

Good morning, friends! Welcome to Foothills Church. My name is Phil. I'm one of the pastors here and it's an honor for me to worship and spend time in God's Word with you today. If I haven't yet met you, I'd love to. Come up and say, "Hi" before you leave today. It would be great to get to know you.

Recap & Intro

We're in our fourth week of this series in Ruth, called 'Profound Provision,' and today we're going to see God do some amazing things to provide for Naomi and Ruth. If you've missed any of the messages so far, here's a brief recap:

- A famine hit Israel, so Elimelech moved Naomi and his family out of Bethlehem to the land of Moab in search of a better life.
- While they were in Moab trying to make things work, Elimelech died.
- Later, Naomi's sons married Moabite women—not what God wanted at all.
- Then the sons died, leaving Naomi alone with her daughter's-in-law, Orpah and Ruth.
- Naomi's world collapsed. Her dream for a better life ended up becoming a bitter life.
- She later heard that God had come to the aid of His people, and courageously gathered up her things and headed back home to Bethlehem.
- Orpah and Ruth set out with her—and after a very emotional discussion, Orpah headed back to Moab, but Ruth stuck with Naomi, her people and her God.
- They arrive in Bethlehem, and everyone remembers Naomi—but they're amazed at the change they saw in her. She's older, worn by the harshness of life—and she's bitter. She's confused, sad and even angry

at God because she feels like God's been against her. She's been journeying through hardship trying to do the right thing, humbling herself...pushing through her fears...taking some risks...to get back to the place God wants her to be.

- And it was the beginning of barley harvest (1:22).

We're going to pick up right where Dillon wrapped up last week. If you haven't already opened your bibles, make sure to find your way to Ruth, chapter two (I'll be reading from the ESV). As you turn there, I want for you to think of a time in your life when you were blessed in a completely unexpected and surprising way. Something over-the-top that you never saw coming that just blew your mind. [wait] Have you got something? If so, write it down in your notes. It will help you identify with Ruth in some amazing ways as we go through this morning's text. If you haven't yet thought of something, don't worry, you'll get there.

Blessed by Friends

For Nancy and me, one of the most profound, unexpected blessings came to us when we were living in Chico, ministering at a church up there. We had one child, a second one on the way, and little, tiny cars. We didn't have a car that was reliable that could fit all of us comfortably or safely. And, very soon, we were going to leave Chico and head across the country for seminary.

Some sweet friends from church, mentors, spiritual leaders in our lives, found out that our car situation wasn't good. So, they pitched in and bought us a used, but reliable, safe and functional minivan from another family at our church. The sellers sold it for way less than its value and the other friends pitched in a fat wad of cash to buy the van for us. They showed up with a card, signed by the crew, with the title inside and the van parked in our driveway—all clean and shiny. They were so excited. We were blown away. Who does that? God does that—through His people—to meet our needs in ways we never considered or saw coming.

We're going to see this same kind of thing, but way better, as we look at today's text. Look at Ruth 2:1-3 and follow along as I read.

Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ²And 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." ³So 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.

God guides Ruth to Boaz (v 1-3)

This is where we meet the third, and final, main character of the story: Boaz. He's part of Elimelech's extended family (that's important as we'll see later in the book). Boaz, whose name means mighty warrior—valiant defender, was a man of standing, a man of influence, not rich but with modest wealth, known for his good character, leadership and godliness.

Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem and the next thing we read, very likely the next morning, Ruth (notice that she's still called the 'Moabite', a foreigner in the land) asks her mother-in-law if it's okay to go glean in the fields for food. Gleaning was what the poor, orphaned, widowed and foreigners were legally allowed to do to try to get by. Gleaners followed behind the reapers, usually men, who cut down that stalks of standing grain and put them into piles. Then, women came behind the men to put the piles into wrapped bundles (called sheaves), making them easier to handle and transport. The gleaners were allowed to walk the field and pick up any stalks or bits that remained (or, if it was a vineyard, any grapes that were still on the vine after harvest). They weren't employees, they were poor, needy people who, God said, were allowed to gather whatever they could after the harvesters were done. Gleaning was a tough way to try to get by. Imagine trying to gather enough aluminum cans every day so you could get some food. Gleaning was rough.

And Ruth was ready to get after it. She knew that she may not be able to just walk into a field and glean. She may be chased away (especially as a foreigner). So, her hope, was to find someone who would have favor on

her and give her permission to glean. That word favor comes up repeatedly in today's text. Watch for it.

Naomi was still stuck, bitter, and angry. She was kind of shut down. All she had to say to Ruth is, "Go, my daughter." So, off she goes. She left town, because the fields were outside of the city walls, and 'happened' to arrive at Boaz's field. There were no fences separating the land, so a 'field' could look like a sea of barley and that field was broken up into sections belonging to different families. And wouldn't you know it? Ruth ended up at Boaz's field. She doesn't know that, but we do! The ESV says, "and she happened to come to" and the NIV says, "As it turned out..." The Hebrew for this little 'coincidence' is more like, 'as her chance chanced' or 'as her hap happened.' The absurd exaggeration of the words is intended to help the reader understand that arriving at Boaz's field is no coincidence, it isn't chance, it isn't luck: It's God taking care of the one who trusted Him.

Application Point

There's no such thing as 'coincidence' for God's people. And that does *not* mean that everything is predetermined, or that we are fated. We have free will, but the God we worship is sovereign. Everything that happens in our lives is filtered through His loving hands, so to speak. He works through our circumstances and situations to accomplish His purposes for our sake and for His glory. Western culture calls it chance or luck. The Hebrew Bible calls it "the sovereign hand of God."¹ God guided Ruth to Boaz...there was not luck involved. Oh, and just in case you forgot, Boaz is part of the clan of Elimelech (that's the last part of verse three).

God Provides for Ruth Through Boaz (v 4-16)

Take a look at verses 4-7 with me. [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." ⁵ Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" ⁶ And the

¹ Younger, Jr., K. Lawson. *The NIV Application Commentary: Judges/Ruth* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2002), 451.

servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. ⁷ She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.' So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest."

I love this! Verse 4, 'And wouldn't you know it...Boaz shows up!' God is taking care of Ruth and, as we'll see, Naomi, but the only One who knows what's happening is God.

The first thing we hear from Boaz are words of blessing and assurance of God's presence among them, "The LORD be with you!" 'God is with you, friends. He's right here as you begin your workday, enabling you to work and to enjoy the fruit of your labor.' Remember, this is the time of the judges where everyone did what was right in their own eyes. It was a time of perversion, godlessness and an overflow of sin in the lives of the people. Boaz's character stands in stark contrast to [the godlessness around him] all that. And his guys respond in kind, "The LORD bless you." Can you imagine what your workplace would be like if that's how greetings were exchanged every morning? Even if you're the only one blessing your coworkers, your character and work ethic could be so different, that you are a blessing to them.

About Ruth

Boaz takes a look into the field and notices a new 'someone' out there. That's interesting to me. He's the boss. He has men and women working for him. And he knows his people so well that a new face is quickly noticed, 'Who's that?' His foreman gets Him up to speed, highlighting several, key things.

First, the foreman notes that Ruth is a foreigner mentioning it twice in the same sentence. In the same breath, He also notes her character: she is the one who has been loyal to Naomi. She's the one who was polite and asked if she could "please" glean in your field. She's also a hard worker, only taking one break since work began. What we see is a godly woman of good character being placed in the presence of a man with the same

qualities. God has set them up. And this is where it begins to get really good. Check out verses 8-9 with me. [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. 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."

Do you see what's happening? God is working through His servant, Boaz, to provide for Ruth. It's risky for her to be out there by herself. She's a foreign woman and that could be dangerous for her. There were no promises that the men in the fields nearby would be kind or gracious or gentle with her. There's a good chance that she would have been, or had already been, harassed, hooted at, disparaged and discouraged from working in the fields nearby. So, Boaz is giving Ruth a safe place to work. "My daughter" he says...it's endearing, it's genuine concern for Ruth. He's probably middle-aged (but can still see clearly!) and she's lots younger, so he has a protective heart toward her. 'Stay with my girls. Stay in my fields. I've specifically told the guys to leave you alone—no cat calls or anything like that. And, when you're thirsty, you come draw water from the most convenient place where people under my care drink. You don't have to find some other watering hole or source; you drink your fill right here with my people.' Traditionally, women drew water for the men and foreigners had to draw their own water. But that's not how it works with Boaz.

Can you see it? Ruth is looking for food, but God has plans to give her so much more. Boaz offered not only to protect her but to provide for her! Friends, we go through seasons when we think we know what we need: If I just had a better job. If only my marriage was better. If I just had a bigger home. If I just had a nicer car. If I could just graduate. If I could just get married. If my family could just get along. We think we know what we need, and God doesn't have a problem with you having a good job or healthy marriage & family or a nicer car—but what if He wants to give you more than that? I'm *not* talking about prosperity gospel stuff. I'm talking

about trusting Him, even as you work diligently with the skills and strength He gives you, to lead you and guide you and provide for you in ways that you never saw coming. What if all that you're going through isn't just 'bad luck' or 'coincidence,' but God's sovereignty in your life? What if God, in His goodness, is putting stuff together that you would never even consider asking for? That's what Ruth is experiencing. More than she could have hoped for is being given her without even asking. She just wanted to find favor with someone so she could glean.

Look at Ruth's response in verses 10-13. [READ]

¹⁰Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" ¹¹But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. ¹²The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" ¹³Then she said, "I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants."

The more I see of Ruth, the more I like her. She bows, kneeling down, forehead to the ground, in a demonstration of humility and deep appreciation and follows with, 'Why would you do this for a foreigner? How is it that I've found favor in your eyes?' There's that 'favor' word again. It's exactly what she said she hoped to find before she left Naomi (v 2). And Boaz doesn't miss a beat: 'I know your story. I know all that you lost: your husband, your family, your country. I also know your loyal love, your sacrificial heart, your faithfulness.' And he makes this declaration, like a prayer, 'The only One who could repay you for all you've done is God Himself. May you be rewarded by the LORD; under Whose wings you have taken refuge.' Boaz is telling Ruth that God sees her. He knows exactly who she is and that He will take good care of her as she continues to trust Him.

Under His Wings

I'm sure you've seen pictures of baby birds, little chicks, huddling under the wings of their moms, staying warm and protected. Boaz recognizes that Ruth has chosen to get 'under the wings' of the LORD. Just as she told Naomi in 1:16, "Your God will be my God." Ruth has trusted God, placed her faith in Him and has drawn close to Him. But here's the piece I want to draw out: You can't get under God's wings from a distance, you have to get close to Him. Some of you want to trust God but you're afraid to get close. That will never work, friend. You've got to trust Him and get close. You've got to trust Him to protect you and provide for you—and you can't do that from afar. You won't enjoy all that He has for you if you're not close to Him. So, the question is: what's keeping you at a distance? *It's not Him*. He wants you close. So, what is it? Fear. Pride. Uncertainty—don't know what to expect. Whatever it is, you need to know, that He's ready to pull you close. What do you want to do? He's willing to forgive you, to cleanse you, to restore you. Place your faith in Him. Trust Him. "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8).

Ruth is watching this unfold and she's totally blown away. Never in her life has she experienced such kindness from a stranger. And, at this point, she has no idea that God is behind it all. But He is because He takes care of those who trust Him. Ruth says that Boaz has brought her comfort by providing a safe workplace for her and through his kind words. She's overwhelmed because she doesn't even have the status of one of his servants, and he treats her so wonderfully. She feels cared for, valued, and seen. She's stunned. Boaz's prayer of blessing is being answered through Boaz himself! God is using Boaz to bless Ruth. Who saw that coming? God is amazing and His is good. But wait, there's more! Check out the last four verses (14-17). [READ]

Boaz Provides Plenty

¹⁴ And at mealtime [lunch] Boaz said to her, "Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine." So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. ¹⁵ When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the

sheaves, and do not reproach her. ¹⁶ And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.”

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.

Picture it...lunchtime. Maybe it was more of a hearty snack to get the crew through the rest of the workday. Boaz invites Ruth (the foreign, widow, gleaner) to join his crew and eat with them. By doing that, Boaz “elevated her status above that of ‘honored gleaner.’ She now belonged to his circle...”² She sat *among* the reapers, ate bread and roasted grain until she was full (how long had it been since she ate enough?). She even had leftovers to take home with her.

When lunch was over, she went back to work. And, unbeknownst to her, Boaz added to her blessing. He told his guys to ‘give her the good stuff—let the sheaves come apart and handfuls of stalks to ‘drop out of the bunch.’ Let her be near the other women on the team, not out with the gleaners. Let Ruth have the best of the grain and don’t harass her in any way—don’t hoot or cat call or embarrass her ever. Let her have anything she wants.’ Friends, God used Boaz to be a source of blessing in Ruth’s life. He’d been blessed to be a blessing.

Application Point

That’s true for all of us: we’ve been blessed to be a blessing to others. You may be thinking, ‘I don’t have much. I don’t own a company. I don’t have a lot of money. I’m not influential or powerful.’ Okay. That may be true. But what *do* you have? Maybe you have time to help someone with a task. Perhaps you have a good mind to help a student with math. Maybe you have a car and can give someone a ride to church or work or the store or the doctor. Maybe your passion for cleanliness could be a blessing to a busy family with little ones who just can’t seem to get caught up. We don’t know how our lovingkindness will bless someone—but I do know that God wants us to use whatever we’ve got to be a

² Hubbard, Jr., Robert L. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Ruth* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1988), 174.

blessing to others. Remember the story in Matthew 14 where the little boy's five loaves and two fish were used by Jesus to feed 5,000 (and there were leftovers!)? You may not think you have much, but what can God do with your time, talent, treasure and willing heart?

You may not know it, but you could end up being the blessing that someone never saw coming—like Nancy & I experienced when our friends showed up with a new-to-us minivan. Ask the LORD how He wants to use you. Ask Him to help you see, to notice, the new person on your block, in your row at church, in your class or at your work. God takes care of those who trust Him and He just might use you to help do it.

Wrap

At the end of the day, Ruth threshed her grain and went home with more than 30 pounds, 5 ½ gallons, of barley. That was two weeks of food for Naomi and her. One day's work: two weeks of food. When was the last time she, or Naomi, had seen that kind of abundance? She probably couldn't remember the last time she'd eaten so well. It was all because Boaz was kind, generous and caring. He was a godly man, used by God, to lavish abundant blessings on Ruth. Those surprise blessings were only a surprise to Ruth...God knew exactly what He was going to do and how His man, Boaz, would play a key role in this and so much more.

[Main: As the worship team plays, I'd like you to think about what it means to take refuge under the wings of the One Who loves you best and most.]

Close

As I close, here are a few things I hope you'll hold onto: Trust Him. Take refuge under His wings and draw close. Notice those around you. Be prepared and willing to be the source of blessing in another's life. Remember that there's no such thing as luck or chance: God's got you. Surprise blessings are only a surprise to the recipient because God knew what He wanted to do all along. He takes care of those who trust Him, even if it comes in unexpected ways.