruth's trust in him. And already through Boaz, God is answering that prayer.

Daisy is our not so gold goldendoodle. When I come home, or see her in the morning, she goes between my legs and stops halfway through. She just stands there under my legs. I think for Daisy, standing between my legs is her refuge. A place of safety and security.

Whether you realize it or not, you have things you look to for refuge. So do I. It's where you go for safety, security, protection and provision. We tend to look for refuge in things like money, politics, work, achievements, talents and abilities, porn, alcohol, drugs, shopping, and romance. Among other things. At best, these fail us. At worst, these enslave us. All these are gods who are deaf, dumb, and blind. Only the triune God is a true refuge because of what he is like! He's the living God who guides and cares. He welcomes, includes, forgives, and loves to show kindness to those who turn to him. Because that's what he's like! That's what God is like when we turn to him!

Surprised by Grace

Ruth turns to God for refuge and **finds a surprising experience of grace**. So, she says,

I have found favor [there's that word again] in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants. (Ruth 2:13)

And God, through Boaz piles on the grace! Ruth is welcomed to the dinner table and given a to-go box for her leftovers. Boaz instructs his workers to drop grain for her and to be kind to her.

So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. (Ruth 2:17)

Boaz piles on the grace because that's what God is like! Ruth came to the field empty, hungry, and hoping to find grace. She leaves with a huge bag of barley – something like a large, 35 lb. bag of dog food - and leftovers.

For Ruth, it's been a day of surprising grace. She hoped to find a little grace. She was guided to a man of grace. And she was surprised by her experience of grace. But there's one more surprise. It's the final act of chapter 2. **Ruth's surprise that grace came from a redeemer**. Verse 18.

4. Ruth's surprise that grace came from a redeemer (v. 18-23)

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. 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." (Ruth 2:18-19a)

Surprised by Grace

You can hear Naomi's surprise! What in the world? Where did you glean today?! Who's the guy that did this?!

So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, "The man's name with whom I worked today is [... is... is...] Boaz." (Ruth 2:19b)

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." (Ruth 2:20)

Naomi blesses, confesses, and reveals.

First, Naomi blesses Boaz in the name of Yahweh.

Second, Naomi confesses that God had not stopped caring for her. She *felt* abandoned. But now realizes that Yahweh was still caring for her and Ruth (the living). And Yahweh was even caring for her dead husband and sons. (We'll see how later in Ruth.)

Third, Naomi reveals to Ruth the **surprising fact that grace came from a redeemer**. As one commentator put it, "What do you find when you 'return' to the land of covenant promise? You find a redeemer!"

We knew that Boaz was related to Naomi (v. 1). Now, we discover that Boaz is a redeemer. Here's how one author explains the redeemer relationship.

Surprised by Grace

Boaz is one of a number of men who have a recognized covenant obligation to look after Elimilech's family. We meet this kind of obligation in God's law, in Leviticus 25:25-28, Numbers 35:6-28, and Deuteronomy 19:4-13. In each case, in different circumstances, the guardian-redeemer has an obligation to stand up for the justice of the dead or wronged person.
(Ash)

Wow! Boaz. One of our redeemers! **Ruth is surprised to learn that grace came from a redeemer.** And grace comes from this redeemer to Naomi as well.

It marks a turning point for Naomi. If this were a Rocky movie, it's the moment the theme song starts, and Rocky begins to train like a madman. Naomi went to Moab full and came back empty. Empty isn't strong enough. Desperate and destitute is more like it. So, when Ruth comes home with a huge sack of barley and leftovers from a redeemer, Naomi is surprised, astonished, and amazed. God's grace has brought them from death to life. From despair to hope.

And here's the thing. The Bible says that as desperate and destitute as Ruth and Naomi are physically, that's each of us spiritually. Before God we have nothing to offer him. There's no one who is righteous. There's no one who is, or does, good. Not even one. Like these women, our only hope is to turn to God and find grace.

At this point, Ruth says, "But wait there's more..." Boaz even said to me to stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain. Boaz's grace isn't just a one-time deal. He offers grace that lasts through the end of the harvest.

Surprised by Grace

Naomi and Ruth return to God. And what do they find? They find **grace that comes through a redeemer**. They find a worthy man, who is a relative, a redeemer who provides and protects.

This Old Covenant picture of a redeemer finds its New Covenant fulfillment in Jesus, **THE Redeemer**. Jesus is the eternal God who became man. So, he is our relative. The relative of every human. And he is a worthy man. The only truly worthy man. Because he alone is without sin. So, what do we find when we turn to God and his Son Jesus? We find grace that comes through **THE Redeemer**. Jesus laid down his life for us on a Roman cross. He did this so that those who turn to him experience the grace of forgiveness, justification, adoption, the Holy Spirit, and his promise to care for us. It's grace that is piled on us day after day because that's what God is like. But for those refuse to turn to Jesus, God is a consuming fire and judge. For those who reject Jesus there is no grace only justice and wrath.

Maybe you've turned to Jesus but it doesn't *feel* like Jesus cares for you. Maybe your life has been really hard; is really hard; looks like it will be really hard.

Here's where the last sentence of Ruth chapter 2 can help us. Look at what it says, "**And she lived with her mother-in-law.**" It means this is not the end of story. Listen, I love my mother-in-law, but I don't want to live with her. That's not my idea of a happy ending. There's more to the story with Ruth. And there's more to the story with you and me.

Surprised by Grace

Ruth and Naomi enjoyed the beginnings of God's kindness through Boaz's food and gleanings during harvest. When we turn to Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit as the beginning of God's grace. But Jesus, through his life, death, and resurrection has secured for us present *and* future grace. His resurrection guarantees it!

Jesus never promised you or me, "our best life now." None of us gets "our best life now." That's not to deny that some suffer more than others. But we all experience suffering, loss, and death in this world. And God promises to give the grace we need. But here's the thing. We tend to view our lives *only* in terms of this world. And if we have hope for this world only, we are most to be pitied. The good news is that Jesus' resurrection guarantees your resurrection and mine. Like the ending of *Beauty and the Beast*, there will come a day when the curse is undone, death is reversed, and we'll be transformed. And we we'll say to each other: "Look at us!" Our best life is coming. And then we'll continue to be surprised and amazed by grace! Because that's what God is like!

Just like there's more to the story with Naomi and Ruth, there's more to the story of your life. Much more. When we turn to Jesus now, we experience the beginnings of grace. And we'll continue to experience his grace – forever.

What did Ruth and Naomi find when they turned to God? They found surprising grace that came through a redeemer. And what do we find? We find surprising grace that comes through THE Redeemer.