

07.26.15 | Working to Provide | Ruth 2:17-18

Work has always been a part of God's order. From the beginning this was evident as he gave Adam dominion over the earth and tasked him to name the animals. Sin made that work much harder but work was a part of God's plan even before sin and work will continue to be a part of God's order for eternity to come. Verses throughout the scripture hint at the role of work, as saints will "serve, reign, rule, and more" for all eternity.

We can be certain that work was instituted by God, and matters to God. We find the necessity to work not only in our own economy, but throughout the pages of scripture.

Our focus over the past month has been Boaz. We have noted his kindness, compassion, and generosity toward Ruth as he saw himself as Yahweh's instrument of refuge for Ruth and Naomi.

This morning we are going to shift our focus from Boaz to Ruth, as Ruth throughout this chapter has demonstrated a proper action and attitude toward work. Yes, Boaz has been compassionate and generous, yet Ruth was the one who

- journey to the field ...
- Asked the foreman
- Remained in the heat of the day working the field to glean and gather barley not only for herself, but also for Naomi.

Verses 17-18 reveal Ruth was a hard worker and Ruth used her work to provide for her mother in law Naomi.

Throughout chapter 2 Ruth gives us a picture of a woman who demonstrates the necessity to work and provide for herself and her mother-in-law.

READ

17 So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. 18 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.

1. THE NECESSITY OF WORK!

Chapter two exemplifies the necessity of work for Ruth and demonstrates her willingness to work hard.

- Starting back in verse 2, **Ruth was the one who volunteered** to work in the fields to glean for their family.
- In verse 3 Ruth was on who **traveled to Boaz's field and asked** the foreman if she could glean.
- In verse 7, Ruth was one who from **early morning** until Boaz's arrival had been continuously gleaning from the field, with the only a short break.
- In verses 8-16, Ruth was the one Boaz addressed.
- Here in verse 17, Ruth was the one who worked until dusk in the fields.

Throughout the chapter we get a glimpse of Ruth's devotion to provide for her and Naomi, NOT THROUGH HANDOUTS, but THROUGH HARD WORK!

Notice verse 17 with me.

17 So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned,

- **Ruth worked from early morning until evening in the field.**
- **Ruth's work was not finished at dusk.** No! Ruth gleaned from the field until the sun began to set, gathering as many stalks and ears of grain as she could. Then she went to the side of the field and worked more threshing the grain she had gleaned!

It is presumably by the side of the field, where Ruth began to beat or thresh the grain she had gathered. A stick or a rock was used to beat the stalks to separate the grain from the chaff. When the quantity of grain was small, it was beat out with a stick which separates the kernel from the stalk. When the quantity was large they would use a mill and threshing floor.

Beating the grain was not for the faint of heart. It required the continual beating of the ear and stalk with a stick until all the grain had been beaten out. However, un-threshed grain was inedible. Therefore Ruth's work required her to thresh.

If you've ever beaten out a rug or floor mate you know it's not for the faint of heart, whacking the dust from the cloth. This form of threshing was whacking the grain from the husk.

Last week I mentioned the generous amount of grain Ruth had gleaned ...

and it was about an ephah of barley.

This ephah was about 5 ½ gallons, somewhere between 30-50 pounds.

Depending on the scholar, between ½ and a full months wages!

However, **this amount would have made her threshing work that much harder**, requiring her to stay that much longer. However, she was greatly rewarded for her days work. This barley grain could be roasted or milled into flour for baking and used to provide for them for weeks.

We see that Ruth worked hard.

- Not only for one day, Ruth worked like this every day during the barley harvest and wheat harvest! The end of the chapter reveals that Ruth rose from bed early to go to Boaz's field, and stayed late to beat the grain as long as there was grain to harvest.

Even in tragedy, poverty, racial prejudice, and perceived helplessness, Ruth exemplifies the necessity and rewards for hard work!

We apply this to our own lives in two ways.

I think here is where we can see a BALANCE OF GENEROSITY VS. HANDOUT.

Boaz's actions and commands were more generous than the Jews had probably ever heard. He was giving not only of his profits but his laborers. Yet, his generosity still required Ruth to diligently work for his generous reward. This was not a free handout! Yet it was generous.

There are plenty of illustrations of compassion meeting the immediate needs of the poor in which no work is returned.

- The Good Samaritan and the Jew left for dead
- Giving alms to the poor who were destitute because they were too crippled or sickly to work.
- Widows who had no children or family to provide them but were too old to work.

We are called to be compassionate and to meet others immediate needs as we are able. However if we seek to find a balance between generosity and compassion, work is that contrasting element. God expects the able bodied to

work, within and without the church. The roles for handouts should extend to those who are unable to work, except in extenuating circumstances.

There is a balance to giving compassionately and generously that Ruth and Boaz demonstrate. I think it is a good one to emulate as it has N.T. and O.T. support.

Ruth was willing worker. She did not demand nor expect a handout.

I am reminded Proverbs 31's description of an excellent wife within Ruth's actions.

- Her husband will lack no grain
- She rises while it is yet night to provide food for her household
- Her lamp does not go out at night
- Strength and dignity are her clothing

I've often wondered if King Lemuel's mother, who many believe to be Bathsheba, is not referring to David's great grandmother Ruth and his words a testament to Ruth's character.

BECAUSE ... Ruth's work ethic is one for each of us to emulate.

Secondly, the bible clearly lays out the principle and necessity to work!

I've mentioned before I think the New Testament theme verse for Ruth throughout this chapter is

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 " 11 and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, 12 so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one."

- Ruth seeks permission to glean keeping peace.
- She keeps to herself not causing a stir among the laborers.
- She works hard from early til late.
- Although given much, she works hard and seeming keeps the peace.

This is the mindset God instructs us to have at work and about work.

Our life is to be a testify of the gospel we believe. At home, at play, and at work!

Some of the people in Thessalonica did not take Paul's advice, and in Paul's second letter he condemned their laziness and gossip to the point where he

says that those who are unwilling to work should NOT be allowed eat further, they should be admonished as a brother and eventually cut out of the community if they continue to act that way. TURN TO 2 THES. 3

10 For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: [it is the same for you and me as this is an apostolic command, not suggestion]

If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. (What about 1 Cor. 11)

WHY 11 For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.

WHAT 12 Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

HOW 13 As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.

RESULT 14 If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed.

HOW 15 Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

Work and the way we work is important! It is important to God.

- What you do to earn money matters to God!
- How you work matters to God!
- The way you work matters to God!

Your work matters!

It matters that you work! There is a balancing act that must occur between compassionate charity toward the poor and enabling laziness. Paul makes certain that everyone knows their responsibility to work for a living.

In most countries people work to eat unlike ours where we work to play and build wealth. However, the saying remains true in America, we must work if we want to be fed.

It may seem silly but we need to be reminded working matters to God! Laziness is a sin! It is a sin from which Paul says to separate yourself from.

That means, you're hired to do your job ... so do your job!

We are also to work peaceably and quietly! Ruth sets the example in the story as we have noted.

I've worked in an office setting and I've worked in a factory. I know the politics, personalities, gossip, and stories that go around. I've worked with all types of people, with all types of motives, with all types of character. I know how easy it is to get involved in work place drama of all sorts.

God says, work hard! and mind your own business!

This doesn't mean you are a loner or you don't invest in people. It means work hard and do the things you are charged to do, nothing MORE, nothing LESS.

- Don't create battles, hardships, or unnecessary conflict.
- Don't gossip, slander, or berate!
- Don't fight with others, or create battles!

Go to work, do your job as best you able, to the best of your God given ability, and come home.

Paul reminds us in Colossians 3 that our work is to be done not **only heartily, but to the Lord**. This means we work as if Jesus himself was our supervisor and employer because for the Christian, He is!

What is your work ethic like? Do you work heartily? Do you work peaceably and quietly? Is your work done with pleasing Jesus as the goal?

Boaz's work was definitely done this way. I believe Ruths was as well!

Not only does Ruth work hard for herself, but **she provides us with an example for a second biblical principal as her work supports Naomi!**

THE NECESSITY TO PROVIDE!

Verse 18 affirms Ruth's desire to provide for her only relative, Naomi.

18 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.

After beating out the grain Ruth headed back to where she and Naomi were living in the city of Bethlehem. We are not told if they lived with family or if they took up residence in their Naomi's former home. However, when Ruth walked in the door with 5 ½ gallons of grain in her shawl, you can imagine the surprise on Naomi's face! **Ruth had gleaned THAT MUCH for her?!**

The author's choice of words revealed almost sarcastically that Naomi SAW what Ruth had gleaned. YA' THINK???

Naomi was amazed! This was not only improbable but impossible, yet Yahweh's provision, Ruth's faithful devotion, and Boaz's generosity all worked together to accomplish this phenomena.

But beyond what Ruth had gleaned, to the surprise of Naomi, Ruth's had not only brought home provision for the future, but she also brought home the remainder of the meal Boaz had served which she had not finished.

This verse reveals the true poverty of these women. It reveals the dire need for Ruth to go glean. I mentioned last week the probability that Ruth and Naomi had no food, ... period. **Ruth likely went to glean without food, while Naomi stayed home without food.** They would continue to go hungry if Ruth had not worked the fields. Naomi would go hungry if Ruth had not stepped up provided for her.

The narrator saves the details of Ruth pocketing the left overs as a surprise both for us and for Naomi. With this surprise he re-emphasis Ruth's loving devotion toward Naomi through this provision.

Verse 18 illustrates Ruth's godly example of working to provides for one's family.

Unknown to Ruth, she sets an example of following several NT principles laid out by Paul regarding widows and family.

Speaking to the church of their responsibility toward widows Paul told Timothy in

1, 5:3-4 TURN THERE WITH ME

3 Honor widows who are truly widows. 4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God.

These verse teach us the children's responsibility to care and provide for their aging mothers. These verses address children, not widows. When mom cannot care for herself, ones children must learn to step in and perform their duty of care toward the one who has cared for them. As long as they are capable of caring for their mom, they are to do it before others should step in to help.

This act, Paul goes on to say is a work of righteousness. The word for godliness or piety, is actually two words in the Greek that literally mean, “well-worship.” The apostle notes how caring for one’s family is seen a form of righteous works. This work is not righteous in gaining righteousness but righteous in that it is well-pleasing to the Lord.

Caring for your parents is a way to “Honor your father and mother.”

Ruth demonstrated honor and godliness by stepping up and stepping out, to work and provide for Naomi. Ruth did so both in the **immediate sense**, but also in the **long term** as she brings home a surplus of grain in the eyes of any gleaner.

Friends we can rightly look at Ruth’s actions to see if we would mimic that in our lives. The bible is often described as a mirror. These accounts are meant for us to see ourselves in them and to mimic the righteous actions and forsake the sinful deeds.

Paul does not give up on his quest to command believers to care for their aging parents. In verse 8 he wrote

8 But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Paul says there is condemnation in forsaking ones familial responsibilities.

Carrying for one’s family is a signature of one’s faith and obedience. Paul goes on to say that those who do not provide for their parents in their aging years are **worse than unbelievers.**

I take this to mean their testimony is worse than unbelievers because even unbelievers care for their aging parents.

Therefore, caring for ones parents is a matter of ...

- Righteous works of sanctification
- obedience to God
- Gospel testimony to the unsaved
- It is an evidence of faith!

I was more than impressed when Vicki Ivester shared her ministry and story with us in early June. I know many of you were impressed as well. God has given her some incredible talents that she is using for His glory.

What you might not know about Vicki though is that for many years Vicki worked a secular job after returning to IL. She worked full time overseeing the translation ministry of ABWE and $\frac{3}{4}$ time working a secular job to provide for her mother who required full time care because of dementia and other health needs.

I remember praying for Vicki during these years as she wrestled two jobs, plus foreign travel. Without ever meeting her, this action spoke her faith even louder than her ministry success.

James words in are brought to life when he wrote,

[2:18] ***“Show me your faith apart from your works,
and I will show you my faith by my works.”***

Ruth’s works revealed her faith, just as Boaz’s works revealed his! Faith motivates God fearers to work hard and to provide for their family. Just as Boaz provided for his extended family and Ruth provided for her only family!

The Lord challenges each of us this morning to work hard.

- To find balance in compassion and generosity.
- To work hard for your employer know ultimately you are working for the Lord.
- To work to provide for your family.

In each of these, your life provides evidence of your faith for all to see.

Does the evidence of your work point to Jesus?