

Homiletics Analysis: Ruth 2

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Ruth 2 is a carefully constructed narrative of providence unfolding in the ordinary. Ruth, the Moabite widow, requests permission from Naomi to glean in the fields during the barley harvest — an act permitted under Mosaic law for the poor and the foreigner (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19). She “happens” to arrive in the field belonging to Boaz, a wealthy and prominent man of the clan of Elimelech — and therefore a kinsman-redeemer candidate. The narrator’s language (“her hap was to light on the portion of the field belonging to Boaz,” v. 3 KJV) is deliberately ironic: what appears to be random is, in fact, divinely arranged. Boaz arrives, notices Ruth, inquires about her identity, and extends to her extraordinary and unsolicited grace: protection from the young men, permission to drink from the water jars, permission to glean among the sheaves themselves (not merely at the edges), and the instruction to his workers to deliberately leave extra grain for her. Ruth responds with deep humility — “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?” (v. 10) — and Boaz answers by rehearsing her reputation: her loyalty (*hesed*) to Naomi, her courageous departure from her homeland, her trust in the LORD God of Israel. He blesses her in the name of the LORD under whose wings she has taken refuge. Ruth returns to Naomi with an astonishing abundance — roughly an ephah of barley — and reports her day. Naomi’s response is immediate and theologically significant: “Blessed be he by the LORD, whose kindness (*hesed*) has not forsaken the living or the dead!” The day of gleaning has become a day of revelation. Naomi, who arrived in Bethlehem saying “call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me” (1:20), now speaks of the LORD’s *hesed* as unbroken. The chapter closes with Boaz identified as a *goel* — a kinsman-redeemer — and Ruth continuing to glean through both barley and wheat harvests, remaining close to the women of Boaz’s household.

This Text — Intent

God is working through Ruth 2 to demonstrate that His *hesed* — His covenant loyalty and lovingkindness — has not been suspended by Naomi’s loss, Israel’s unfaithfulness, or Ruth’s foreignness. The chapter is designed to reawaken trust in a God who works behind the ordinary surface of daily life to accomplish redemption. The reader is meant to see that what looks like chance is providence, what looks like ordinary human kindness reflects divine character, and that God’s covenant faithfulness extends even to those who come from outside the covenant community by faith. The intent is not merely to advance a narrative plot but to reshape the reader’s perception of how God works: not in spectacular interventions alone, but through the quiet convergence of a gleaning field, an arriving landowner, and words of grace spoken over a foreign widow.

Subject Sentence: The LORD's unseen hand guides a Moabite widow into the field of her kinsman-redeemer.

Primary Claim: God's *hesed* is never absent — it is present and active even when invisible, working through the ordinary to accomplish extraordinary redemption, and calling His people to reflect that same covenant loyalty toward the vulnerable.

Interpretive Evaluation

The meaning of “her hap was to light on” (v. 3)

The narrator's choice of language is deliberate and theologically loaded. The Hebrew (*miqreh*, “chance” or “happening”) is the same word used in Ecclesiastes for the seemingly random events of life under the sun. Some interpreters read this as a straightforward narrative device — mere scene-setting without theological freight. Others (particularly those with a deistic or open-theist reading) see the text as affirming genuine randomness within a generally providential universe: Ruth just happened to end up in Boaz's field, and God worked with that. The Reformed reading rejects both thin readings. The deliberate irony of the narrator's language is precisely the point: the text uses the language of chance in order to expose its impossibility. This is not randomness that God later redeems; it is orchestrated convergence narrated in the idiom of human perception. Naomi herself will make this theological point explicit when she recognizes Boaz as kinsman-redeemer — “The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers” (v. 20) — and immediately ties his presence to the LORD's unbroken *hesed*. The Dispensational tendency to read Ruth primarily as a type-system (Boaz as a type of Christ, Ruth as the Gentile church) captures a genuine canonical resonance but risks flattening the narrative's own claim about providence by rushing past the story to the symbol. The narrative deserves to be heard as narrative — making its own claim about how God works — before its typological dimensions are developed.

Boaz's kindness and the nature of *hesed*

A Wesleyan/Arminian reading sometimes emphasizes Boaz's kindness as the primary theological content — an example of generous, Christ-like care for the vulnerable, with Boaz functioning as a moral exemplar. This reading is not wrong but is incomplete. Boaz himself refuses to let his kindness be the ultimate reference point: he explicitly grounds it in Ruth's own *hesed* toward Naomi (v. 11) and in the LORD's *hesed* as the source and origin of all covenant kindness (v. 12, 20). The Reformed reading insists that the human *hesed* in the chapter (Boaz's toward Ruth, Ruth's toward Naomi) is intelligible only as a reflection of and response to divine *hesed*. The moral application is real but secondary: the theological claim comes first. Reducing the chapter to “be kind like Boaz” is precisely the

Clowney anti-moralism warning — it imports an imperative without grounding it in the indicative of God’s own prior lovingkindness.

Ruth’s identity as a foreigner

Some interpreters have read the chapter primarily through the lens of ethnic inclusion — a text about welcoming the outsider, breaking down social barriers, and models of racial reconciliation. This is an application the text will support but cannot be its primary claim, since the text’s own theological vocabulary (*hesed*, *goel*, refuge under YHWH’s wings) situates Ruth’s foreignness within a covenant framework: she has not merely crossed an ethnic boundary but has taken refuge under the wings of the LORD (v. 12), language drawn directly from the psalms’ imagery of covenant protection (Psalm 91:4). Her inclusion is not a social achievement but a theological event — a Gentile entering the covenant community through faith. The Reformed reading preserves this distinction and refuses to let the social dimension of Ruth’s inclusion displace the theological claim that drives it.

Verdict: The Reformed reading — that the chapter is a sustained meditation on divine *hesed* operating through ordinary providence, seen in the convergence of the gleaning law, Ruth’s faithfulness, Boaz’s covenantal generosity, and Naomi’s restored recognition of God’s unbroken loyalty — best accounts for the text’s own theological vocabulary, narrative structure, and placement within the larger Ruth narrative.

Key Canonical Support

- **Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-21** — The gleaning laws provide the structural framework for the chapter’s action; Boaz’s generosity operates *within* and *beyond* Mosaic provision, making his *hesed* simultaneously law-keeping and grace-exceeding.
- **Psalms 91:1-4** — “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High...He will cover you with his pinions; under his wings you will find refuge.” Boaz’s blessing over Ruth (v. 12, “under whose wings you have come to take refuge”) draws directly from this covenant imagery, identifying YHWH as Ruth’s true shelter.
- **Psalms 107:1-9** — “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love (*hesed*) endures forever...He led them by a straight way until they reached a city to dwell in.” The theme of divine *hesed* reorienting the displaced and hungry toward abundance directly parallels Ruth’s journey from Moab to the fields of Bethlehem.
- **Ephesians 2:11-13** — “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Ruth’s inclusion as a foreigner within the covenant assembly is a type of Gentile inclusion in Christ — the mechanism changes (gleaning field → cross) but the movement is the same: those outside brought inside by grace, not merit.

- **Matthew 1:5** — Boaz and Ruth appear in the genealogy of Jesus, establishing that the *hesed* enacted in this field directly produces the Redeemer toward whom all the chapter's typology points.

Aim: To show that God's covenant faithfulness is never suspended — that He is always working through the ordinary fabric of daily life toward redemption — and to expose both the temptation to read our circumstances as divine abandonment and the call to become agents of *hesed* toward those around us.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1	Narrator introduces Boaz: a man of standing, from the clan of Elimelech	Boaz is introduced before Ruth encounters him — the reader knows what Ruth does not; dramatic irony established
2	Ruth requests permission from Naomi to go glean in the fields; Naomi consents	Ruth's initiative; she does not wait passively; "after him in whose sight I shall find favor" — she expects grace, not entitlement
3	Ruth goes and gleans; "her hap was to light on the portion of the field belonging to Boaz"	Key theological irony: <i>miqreh</i> language (chance/happening) used deliberately; what appears random is providentially arranged
4	Boaz arrives from Bethlehem; exchanges covenant greeting with his workers: "The LORD be with you" / "The LORD bless you"	The workplace itself is framed in covenant language; Boaz's arrival is narrated as a significant moment
5-7	Boaz notices Ruth; asks his foreman about her; foreman describes her identity, her request, and her diligent work since morning	Ruth is identified as "the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab"; her foreignness is not hidden
8-9	Boaz speaks directly to Ruth: stay in my field, stay	Boaz's first words are protective and generous —

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	close to my young women, drink from what the young men have drawn	beyond legal requirement; he gives her access to provisions, not merely permission to glean
10	Ruth bows in gratitude and asks why she has found favor, since she is a foreigner	Her humility is genuine; she offers no claim on his generosity; the question itself sets up Boaz's theological answer
11-12	Boaz rehearses her reputation: her <i>hesed</i> toward Naomi, her departure from her homeland, her trust in the LORD; blesses her under whose wings she has taken refuge	The theological heart of the chapter; Boaz grounds his kindness in her prior faithfulness and in YHWH's covenant protection; "wings" = covenant shelter imagery (Psalm 91)
13	Ruth responds with further humility: "I am not one of your servant girls"	She does not overreach; her gratitude does not become presumption
14	At mealtime Boaz invites her to eat with the workers, passes her roasted grain; she eats until satisfied and has some left over	A foretaste of abundant provision; she is treated as an insider, not an outsider laborer
15-16	Boaz instructs his workers to leave extra grain deliberately and not to rebuke her	He exceeds legal requirement; his grace is active and instructed, not passive
17	Ruth gleans until evening and threshes approximately an ephah of barley	The abundance is measurable; roughly 30-50 lbs of grain — far beyond a day's normal gleaning
18-19	Ruth returns to Naomi; Naomi asks where she gleaned; Ruth shows her the grain and the leftover meal	The abundance itself becomes the opening for the revelation of whose field it was
20	Naomi blesses Boaz: "Blessed be he by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the	Naomi's theological transformation: from "the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me" (1:20) to

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	dead!” — and identifies him as a <i>goel</i>	recognizing the LORD’s unbroken <i>hesed</i> ; <i>goel</i> (kinsman-redeemer) introduced
21-22	Ruth reports Boaz’s instruction to remain with his workers; Naomi affirms this as good and protective	Naomi is now actively engaged in Ruth’s future; the hopelessness of chapter 1 is lifting
23	Ruth gleanes with Boaz’s women through barley and wheat harvests and lives with Naomi	Summary verse; the arrangement established in this chapter sustains them through both harvests; the stage is set for chapter 3

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1-3	The Setup: A Widow Gleans by “Chance” in the Right Field
2	4-13	The Encounter: Grace Extended and Received
3	14-17	The Abundance: Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Provision
4	18-23	The Return: <i>Hesed</i> Recognized, the <i>Goel</i> Named

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The LORD’s unseen hand guides a Moabite widow into the field of her kinsman-redeemer.

Primary Claim: God’s *hesed* is never absent — it is present and active even when invisible, working through the ordinary to accomplish extraordinary redemption, and calling His people to reflect that same covenant loyalty toward the vulnerable.

Applications (Five)

1. Reframe your “ordinary day” as the arena of God’s active providence. (*Mind/belief*) Ruth’s greatest day of provision began as an unremarkable request to go gleanings. Nothing announced itself as significant. The theological work of Ruth 2 is to retrain the reader’s perception: what looks like coincidence, routine, or small daily decisions is precisely where God’s *hesed* operates. The believer who is waiting for a spectacular intervention before trusting God’s care has misread how God works. Your commute, your conversation,

your seemingly random choice of which line to stand in — these are not outside God’s providential arrangement. Trust Him in the ordinary because the ordinary is where He characteristically works.

2. Receive God’s grace with Ruth’s humility — without either dismissing it or demanding more. (*Affections/worship*) Ruth’s response to Boaz’s kindness is a model of grace-shaped reception: genuine gratitude, genuine humility, and the refusal to overreach (“I am not one of your servant girls,” v. 13). Modern believers tend toward two errors — either deflecting God’s goodness (“I don’t deserve this”) in a way that refuses to receive it, or treating grace as an entitlement and demanding more. Ruth’s posture is neither. She receives with open hands and a bowed head. Practice receiving God’s daily provisions — protection, provision, relationships, small mercies — with explicit gratitude rather than either false modesty or grasping entitlement.

3. Bring your Naomi-moments back to the LORD’s *hesed*, not to your own circumstances. (*Mind/belief*) Naomi entered chapter 1 bitter, emptied, and convinced the LORD had dealt against her. One day of gleaning — one encounter with *hesed* in action — reorients her entirely: “Whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!” (v. 20). The change is not that her circumstances are fully resolved — they are not. The change is that she can now read her circumstances correctly. When you are in a season of loss or confusion, the question is not “has God abandoned me?” but “where is His *hesed* at work that I am failing to see?” Ask God to give you eyes to see the Boaz in your field — the evidence of covenant loyalty present even in seasons of hardship.

4. Extend *hesed* beyond what is required to those who are vulnerable and foreign to your community. (*Will/behavior*) Boaz did not merely comply with the gleaning law — he exceeded it. He instructed his workers to pull stalks out of the bundles and leave them deliberately, to let Ruth drink from the water he had provided, to protect her from harassment. The law required the edge of the field; Boaz gave the middle of it. Identify one person in your immediate circle — a widow, a recent immigrant, a person outside your social group, someone who has no claim on your attention — and take one concrete step this week to extend grace beyond what is socially expected. Not because it will make you a better person, but because the *hesed* of God flowing into your life is meant to flow through you to others.

5. Let Boaz’s role as *goel* press you toward Christ as the ultimate Kinsman-Redeemer. (*Affections/worship*) Naomi names Boaz as a *goel* — a kinsman-redeemer — the moment she recognizes what has happened. Boaz’s extraordinary kindness, his willingness to cross social boundaries to provide for and protect a foreign widow, his eventual redemption of Naomi’s land and his marriage to Ruth — all of this is a shadow of One who became our kinsman by taking on flesh, who crossed the ultimate boundary to redeem us from lostness, and under whose wings we now take refuge. Do not let the typology remain abstract. Let Boaz’s goodness in this field make Christ’s goodness in history feel more concrete, more tangible, more personal. Boaz showed up in Ruth’s field. Christ showed up in human history. Both acts of *hesed* are real.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Ruth 2 is a sustained revelation of the nature and method of divine *hesed* — God’s covenant lovingkindness. The chapter teaches that God’s providential care is not suspended by suffering, poverty, foreignness, or apparent abandonment. It operates through ordinary human structures (gleaning laws, harvest rhythms, daily labor) and through the choices of ordinary covenant people (a woman gleaning, a landowner arriving, workers following instructions). The text insists that human *hesed* — Boaz’s extraordinary generosity toward Ruth, Ruth’s prior faithfulness to Naomi — is not an independent virtue but a reflection and instrument of divine *hesed*. Naomi’s theological restoration (from bitterness in 1:20 to blessing in 2:20) demonstrates that recognition of God’s *hesed* is itself a gift — the ability to read one’s circumstances through covenant eyes rather than through the lens of apparent loss. The introduction of Boaz as *goel* places the entire chapter within the covenantal framework of redemption, signaling that what is at stake is not merely Ruth’s survival but the continuation of God’s redemptive purposes through the line of Elimelech.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Ruth 2 is one of the Old Testament’s most precise illustrations of Reformed providentialism — the conviction that God’s sovereignty operates not by overriding ordinary means but by governing them with exhaustive intentionality. The “chance” arrival in Boaz’s field is the text’s own confession that what looks like random contingency is, from the divine vantage point, purposeful arrangement. This is not fatalism (Ruth actively chooses to go, to ask, to work hard) but Reformed providence: God works through genuine human agency without suspending it. The chapter also displays the covenantal structure of redemption: grace precedes merit, the outsider is included not by her own ethnic credentials but by her trust in YHWH (v. 12), and the kinsman-redeemer framework anticipates Christ’s mediation as the one who is both related to us (the Word became flesh) and able to redeem us (sinless, sufficient, willing). Naomi’s restored recognition of YHWH’s *hesed* is a microcosm of regenerate vision — the ability to see God’s faithfulness operating behind and through what appeared to be divine absence. Reformed theology’s insistence that salvation is grounded in God’s unilateral covenant faithfulness, not human merit, is embodied in this Moabite widow who brings nothing but need and faith — and receives everything.

Main Takeaway

God’s *hesed* was in that field before Ruth arrived. It was arranging the meeting, preparing the abundance, and positioning the *goel* — and neither Ruth’s foreignness, nor Naomi’s

bitterness, nor the apparent randomness of the day could interrupt it. The same is true of your life today. You are not waiting for God to show up. He is already in the field. Open your eyes, receive what He has placed in your path, and become — for someone who has nothing to bring but need — the *hesed* of God with a face on it.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Turning Boaz into a moral exemplar and Ruth into a virtue model — and calling that exposition.** The most common mishandling of Ruth 2 is reducing it to “be industrious like Ruth” and “be generous like Boaz.” This imports a behavioral imperative without grounding it in the chapter’s own theological claim. Boaz himself refuses to accept credit — he grounds his generosity in Ruth’s prior *hesed* and in YHWH’s covenant protection. The sermon that makes Boaz the hero of the chapter rather than YHWH has misread the text. Both Ruth and Boaz are characters *within* a story whose protagonist is God.
- **Skipping the *goel* connection because it feels like a detour into background material.** Naomi’s identification of Boaz as a kinsman-redeemer in verse 20 is not a footnote — it is the theological pivot of the entire chapter and the hinge that connects Ruth 2 to Ruth 3-4. Preachers who treat it as background information have missed that it is precisely here that the chapter reveals its redemptive-historical weight. The gleaning story has a *goel* at its center; that must be named, explained, and pressed toward Christ.
- **Treating “her hap was to light on” as unimportant narrative filler.** The narrator’s ironic use of chance language is the theological nerve of the chapter. If you read past verse 3 without pausing to expose what the narrator is doing — using *miqreh* language precisely to subvert it — your congregation will experience the chapter as a pleasant story about a kind man rather than a revelation of sovereign *hesed*. The irony must be made explicit.
- **Psychologizing Naomi’s restoration without naming its theological content.** When Naomi blesses Boaz in verse 20, preachers sometimes treat this as emotional recovery — “Naomi is feeling hopeful again.” This flattens what is actually a theological confession: Naomi is acknowledging that YHWH’s *hesed* has not ceased. Her shift is not psychological but doxological. Preaching it as emotional recovery produces a therapeutic sermon; preaching it as theological recognition produces a sermon about God.
- **Developing the typological dimension of Boaz before the narrative has been heard.** Boaz as a type of Christ is a genuine and important canonical insight (supported by Matthew 1:5 and the *goel* framework). But if it is introduced too early in the exposition, it collapses the narrative into an allegory and robs it of its own claim about how divine *hesed* works in ordinary history. Let the narrative make its

own claim first. Let Boaz be Boaz before he becomes a type. The typology lands with far greater force when it emerges from a thoroughly heard narrative rather than being imposed upon it.

- **Failing to connect Ruth's foreignness to its covenant-theological meaning.** It is tempting in contemporary preaching to apply Ruth's foreignness primarily as a text about ethnic inclusion, racial reconciliation, or welcoming immigrants — all applications the text can legitimately support. But these applications must be grounded in the text's own framework, which is covenant-theological rather than social. Ruth is included not because Israel has decided to be more welcoming but because she has taken refuge under the wings of YHWH (v. 12). Her inclusion is a theological event before it is a social one. Applications about welcoming outsiders are valid but must be derived from and grounded in the covenant claim, not substituted for it.