

**I. Introduction**

- A. Welcome to Pathway. My message today is part of a series. The series is called Resting in the Love of God. We are meditating our way through a book in the Bible called Ruth.
- B. Today is part 7 in the series.
- C. The title of my talk today is: **The Scandal of How Little God Cares**
- D. Stay with me.

**II. Previously in Ruth**

- A. We meet two women, Naomi and Ruth. Naomi, the mother-in-law is from the land of Judah. Ruth, her daughter-in-law is from Moab.
- B. They have both suffered great loss. Naomi has lost her husband and both of her grown sons. Ruth has suffered the loss of her husband, who was one of Naomi's sons. They are both in pain.
  - 1. And Naomi is also in despair. She is angry. She is hurt. And for the whole first chapter, she's lashing out at God.
  - 2. Naomi is the poster child for the accusation of how little God cares.
- C. Not only are they both in pain...
- D. They are also penniless. So, as we've gone through the story, we saw that Ruth decided to go out and glean.
  - 1. Gleaning was an ancient practice in which poor people could pick up dropped grain on a farmer's field.
  - 2. There were rules for this, but it was required under the laws of Israel.
  - 3. So Ruth heads out, and she turns up on the fields of a man named Boaz.
- E. It turns out that Ruth is very bold. She asks for special permissions that go way beyond what the laws of gleaning permitted.
- F. Last time we saw this incredible, brilliantly written dialogue between Ruth and Boaz... and in it there was grace, more grace, amazing grace, and super grace.
- G. It's incredible... Ruth asks for special privileges way beyond gleaning.
  - 1. Boaz grants the special privileges... that's grace in action.
  - 2. Ruth takes full advantage of everything grace offers her... that's faith in action.
    - a) When that grace met that faith the result was mini-fireworks.
- H. So much so that Ruth gleaned an incredible amount of barley. Let's pick the story up in Ruth 2:18.
- I. We're going to do exposition, which means line by line study of the words of the Bible.

**III. Exposition**

- A. *"So she gleaned in the field until evening, and beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley."* (Ruth 2:17)
  - 1. Yes, when I say "ephah" you're supposed to say wow. Because in 1 Samuel 17, an ephah of grain is enough food to feed a whole regiment of fighting men. When the grace flows, that's how God rolls.
- B. *"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."* (Ruth 2:18)
  - 1. Ruth comes home with a mountain of food. She actually had three kinds of food.
    - a) One is all the barley she had gleaned. This in itself is a huge amount—a whole ephah!
    - b) The second all the leftovers from lunch (v. 14) that Boaz threw for his workers.
    - c) Third was the extra dessert... called "parched grain." This was a kind of snack or gift food. I'm calling it caramel corn, you can make it something else. You can make it gummy bears. Nobody really knows for sure, so use your imagination.
  - 2. All of this is the first good news in the very long, very sad story of Naomi's life.
- C. *"And her mother-in-law said to her, 'Where have you gleaned today? And where did you work? Blessed be the one who took notice of you.' So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, 'The name... of the man... with him... I worked... today... is... Boaz!'"* (Ruth 2:19)
  - 1. It's actually funny, because Naomi is dying to know how Ruth got so much food. This is a world record for one day of gleaning. How did this happen?
  - 2. Ruth knows, and we know, that it's grace. The kindness of God was at work.
    - a) It was grace that motivated Ruth to make such a big, bold request.
    - b) It was grace that she just so happened to "randomly" show up at the fields of Boaz... a man she had never heard of before.
    - c) It was grace that gave her permission to glean on the fields right on the heels of the reapers... something that wasn't allowed.
    - d) It was grace that gave her permission to glean among the stacked-up bundles of grace, among the sheaves... that wasn't allowed either.
    - e) It was grace that gave her a full lunch with the paid harvesters.
    - f) It was grace that gave her all the leftovers.
    - g) It was grace that gave her the leftover dessert.
    - h) It was grace where Boaz basically says, I'm going to give you the complete benefit package of being one of my employees, Ruth says But I don't work for you or make any money for you, and Boaz says, I know. Here's the benefit package anyway.
  - 3. So there's so much grace and so much abundance that Naomi and Ruth are set up with provisions for the better part of a year.
  - 4. And Ruth saw this all happen, but Naomi didn't. So she's dying to know.
  - 5. And Ruth is awesome because she takes her own sweet time getting it out.
    - a) The name... of the man... with whom... I worked... today... is... Boaz!
  - 6. Ha! Take that crabby mother-in-law.
- D. *"Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, 'Blessed be he of the LORD, who has not forsaken His kindness [hesed, grace] to the living and the dead!' And Naomi said to her, 'This man is a relation of ours, one of our close relatives.'"* (Ruth 2:20)

1. I want to give some love to a really important word in this verse:
  - a) Kindness... this is the Hebrew word *hesed*, which means grace. It's one of the top two words in the Old Testament Hebrew for grace.
    - (1) Grace...
      - (a) You don't deserve it, but God does good stuff anyway.
      - (b) You don't earn it, but God gives good stuff anyway.
      - (c) You push him away, but God loves you anyway.
      - (d) You have something bad coming, but God forgives, God forgets, and keeps calling you home.
    - (2) Definition:
      - (a) **GRACE is a well-tuned engine of blessing, with a complex set of precision-engineered, interconnecting truths and promises, designed in the heart of God, built by the hand of God, fueled by the Cross of God, running by the power of God, and outputting the love of God to any helpless, hopeless, humble sinner who will receive it... and go on receiving it by faith.**
    - (3) And now look whose lips are saying this word. It's Naomi, the bitter one. Naomi, the mad-at-God one. Naomi, the wounded, broken, giving up, unloved, unblest, uncared for one. Something is happening here.
  - b) Also, notice how Naomi describes Boaz: He is a relation of ours, one of our close relatives.
  - c) The only thing I want to say is that that's all Boaz is. A relative. He is not, as a lot of people suggest, the kinsman redeemer. He just isn't, and when we get there to chapter four, I'm going to argue that like a lawyer.
2. So Ruth lays a mountain of food on Naomi. Naomi realizes it's Boaz and it's grace.
3. And chapter two ends with Ruth and Naomi planning for their future, and then chapter 3 starts like this:
  - E. *"Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, 'My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?'"* (Ruth 3:1)
    1. This is a massive transformation. The hurting person is Naomi. She is bitter to the point of dysfunctional. She is blaming God.
      - a) She's been angry at God. She's been hostile to Ruth. She's been abrupt with the women of the town.
    2. But now look at what she says! "I shall seek YOUR welfare, Ruth."
    3. This is huge! It is a profound transformation in her whole outlook.
      - a) She goes from self-pitying, to actually feeling some compassion for another.
      - b) From self-absorbed, to actually showing care for another.
    4. She's about to explain a local marriage custom to Ruth. She wants to help her daughter-in-law find a new husband.
    5. And you've got to understand what a sacrifice this is. Ruth is all she's got. Naomi will be giving up her only visible means of support. This is a huge change.
    6. Naomi is utterly, completely, powerfully transformed.
      - a) But how? What makes the difference?
    7. That's what I want to preach about... because this is exactly what so many people get radically wrong about God.
  - F. So two questions: What changed? How did it change?
- IV. God's Hospital for Hurting People
  - A. Let me tell you what didn't happen to Naomi:
    1. Nobody shamed her for her bitterness.
    2. Nobody lectured her on having more faith.
    3. Nobody quoted Bible verses at her about submitting to God's will and God's ways.
    4. Nobody told her to pray harder.
    5. Nobody told her to repent.
    6. Nobody rebuked her for blaming God.
    7. Nobody held an intervention to fix her bad attitude.
  - B. What happened instead is God's Hospital for Hurting People.
    1. Naomi has an illness. WE need to give it a name. She has a bad case of GDD.
  - C. Grace Deficit Disorder
    1. **Grace Deficit Disorder (GDD): the mental, emotional, and spiritual problems – and countless manifestations – resulting from a person's failure to fully see and utilize the grace God has for them. (Hebrews 12:15)**
    2. What is Grace?
      - a) •Eternal Salvation (everlasting life, heaven)
      - b) •Total Forgiveness
      - c) •Perfect Acceptance
      - d) •Faithful Presence
      - e) •Abundant Provision
      - f) •Loving Protection
      - g) •Continual Re-Creation
      - h) •Emotional wholeness (sobriety, freedom, peace, joy)
      - i) •Boundless love... the deepest most satisfying love a human heart can contain.
        - (1) Jesus gained this all for us by his own sacrifice when he died on the Cross and rose again.
        - (2) And all of this grace is yours as one giant gift, freely given to anyone who believes, totally free to you because it was paid in full by Jesus.
        - (3) **Grace is perfect. Grace is permanent. Grace is forever.**
  - D. Christian, this grace... this grace is yours.

1. I don't care if anybody else thinks so.
  2. If you feel like you're an outcast, then join us here, as we feast together on this grace.
  3. If you feel like you're misunderstood and judged, this is where you belong, and this is what your heart is craving.
  4. If you feel ashamed or trapped in something you've done or are doing, you will find forgiveness... and freedom... right here in this love of God.
  5. This is your home. This is your heart. This is your guiding star for the rest of your life all the way to heaven.
  6. And I want you to tell all your friends about it. There's a place for you at the table of grace.
  - E. Because the saddest story ever told is to have a Dad in heaven who loves you so well, and to live on earth out of touch with grace.
  - F. And that's where Naomi found herself. In the wastelands of gracelessness, in the howling winds of GDD.
  - G. But now, she's changed. She's healed and she's healing. Did you see how?
- V. The Healing
- A. While Naomi sat in her bitterness, while she accused God to anyone who would listen, while she renamed herself after her pain, God was doing his thing.
    1. He guided Ruth to Boaz's field. He moved Boaz's heart toward Ruth. He orchestrated an avalanche of provision.
    2. And this mountain of barley was poured at the feet of a woman who was still calling God her enemy.
    3. That's God's Hospital for Hurting People - where mountains of grace are lavished and poured out before a person even gives one thought to God.
    4. He's ahead of you... waiting... arms open wide. He always is.
  - B. With all of Naomi's anger and hostility toward God (open hostility), notice how neither God, nor Ruth, responds.
    1. Nobody shames her.
    2. Nobody tells her God has a better plan, she should have more faith.
    3. Nobody tells her that God is sovereign, and he gets to beat us up as he wills (he doesn't and he wouldn't and he hasn't).
    4. Nobody disciplines her for her bad attitude.
    5. Nobody tries to give her Bible studies on the sovereignty of God or why she should just accept that God gets to take her husband's and sons' lives (a premise which I reject as wildly inaccurate, by the way).
  - C. She has space for her grief, and in that space, God is piling up grace for her.
  - D. She has zero condemnation or judgment from God. No one lectures her over her bad attitude.
  - E. She get unwavering love, with a faithfulness that is consistent over time, no matter what kind of mood Naomi is in.
  - F. **The greatest scandal is how little God cares about the mess you've made or the repairs you need before he lavishes his love on you.**
    1. **Grace creates space for healing without ever demanding performance.**
  - G. Some of you are so worried about trying to perform for God, you can't even breathe in long enough to receive from God the love he wants to lavish on you.
  - H. Naomi is bathed in grace through Ruth's actions long before she's able to reciprocate or even recognize what's happening.
  - I. By the time Naomi is ready to finally bless Ruth... the cumulative effect of this unconditional grace has done its work. Naomi, who was once consumed with her own pain, can now think about Ruth's welfare. Her heart has been gradually reopened to love and concern for others. She's moved from "call me Mara (bitterness)" to actively seeking another's happiness.
  - J. What strikes me most is how countercultural this approach is, even within many Christian communities. Often our instinct when someone is bitter or angry at God is to correct their theology or minimize their pain. But here we see that the heart of God is something radically different than the human mind imagines.
  - K. The text shows that healing doesn't come through theological arguments but through embodied grace. Ruth doesn't try to fix Naomi's perspective - she simply stays, serves, and loves. And that sustained presence of grace eventually transforms Naomi from within.
  - L. It's also meaningful that God doesn't strike Naomi down for her accusations against Him. There's a patience and space for human pain that runs counter to how we often think God responds to our anger.
- VI. The Transformative Power of Grace
- A. What happens in that interval between "Call me Bitterness" and "Let me care about your welfare, Ruth"?
  - B. An encounter with mountains of grace. That's what happened.
    1. Not an encounter with correction.
    2. Not an encounter with rebuke.
    3. Not an encounter with theology.
    4. Not an apology.
    5. Not repentance.
    6. Not changing your ways.
    7. Not getting your act together.
    8. Not improving your attitude.
    9. Not getting religion.
    10. Not anything that any church-person, pastor, priest, or advisor would counsel.
  - C. All that made the difference was an encounter with overwhelming, undeserved grace.
  - D. The Real Scandal
    1. And now we come to the real scandal - not how little God cares about you... but how scandalously little God cares about your accusations against Him before He starts blessing you.
      - a) It's scandalous how little God cares about Naomi's bitterness before showering her with provision.

- b) It's scandalous how little God cares about her accusations against him before orchestrating her restoration.
- c) It's scandalous how little God cares about her bad theology before moving toward her healing.
- 2. This is the God who runs to embrace prodigals while they're still covered in pig manure.
  - a) Religious people hate that.
  - b) This is the scandal of real grace. God doesn't care how bad you smell, how nasty you've been, how arrogant you are, how guilty you feel...
  - c) If you come to him, you'll find he's already got a place at the table for you, and he's pulling out the chair... but first, he says, bring it in and let me hold you for a minute.
- 3. This is the Savior and Friend who cooks breakfast for Peter the next time he sees Peter after Peter swore up and down denying that he even knew Jesus.
  - a) All Jesus wanted was a hug... Peter, do you love me? Yes, Jesus, you know I love you. And that was enough.
  - b) Oh, the religious authorities hate that. He has to be dragged through the mud. He has to go through a process. He has to check the boxes. He has to be sufficiently contrite. He has to beat himself up for a while, and while he's at it, we should beat him up a little too.
  - c) And the greatest scandal in the universe is how little God cares about all that stuff.
- 4. This is the same Jesus who meets Saul on the Damascus road with grace, not punishment.
  - a) He's known for hating Christians. He's known for persecuting the church. He's a bad guy.
  - b) And God sends a man to heal his blindness.
  - c) And God sends a friend to welcome him into the church.
  - d) And God sends a message that he will bring grace to the masses, and proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ.
  - e) And for most people it's an absolute scandal that he never had to make amends.
- 5. And here you've got a woman who names herself Bitterness.
  - a) And a Father who loves her. And watches over her. And makes sure her needs are met.
  - b) And who on one surprising day... pours out an ephah of barley at the feet of a woman who has renamed herself "Bitterness."
- 6. The real scandal of Christianity is how utterly unconcerned God is with your attitude adjustment before He lands the grace into your life.

**VII. So What?**

- A. Perhaps you're sitting here with your own bitterness toward God. Maybe you've blamed Him for losses in your life. Maybe you've renamed yourself after your pain.
- B. The scandal of God's grace is that He's not waiting for you to clean up your attitude before He starts blessing you. He's not holding back His love until you get your theology straight.
- C. The scandal is that God is pouring out grace on you right now, whether you recognize it or not. He's orchestrating provision. He's working in ways you haven't yet seen.
- D. He's not offended by your accusations. He's not wounded by your blame. He's not standing at a distance until you shape up.
- E. He's right here, right now, with a mountain of blessing to pour at your feet. With enough blessing to heal your heart. With enough love to overwhelm your bitterness.
- F. And the only question is whether you'll notice it when it comes.
- G. The Ultimate Scandal

**VIII. The ultimate scandal of grace is revealed at the cross.**

- A. While we were still sinners - still enemies, still bitter, still accusing God - Christ died for us. He didn't wait for us to clean up our act. He didn't demand we fix our attitudes first. He died for us while we were still spitting in His face.
- B. And this same scandalous grace continues today.
  - 1. **God doesn't love you because you're lovable. He loves you because He is love.**
  - 2. **He doesn't bless you because you deserve it. He blesses you because Jesus deserved it for you.**
  - 3. **He doesn't heal you because you've earned it. He heals you because He's the Great Physician.**
  - 4. **He doesn't save you because he's lenient. He saves you because Jesus paid the price.**
- C. The scandal of how little God cares about your accusations, your bitterness, your record, your rap sheet, and your anger against him... before He starts pouring out blessing - that's the scandal that can set you free today.

**IX. Conclusion**

- A. Maybe today you walked in here carrying your own version of bitterness. Maybe you've been pushing God away, blaming Him, questioning Him, even accusing Him.
- B. And perhaps, deep down, you believe He's pushed you to arm's length until you get your act together.
- C. But the miracle of grace that transformed Naomi is available to you right now.
- D. The beautiful scandal of the gospel is that God is already running toward you - not with a lecture, but with open arms.
  - 1. Not with conditions, but with compassion.
  - 2. Not with demands, but with deliverance.
- E. And He's not waiting for you to fix yourself first. The table is already set. The feast is already prepared.
- F. The Father is already scanning the horizon for you. The question isn't whether God's grace is available to you. The question is whether you'll consent to be loved by a God who cares so scandalously little about your past and your failures and so passionately much about your future and your joy.
- G. Yes or no... will you say yes to the full measure of God's grace for you?
- H. Let me pray that for you now.