

# Ruth: Experiencing God's Hand In Your Life

## "Part 2: God's Hand in our Luck"

Text: Ruth 2:1-4

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on June 5, 2016 by Pastor Barton Priebe

### INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Please open your Bibles to Ruth 2.
- It was February 15, 1947. Glenn Chambers boarded a plane bound for Ecuador to begin his ministry in missionary broadcasting. But he never arrived. The plane crashed into a mountain peak and then dropped thousands of feet into a ravine.
  - Later it was learned that before leaving the Miami airport, Chambers wanted to write his mother a letter. All he could find for stationery was a page of advertising on which was written the single word "Why?" Around that word he hastily scribbled a final note. After Chambers' mother learned of her son's death, his letter arrived. She tore open the envelope and unfolded the letter. Staring her in the face was the question "Why?"
    - If God is really in control of all things then why are our lives so filled with dark clouds of pain, suffering, and trials?
- The book of Ruth begins with the why questions that go with suffering. As we saw last week Naomi's husband Elimelech dies in a foreign land along with her two sons. Naomi is embittered with God. Look at 1:20. **READ 20** - *Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.*
  - But Naomi does not see what we most often do not see when we are suffering. She does not see that God is already at work setting in motion a chain of events that will lead to her deliverance.
    - God's invisible hand is at work in the everyday ordinary events of life, including those things we call luck.
- You see there are no miracles in this story. Naomi's husband is not raised from the dead like Jesus raised Lazarus. Naomi and Ruth are not saved from starvation like when Jesus miraculously fed 5000 people with five loaves and two fish.
  - This story shows us that God's normal way of working is through what we call "providence". Providence is God's invisible hand working through ordinary everyday events to accomplish his good purposes.
- This is written for you - that when you are living in Ruth chapter 1 you would not fall into despair but that you would trust that God's invisible hand is at work in ways you cannot even possibly imagine, including seemingly lucky events.
  - Ruth teaches us that life is like a tapestry. From the underside it looks like a tangled mess of knots and threads. But the weaver knows what he is doing. Every stitch, every chance event, every lucky event, every random event in life, is stitched by God. From our view, none of it makes sense. But when the tapestry is turned over all the threads reveal a beautiful work of art.
    - So this morning I am praying that the providence of God would continue to comfort those who are suffering and I pray it would equip all of us to deal with the suffering that will most certainly come our way in this fallen world.
      - To that end, this morning I will break our message down into three parts: experiencing providential luck, understanding providential luck, and applying providential luck.

### EXPERIENCING PROVIDENTIAL LUCK

- **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** We begin then with part 1: experiencing providential luck.
  - Ruth chapter 2 begins strangely. **READ 1** - *Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.* That is strange because verse 1 interrupts the flow. It flows much better if you leave it out. **READ 1:22, 2:2.** *So Naomi*

*returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest... And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field.*

- Why this strange verse about Boaz? Unlike a detective story that keeps its secret until the end, the narrator of this story reveals the secret now. Why? So that we are in the know. So that we will know that what is about to happen, although it appears like pure luck, is not luck at all.
- In this verse we are introduced to Boaz. What a great name! We are told that he is Naomi's relative through Elimelech. What is important to know here is that in those days families had an obligation to help the wider family when needs arose. We also learn that Boaz was a 'worthy man'. This means he was a wealthy, single man of influence and noble character.
  - In 24 hours the invisible hand of God is about to completely change Naomi and Ruth's life through this man Boaz. Let's see how it happens.
- **READ 2** - *And Ruth the Moabite 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 and Naomi are taking advantage of a law God made for the poor.
  - Here is how it worked: a harvester would grab a handful of grain in his hand, cut it with a sickle and place it on the ground where it was bound in sheaves. If he missed a stalk or failed to put it into a sheaf it was to be left for the poor who would follow behind and glean what was left. In this way the poor had to work but they were provided for.
- Now Ruth goes out to glean but Naomi stays home. Why? Well she is older. But couldn't she help a bit? Is it possible that her bitterness against God has caused her to sink into depression and despair? We are not sure but we do not know that Ruth, who is also a bereaved widow, steps out in faith.
  - Notice her words. **READ 2b** - *Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor.* This word "favour" is so important in this chapter. She is hoping to find someone who will give her more than she deserves so that she and Naomi can have food to eat. She is looking for grace.
- Now watch what happens in verse 3. This is amazing. **READ 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.* This is brilliant story telling. A good storyteller does not directly interpret things for you but gives you obvious clues. Right here is *the* big clue.
  - Literally it reads, "*she just happened to happen*" on Boaz's field. We might say, "*as luck would have it.*" Now fields in those days did not have fences. There was no sign that said, "*Boaz's field.*" What are the odds? How many fields are there? And yet Ruth happens to happen on the field of a Boaz who as it is stated once again at the end of verse 3 is from the clan of Elimelech – from her deceased husband's family.
- It gets better. **READ 4** - *And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered, "The LORD bless you."* As Boaz is greeting his reapers Ruth is just about to leave the field.
  - We know this because if you look down at verse 8 you can see that Boaz asks her not to leave. **READ 8** - *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.* Why was she about to leave? The clues are in verse 9. **READ 9** - *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.*" It seems that Ruth tried to get a drink of water from the male reapers water supply. Upset about this, they do something that makes her feel uncomfortable enough to leave.
    - But just then, as luck would have it, Boaz pulls up in his Mercedes and his Armani suit. His lucky timing is perfect for he gets introduced to Ruth and as we will see next week Boaz saves Ruth and Naomi.

## UNDERSTANDING PROVIDENTIAL LUCK

- So here we have experienced what providential luck looks like. That brings us to our second heading. Our second heading is: **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** understanding providential luck. Let's reflect on what was just experienced.
  - Naomi and Ruth just happened to arrive at the barley harvest. Ruth just happened to pick the field of Boaz. and just when she is about to leave Boaz happens to arrive.
    - Is this just good luck? Are we making too much of this?
- A few years ago I read a book entitled *Survive the Savage Sea*. It is the story about a family called the Robertson's who sell off most of their earthly belongs, buy a 43-foot schooner and together with their teenage children decide to sail around the world.
  - When they are far off any shipping lines and in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, suddenly three gigantic whales strike the underside of their boat.
    - Mr. Robertson said this, ***"My senses reeled as I dropped to my knees and tore up the floorboards to gaze in horror at the blue Pacific through the large splintered hole punched up through the hull...water was pouring through with torrential force."***<sup>1</sup>
- The boat sank in one minute leaving the family stranded on their lifeboat with 3 days rations. Now this takes place on page 14. The book is 249-pages long. The rest of the book chronicles the 37 days they were stranded at sea.
  - It is filled with amazing stories like how they run out of water only to have it rain at the exact right time or how turtles would swim right up to their boat, which they could use for food.
    - Time and time again seemingly random events would occur to get them food and water as they fought to stay alive. Finally, on the 37<sup>th</sup> day a ship passed and saw them and they were saved.
- In the final chapter of the book, the author who is Mr. Robertson chronicles the impossible chances of survival on the sea, the chances of catching the food they needed to live, and the chances of their boat drifting exactly in line with a ship that should not have been in that area except for a change of course.
  - Then on the final page, listen to how he concludes the story: ***"For those who believe that a higher intelligence directed the movements of our craft, there is much evidence to sustain that belief. [I] simply believe that coincidence has a very long arm."***<sup>2</sup>

## ALL FOR THE WANT OF A NAIL

- The Bible knows nothing of coincidence or luck. All things, all events, are directed by the providential hand of God as he works out his good purposes in history. This includes the free actions of human beings. God never coerces human wills as if we are robots. The Bible teaches both that humans act freely and that God directs every event of our lives, the big and the small.
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** Proverbs 16:9 says, ***"in his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD directs his steps."*** This includes the most random moments of life. Think of that famous story in I Kings 22. Through one of his prophets God tells the wicked King Ahab that he will die in battle. God has decreed it. Ahab does not want this and so he dresses up as a common soldier. The plan works. The opposing army cannot find Ahab. Then I Kings 22:34 says, ***"But someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armor."***
    - You've heard the saying, 'the devil is in the details.' In reality it is God who is in the details. **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** God's invisible hand is not just directing the destiny of nations; it is directing the smallest and most random details of your life.
- And never underestimate the impact of small and seemingly random events. The smallest events have major consequences for they create a domino effect of events. As the old folk tale about the nail from horseshoe says,
  - ***"For want a nail the shoe was lost..."***

---

<sup>1</sup> Dougal Robertson, *Survive the Savage Sea*, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pg 249.

*For want of a shoe a horse was lost...*

*For want of a horse a rider was lost...*

*For want of a rider the battle was lost...*

*For want of the battle a kingdom was lost...all for the want of a nail."*

- One nail caused the loss of a kingdom.
- When Ruth stood deciding which field to enter she had no idea that the field she chose would set in motion a chain of events that would literally change the course of human history affecting even you and I. Think about it:
  - If Ruth chooses a different field she does not meet Boaz. No Boaz means no marriage to Boaz. No marriage means no baby boy named Obed. No Obed means that Obed does not grow up to father Jesse. No Jesse means that Jesse will not grow up to father David. No baby David means no King David. No King David means no promise of a Saviour through David's line. No promise means no Jesus. No Jesus means no cross. No cross means no resurrection. No resurrection means no salvation. No salvation means no Christianity. No Christianity means no western civilization as you know it today...and all because Ruth just happened to happen on the field belonging to Boaz.
    - Now obviously God could have worked out a different plan. It is not like he needed Ruth to make this happen. But the point is that in his providence God set a chain of events in motion that led to the salvation of his people through Jesus. The invisible hand of God is at work in the smallest and most random events of life.

## APPLYING PROVIDENTIAL LUCK

- We have experienced providence luck. We have tried to understand providential luck. Let's bring all this together in our last heading: **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** Applying providential luck. Let's apply it in a whole bunch of ways.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** First, God's providential luck should change the way we talk.
  - When you talk about events in life don't say things like, "*that was lucky.*" Take the opportunity to boast in the God. If you narrowly escaped an accident, or just happened to meet someone who gave you a job, use words that boast in how God's invisible hand is at work.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** Second, God's providential luck should give us confidence for the future.
  - Despite the pain she feels Ruth steps confidently into the future trusting that she will find favour. If you are human, you will face anxiety about the future – anxiety about money, a job, about whether you will get married, about where you will live, education costs, health...etc. The future is especially filled with anxiety for those like Ruth who are in trials.
    - But when you understand that God is not far off in space somewhere unconcerned about humanity and that your life is not the victim of blind forces like chance or karma, but rather that God's invisible hand is at work in the smallest and most random events in life, you can approach the future with confidence.
- Some of you have anxiety because you have not found a spouse. It could be that God's good plan is to have him serve you as a single person. But since most people get married could it not be that God is already setting events in motion that will lead you to your future spouse? Ruth had no idea that God's hand was bringing her a husband. Boaz, the most eligible older bachelor in Bethlehem had no idea he was about to meet his wife.
  - The only reason I met Heather at Columbia Bible College was because a back injury ruined her promising track and field career. Most couples I meet have a similar story of random events bringing the together.
- It is the same for jobs. Many of you worry about future work. But not many of us have jobs because we created them. Even then God lined up events for the job to work. Most of us just happened to know someone who knew someone who got us the job. Or our past jobs opened doors that opened doors that led us to where we are.

- Friends, the providence of God is what will save you from the paralyzing anxiety of the future. Approach the future with confidence because God’s providence will cause the most random events to come together so that his plan for your life might come to pass.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 9)** Third, God’s providential luck should produce thankfulness for the past.
  - It is almost impossible in the present moment to discern how the invisible hand of God is at work. So often I think I know but am wrong. God’s ways are mysterious. However, when we look at the past we can often discern how God’s invisible hand set certain events together.
- Kent Hughes tells a story a story that illustrates this well. One day his wife Barbara went in for a common surgical procedure. As he was waiting in the lobby a woman named Susie, who was a friend of his wife’s niece just happened to walk through. Although she worked in the hospital lab she never came to that part of the hospital. On that day, as luck would have it, she needed to use the ATM in the lobby. Kent and Susie chatted and she promised to visit Barbara the next day.
  - During Barbara’s surgery one of her arteries accidentally got nicked. She started to lose blood and they could not stop it. Her hemoglobin, which was 14 when she went into surgery, dropped to 4.9. She had lost 2/3 of the blood in her body and she just kept bleeding. As she was being rushed to ICU Susie just happened to come in with some magazines for Barbara.
    - Realizing a crisis was happening she turned to leave but then, as luck would have it, she overheard a pastor tell Barbara’s brother, *“you need to encourage her. She thinks she is going to die – something about her blood not clotting.”*
- Susie suddenly remembered an event that happened years ago when she and Barbara’s niece had randomly decided to do blood work on each other. As chance would have it, they discovered that Barbara’s niece had a rare blood disorder. She was warned that if she ever started bleeding severely she could die.
  - Remembering this, Susie ran to her lab, pulled up Barbara’s niece’s blood results, compared them with Barbara’s and realized they had the same disorder. She immediately contacted Barbara’s doctor who called a hematologist who brought the remedy – cryoprecipitate. Once it was administered the hemorrhaging stopped and Barbara’s life was saved.<sup>3</sup>
    - How many stories like this could you tell? Let your heart overflow with thankfulness.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** Fourth, God’s providential luck should motivate us to action.
  - We speculated that the reason Naomi did not go out in the fields was because her bitterness drove her to depression. Whether this is true or not for her it is often true for us. As Ian Duguid writes, *“When we stop believing in God’s goodness and give ourselves over to doubt and worry, we easily sink into a despairing inactivity. This can lead to a downward spiral in which our inactivity makes our situation worse and deepens our despair, which in turn makes us feel less inclined than ever to step out into what we believe to be a hostile world.”*<sup>4</sup>
    - What will get you going again is the gracious providence of God – trusting that as you get up like Ruth did and step out into the world hoping for favour, you will find that God has already lined up events. The providence of God is the greatest incentive to work hard and step out in faith because you know God is already at work. In what area do you need to get off the couch and step out in faith today?
- **(SHOW SLIDE 11)** Finally, God’s providential luck should convince us of God’s love for us. Naomi rightly understood that God’s providence directs all things. But she misunderstood God’s heart. She thought the Almighty was against her and she became embittered. There is nothing wrong with directing one’s complaint to God. Job did this. The psalmist did this. Let’s not be too hard on Naomi. But what she did not understand was that God is not only sovereign, He is also good. He is not against her. He is for her. The rest of the story makes that clear.

<sup>3</sup> Kent Hughes, *Luke: That you May Know the Truth*, 313-315.

<sup>4</sup> Iain Duguid, *Esther & Ruth* (Reformed Expository Commentary), 157.

- The only remedy for a heart that is growing bitter with God is to ponder the heart behind the hand. God's heart is always one of love for his people. How can you know this when it seems that your circumstances say otherwise? Look to the cross.
  - Romans 8: ***"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*** How do you know that God is for you? ***"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"***
- There is an amazing scene in the movie *Clash of the Titans*. At the very end Zeus, the supreme god of Olympus, saves humanity through his son Perseus. He points out how much he helped Perseus along the way. Zeus says, ***"I wanted men to worship us again but I didn't want it to cost me a son."*** Zeus' love for humanity has limits. He would not go so far as to sacrifice his own son. But oh not the God of the Bible. Be staggered by this: God the Father gave up His Son that you might be his child. If he did not love you why would he do this?
  - This is how you must prepare for trials and suffering. This is how you keep going in suffering. It is wonderful that God's hand is guiding every event but what is even better is that the heart behind that hand always aimed at your ultimate good, which is becoming more like Jesus.