Main Sermon Idea: The Lord will greatly bless and favor us when we work hard to bless others.

Introduction

One thing about Bethlehem is the beauty of the golden fields of barley and wheat. I love this place. I know it’s a small town, but it’s so worth it. Ah, here comes one of my men now. It’s time for the afternoon report. I’m sure it will be good. Today is one of the days of harvesting! All of that hard work that went into planting and maintaining the fields will come to fruition today. I hope that the blessing of the Lord extends from my fields to the whole town!

Oh, wait a minute, that’s not my young man who’s in charge of the fields. That’s my son. Oh, I did promise him that I would tell him about how I met his mother in this very field today...Good morning, son! I’m glad you could make it too. Well, don’t trip and fall. Slow down. We have time to tell the story today. Do you remember where we left off?

Oh yes, your mother and grandma had finally gotten back to Bethlehem, and your grandma was coming to terms with all of the calamity that happened in her life up to that point. Even though she was home, she felt like God was against her and her life was still very bitter, because even in living here, she would be a widow and had no heir. There wasn’t much hope for her of finding another husband, and so she was in quite a predicament. But your wonderful mother had a great solution, and that’s how we met!

Body

Putting Bread on the Table (2:1-7). Well, son, let’s inspect the fields, and then you must go to study Torah while I work with the men. Oh, you always think I’m too old to work with them, but a good manager knows every level of operation. Besides, I receive great respect when I work alongside of my hired hands. But let’s see those fields. The first time I saw your mother, she was right over there, right at the edge of the field gleaning what we leave behind.

You see all of those people? They are the poor, the widows and the foreigners. We are told specifically in our Torah, in the Law of Moses, to not reap the full part of the field. We who are honorable enough to follow the Torah always leave the edges of the field so that those who don’t have enough to eat will be able to survive in our land. It is what the Lord desires of us, to be kind even to those who are not as blessed by Him as we are. Don’t you ever forget, son, that these people are always on the Lord’s heart. That’s why He provides for them in His law!

And what a blessing and good return I got from following the Law of God! Your mother was strong and she worked hard. You see, I had come to inspect and work the fields myself years ago. As you already know, my boy, I am also from the same clan that Elimelek, yes grandpa, is
from. That makes us kinsmen! It means that I have the responsibilities of the family to pay him and grandma.

It was that day that the Lord brought your mother and I together for the first time, although neither of us knew it until we first laid eyes on one another. You see, that was the day that your mother told grandma that she would like to go and provide the food by working in the fields. She overqualified for that kind of work because she was a widow, poor, and a foreigner. Grandma said that was a good idea and so off your mother went in search of a field to glean in.

Now think about how hard that would be for your mother. I know you haven’t gotten this far in your studies at Temple, son, but the times that we live in are not the best at all. You see, most people around here are not like me. They don’t look to the Lord’s good law to guide them. Instead, we need judges that God will raise up to deliver us because we go our own way, and like sheep, we go astray. But I was noble then as I am now. I followed the Law of God. And I made it possible in my fields for the poor to come and glean. But not everyone was so obedient. I can imagine that your mother happened upon several fields and found Israelites that weren’t following God’s Law.

But then she happened upon mine, and it was the best day of my life, well, other than the day we got married, oh and your birth was pretty special too, son. But that was the day that started it all! You know what a hard worker your mother is. She worked from the morning when she came upon my field to lunch and then after lunch into the evening hours. Funny thing that she happened on my field when she did. You might even say that the Lord guided her to me!

This brings up two life lessons that you can learn from your mother, Obed. One of them is that she was a woman who served others first. She was willing to work hard in the fields all day just so that grandma and her could eat. But she was more concerned for your grandma even than herself. Selflessness is hard to teach because the moment that you say, “I’m learning how to be selfless!” you are being selfish about your own development. It’s very tricky. But your mother was and is selfless. It is one of the things that drew me to her. You’ve got to be willing to lay your own rights down to be selfless, and that doesn’t happen in too many people.

The second life lesson I want you to take away from this part of our story is that God works even in the little things in life. All your mother needed was to be able to get enough grain for the day. But that day she met her future husband, received well more than enough food to last for quite a time, and came under my protection and blessing. God works things out behind the scenes of our lives and we don’t usually recognize what He’s doing until after the fact when we look back at our lives. Even when you’re just going about your business in the day, the Lord can use that time to bring special divine appointments. It’s up to us to learn when those moments are and make the most of every opportunity.

Now, back to our story. Your mother worked so hard that day that I came upon the fields about mid-morning or so. I was interested to see how my men were fairing. It was harvest time, and as we are doing now, so I did back then too. A wise man knows the possessions in his care and manages them as well as he can. So that was also my aim back then. But you know me, son. I wasn’t cut out for observing and supervising. I always get in there and work with the men. Still
do. That’s why your poor mother is always after me to relax. She should take some of her own medicine…

When I cam upon the field foreman that day, a young strapping lad who knew every bit of that field, I greeted them as I always do. I proclaimed a blessing on all of them, and they are so happy to work for a noble man that they returned my blessing upon me as well. You know, when your employer is blessed, so you too will be blessed if the employer is a godly person. Always work for godly people, son. They treat you right. If they don’t, then they’re not what they profess to be.

It was at that time as he was reporting to me that I saw the most attractive woman I have ever seen. She was working so efficiently, so readily. I had not seen such work ethic among the poor before. Most of the people who are poor have had bad breaks in life. They’re good hard workers who have fallen on hard times. But there are always a few who like to milk the system, to just slide by. But when I saw your mother, she was working so hard I thought she was one of the hired field hands.

I couldn’t help it, son. I just had to know who she was. So I asked the man who knows everything about that field and he told me that she had come in, taken one small rest in the house all day, and had been working like that since she got here. That I could have guessed just by watching how dedicated to her work she was. But he also told me that she was Ruth, the Moabite woman that had given up her life, her country, her family, and her gods to come to Israel and be with your grandma. I knew her story well, and I was a kinsman to grandma, so I could not resist her. I had to speak with her!

By the way son, as you grow up and get older, you’re going to begin to really like girls and be attracted to them. You will find many things appealing. Oh, don’t smirk at me like that. Sure, I know now they just pull your hair and tease you and embarrass you. But one day, you’re going to like them. It’s important that you know what you should be attracted to in a girl. Girls are beautiful, but their most attractive qualities will not be what’s on the outside. Sure, that’s going to attract you as well, but you will find that you will be attracted to what is on the inside. I saw in your mother someone who selflessly worked as long as the day to take care of her mother-in-law. That is some attractive character. Be wise, my son, in your choice of women. Look for the character you can’t see and judge your attraction on that first. You will be pleased with your choice then!

A Special Dispensation (2:8-13). I had to meet your mother. I could not resist her! So I went to her and I blessed her. I went to her and I told her that I wanted her to glean only in my field from now own. I told her to cling to my young women, the young women that regularly worked my field. I wanted to make it easier on your mother, knowing her background and how she had sacrificed for grandma.

What son? Yes, it’s true I called her “my daughter.” But listen, I said that because she seemed so much younger than me then. I didn’t know how she would react to me. Besides that, I wanted to care for her and protect her and provide for her because she had done such a wonderful thing for your grandmother, one of my kinsmen. Aside from that, I knew that she felt like an
outsider in Bethlehem. After all, she wasn’t from around here. Calling her my daughter was to show her that she is part of Israel now because of the commitment that she made.

Some people think that you can only be an Israelite by birth or by circumcision, but son, you can be an Israelite, part of the people of God, when you pledge your loyalty to the Lord. That is what your mother did before she was even fully out of Moab. She was more loyal and faithful than most of the people living in Israel born here and going about their lives in the way that they saw fit rather than following God’s rule and law. So I had no trouble trying to bring her into the fold and make her feel welcome and comfortable like an insider.

I didn’t want her to ever leave my field. I wanted to begin to repay her for her amazing character and the sacrifices she had made in her life. So not only did I promise her safety in my field, but I also commanded my hired workers to not bother her or touch her or harm her or harass her. The edge of the fields is a great place to pick up widows who need a husband for security. I told them to keep their hands off! She would be able to work here in this very field in peace and safety. I even commanded them to draw water for her whenever she needed it. I just blurted it all out. I wanted her to know how blessed she should be. I would have given your mother the moon that day if I had it in my grasp.

She didn’t get me at all though! She fell on her face before me and acted like a total stranger no matter how I tried to make her feel welcome. She said something about me having favor on her. That was true. I did favor her, because of her great character and her commitment and selflessness. She couldn’t understand that I knew about her though. To her, I was some rich Israelite that laid eyes on her even though it went against our culture. She always did remind me of being a foreigner in those early days.

Sometimes people can’t help but remind you of their faults or shortcomings, the things they think that people see in them. Maybe people see these faults or not, but they announce them because they feel like everyone knows it already. Your mother was so afraid to be an insider. She didn’t know our customs very well then and she always felt like she was resigned to the life of a foreigner and a poor widow. She was stuck in that thinking and no matter how much I tried to bring her on the inside, she stayed an outsider by her choice.

All of us have people that feel like outsiders. A new kid in your class or a new neighbor. They don’t know how to interact and become insiders, even if they’re great people. But the duty is yours and mine, son, to help them fit in. We need to take the initiative and welcome them and bring them into the fold. Outsiders don’t need to be outsiders when we are hospitable.

So I told your mother why I was being so kind toward her. I explained that everyone knew what was quickly becoming the legend of the town, that Ruth the Moabite woman gave all to follow grandma and live a desolate meager existence with her. They had suffered so much together and your mother figured her life would always be poor and alone. But the Lord had other plans for both of us. That was the reason I lavished the gifts I did upon her. I wanted her to know that her background selflessness and strong character did bring rewards. And I was very happy to do it.
Your mother was beginning to feel a bit more like an insider, even though she reminded me she wasn’t like my maidservants. I know she has learned to fit in pretty well now, but back then she was so afraid of what others thought of me and of her and of grandma. We’re still working on some things. She told me that day that I comforted her. We all want to be accepted, and she was beginning to realize how wonderful that feeling is. She also was glad that I spoke from the heart, that I was genuine with her.

The most important thing that I could have done was shown her what it is like to be under the shadow of God’s wings. She had pledged her very life to God and to grandma. I wanted her to see that things are different in Israel than they were in Moab. When we call ourselves God’s people, son, we need to be good representatives. We need to show people how much better it is under His wings and in His kingdom. That’s another one of the duties of a person with character, to show what it would be like to live life God’s way. It is a choice we must all make every day.

Your mother continued working in the fields and I joined the men and we all worked very hard. As you know, son, there is a select window of opportunity to harvest, and then it is too late. The work continued steadily and we accomplished much. It was finally time for lunch. We all grabbed our lunch and prepared it and then I did something I had never done to the hired hands before.

It all started out normal, and then I couldn’t help myself. I think I scared some of them, but they get paid so I didn’t care. I called your mother over to eat with us. She was staying so far away from us, like she had some disease or something. Now it was customary for Israelites to not associate with foreigners, so I’m not surprised the workmen were a little uneasy, but this was all part of showing your mother that she wasn’t an outsider anymore and to show her the grace that God wanted to give her.

When you’re helping an outsider become an insider, you have to step out of your comfort zone. For some that means beating the peer pressure they feel from others to not be welcoming or inviting to certain people that don’t fit the mold of their little clique. For others, that means going against the cultural norms and reaching out to the people no one cares about or wants. The funny thing is that if we don’t get out of our comfort zone and help outsiders feel welcome, the Lord might not feel comfortable around us! We need to learn His hospitality and be as welcoming as He is! You won’t always get it right your first try, but you need to practice and be persistent.

The First Date (2:14-23). I called your mother over to eat with all of us, the field hands and myself. It was like pulling teeth to get your mother to come over, but she finally did and I handed her some food. As you know son, sharing a meal together is very special in all of Israel. It is not just food that we share but also our experiences and our lives together. To eat a meal together is to proclaim fellowship and oneness with others. So I was letting your mother know that she would fit right in.

A meal is a deep and sacred act to us. It goes deeper than filling our stomachs. During the meal time, we fill one another’s souls as well. To eat with someone is to proclaim them most
worthy and an intimate friendship. I didn’t know what else I could do to send your mother that clear message. So I did everything within my ability to send the message.

We ate for a while. It was only the second break your mother had that whole day. I gave and gave and gave. I filled her portion with as much as I could. She told me that she had been stuffed full and well satisfied. She even had a little left over. I wanted her to know that when the Lord provides, you always have a little left over. We forget that in His provision, but His servants don’t go without their needs being met. Ever.

We had a great time at meal as well. She was very quiet around the other men. I didn’t want to draw her out too much, but I could tell very much that I was interested in your mother from that one meal. Your mother is the whole package, son. She’s got character and looks and she’s beautiful on the inside and outside. That’s the kind of woman you need to be looking for, when you’re ready.

Yes, indeed, just like the woman at the end of Proverbs. You look to your mother, and you’ll learn just what you need in a wife. We tend to copy the people in our culture that seem successful or popular. Your mother was not popular. She was a foreigner and a widow. But she was more attractive to me than a thousand women! The most interesting thing was that the little she had left over, she packed it away and I never knew what became of it until later. Her actions with it only confirmed what I already knew about her.

You see, your mother packed that little bit away and took it home to your grandmother and gave it to her to eat. Even in being blessed by others, your mother sought to be a blessing to those in need. That’s why God blesses us, you know, so that we can be a blessing to others in need. Your mother was so selfless that even in the midst of her good fortune, she was thinking about how to give to someone else. That’s a lesson that we all need to learn.

Your mother’s always been all about her business. She arose from the table and was back out in the fields after lunch. Look, most of the poor that were there that morning were gone by lunch. But your mother worked until the day was over. I have always loved that about her. She doesn’t do things halfway and she doesn’t mind working hard. So I decided to surprise her with a blessing unlike any of the previous ones I gave.

I commanded the men to leave for her even the sheaves that they had already gathered. I told them to treat her like a queen, to let her glean even from the already harvested grain. She would have been so ashamed. And I knew that. So I made the men make her take it. I made those men an extension of God’s grace to her. After all, when a person’s been through so much tragedy in their lives, they won’t accept anything from anyone. But when you make them take it, it’s a different story. Sometimes, the gift has to be forced because the person will so refuse charity.

Once the evening came along, I could see your mother beating out the grain. I know I’ve showed you this before, son, but it’s always important to go over these things again. First you take the stalks of grain, right, just like that. Then you put them on something hard, like a threshing floor. And then comes the fun part! Yes, just like that. You beat them or stomp on them and the grains separate out of the sheaves and the chaff is separated out. then you store the grain. Sometimes when there’s a good wind, you can even let the wind carry the chaff away,
because it’s lighter than the grain. Your mother beat out a whole ephah of barley that evening! I know! It’s about 30-50 pounds! She was so strong to carry it all back to grandma too!

Once she had her grain, she went back into the city. Oh son, don’t say that. Bethlehem’s big enough to call it a city. After all, we live in the middle of nowhere out here. Fine. She went back into the village to meet with grandma. When she got there and grandma saw how industrious she was, she couldn’t help but think someone else had something to do with it. While she was eating the meal that your mother had given her from what was left at her own lunch, she told her all about me and how she found my field and what I had done. Of course your grandma figured someone had noticed your mother.

And indeed I did. When she told grandma my name, grandma remembered that I was a kinsman to her and grandpa. You see, son, a kinsman is very special in Israel. Since we’re all part of the same clan, we help one another out when we are in need. And grandma and your mother were certainly in need. Grandma knew that one of these needs was a redeemer, someone who could buy back property for the family to keep it in the family, but we’re getting ahead of ourselves.

Your mother told grandma all about how I had said she should come back to my field and glean only here, and grandma was agreeable to that. So that is how I met your mother, in my own field. God practically dropped her into my lap! She worked that whole harvest season in my field and I blessed her until she couldn’t handle it anymore. Your mother was finally seeing the blessing of her noble character. She had a stable place to work and get food from and a place to stay and live with a loving mother-in-law. The series of extremely unfortunate events was drawing to a close, and your mother was beginning to feel what it was like to be in Israel, but where she might have settled, God had different plans.

Conclusion

But son, that’s enough of the story of how your mother and I met for now. I’ve got to go work for a while and you need to get to your studies. I know you don’t want to, but it pays off in the end. Yes, just like noble character. Now off with you. Next time, I’ll tell you about the night that changed everything, and how your mother proposed to me!

Altar Call: Is there someone in your world, in your life, that is an outsider? One of our duties as believers is to show them the love and grace of Christ. We need creative ways to make them insiders. Maybe you feel like an outsider, like others don’t accept you. Acceptance in God’s house starts with how Jesus accepted us in the midst of our worst situation, when we were drenched and drowning in our sin. That is when Jesus accepted us and began to change us. If you have trouble accepting others in your life or don’t feel accepted, these altars are for you. God wants to lavish His love on you like Boaz lavished grace upon Ruth.

Also, you may be dealing with a time in your life where you’re not so sure that God repays noble and godly character with blessing and goodness. Look back on your life and see where God was working behind the scenes and how He has blessed you from an even darker
time in your life. He’s always working for our benefit. That’s the kind of God that we serve, that though we were strangers to His kingdom, He has welcomed us with open arms and led us into victory!