

**** I Want to give another shout out reminder for the Pro-life Prayer Walk - Nov 11.** Thousands of believers all over our nation will be praying outside Planned Parenthood centers in their cities. This will be organized by Love Life ministries (my shirt) and include a time of prayer, worship, and testimonies. This is not a protest, but a time of prayer and worship from 9-11. It will be at Sutter's Landing Park in Sacramento. See Malinda on the patio today to register or get more info. (Look for the Love Life T-shirt like I'm wearing today).

Introduction:

Today we take another step in this amazing story of God's providence in the short story about the life of Ruth in the Old Testament.

We've learned so far that God's providence is at work:

- *When times are hard*
- *When we're starting over again*
- *When it seems, God is against you*
- *When unexpected blessings come your way*

And **today** we'll learn: **God's providence is often behind things that seem coincidental in our lives.**

We've all had those experiences in life when things happen, and we look back and we might think, what a coincidence! Recently a friend of mine was driving his truck down South Shingle Road and a tree fell on the top and rear of his truck totaling it, but he walked away unscathed. One second sooner and he likely would have been killed. One second later and it might have missed him altogether. Coincidence? I'd say, "No way."

Our Ladies Bible study calls these types of experiences, “God sightings.” Now, you can over-spiritualize this or get pretty fanciful with it. But fundamentally, it’s true—God’s providence is often behind things that might seem coincidental in our lives.

These are times when just the right thing, or series of things happen at just the right time. Or someone came along to help you at just the right time. Or you “just happened” to run into someone at just the right time... for them, or for you. I’ve heard some rename these experiences “God-incidences.”

They say that because they recognize that— and this is what the book of Ruth keeps pointing out—they recognize **God is at work in those times that seem like random coincidence**. We’re going to see this in a big way today as we dive into the story of Ruth.

[**Transition**] - Let’s set the stage for where we are going to pick up the story today.

Setting the stage

After returning from a life far from God in a place called Moab (and all of us have lived in places like Moab), Naomi and Ruth have begun settling into Naomi’s old hometown—Bethlehem—the House of Bread.

Ruth decides that her life needs to get started again—so she starts working as a gleaner in a field owned by a wealthy businessman named, Boaz. Boaz owns fields outside of Bethlehem—the very region where generations later, a lowly group of shepherds hear the angelic announcement of the birth of Jesus.

Ruth knows nothing about Boaz. She has seen his kindness and benevolence to his staff and even to her. He invites her to remain and glean only in his fields—and among his harvesters and servant girls. He

invites her to his table to eat of his provisions. He offers her roasted grain until she is full.

Then he dispatches his harvesters with the instructions to drop some good stalks in her path so as to give her plenty—and by the time she is finished working, she’s got enough grain threshed out to feed her and Naomi for weeks. She has had one great day of gleaning!

She packs up her grain and starts for home. It is a heavy load, but she is very excited about her highly productive day. And she’s really curious about her surprise encounter with Boaz. What might this encounter mean? But as surprised as she was to have met Boaz and experience his kindness, there was an even bigger surprise awaiting her. That is what we want to learn about today...

[Transition]- So, to get the flow, lets pick things up in 2:17-23. Look there with me.

One of the lessons I think we can take away from this part of the story today is that...

Unique or unusually favorable circumstances are often more than coincidence (vv.18-19).

Picture it...Ruth is hustling home with her huge bag of grain on her shoulder...what’s she thinking about the day she just had?

She may have wondered:

> How crazy is it that of all the fields I chose to glean in, I would step onto one whose owner was so kind and generous.

>She might have recalled how Boaz showed up, calling out to his workers with such a kind a special blessing from the God...from the same God Naomi worships.

>Maybe she rehearsed Boaz' personal words to her—how he knew of her...and how he affirmed her character and reputation—pronouncing a special blessing on her. The blessing is in verse 12, *"May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge"* (2:12).

>She had to wonder...could all this really be happening? How in the world could things have taken such an awesome turn in my favor in such a short time.

Obviously, we have no way of knowing if Ruth was thinking like this or not. But here's one thing we know reading this part of the story:

>It was **no accident** that Ruth ended up in Boaz' field that day. As Phil pointed out last week, the Hebrew word choice and structure make it clear...this was not happenstance. This was not a coincidence.

>So...it was no accident that Ruth met Boaz.

>It was no accident that she was given such kind and benevolent treatment by him.

There is something going on behind the scenes in every part of this story—and especially here.

[Application] - For Ruth—and for us—when unique or unusually favorable circumstances occur in our lives, they are OFTEN more than mere coincidence—way more.

Here's a few things we have to keep in mind when unique or unusually favorable circumstances occur in our lives...

A. *God's providence is at work displaying kindness in order to reveal Himself.*

God loves Ruth and wants to lead her to a place where she can see clearly who He is. He's been leading her for several months—and she probably doesn't realize it. God chose to bring a young woman from

Moab—into the place and space of His kindness and mercy—so that she might **know Him**.

And to do that, he allows the doubt and faithlessness of Elimelech, who took his family from the house of bread to sojourn in a place like Moab. While there, his life ended. But God allows Mahlon (whose name means “sick or weak”) to marry a young lady named, Ruth (whose name means, “pleasant”). And then Mahlon dies along with his brother Kilion (whose name means something like, “tired”) Can you imagine naming your kids kids “sick” and “tired?”?

Here's something wild to think about. God chose the unusual means of death and heartache to dislodge Naomi from the anguish of a foreign land in hopes of re-establishing herself back at the house of bread.

What we're witnessing in all of this is God drawing Ruth—ever so patiently—ever so purposefully—to a place where she meets the God she swore to her Naomi she would follow. Remember her pronouncement—where you go, I go. Your people, my people. YOUR GOD MY GOD!

Now, we have to stop here for a second! Because I don't want you to miss this. God is plucking out a lowly Moabite—who had no right to be among God's covenant people. He plucks her from a place far from him and works to bring her close to him. That's what God does! He calls the unlikely, he calls the one we would never assume would be the object of His kindness or love.

Please realize...this is exactly how salvation works.

- It doesn't come to the deserving.
- It doesn't come to those who think they've figured it out.
- It doesn't come to the one who has the highest intelligence
- And it doesn't come to the one with the greatest wealth.

It comes in a way that seems so random—so unexpected—even unnatural.

[Application] - I wonder if God might be drawing someone here today just like that? Weeks, months, years have come and gone—and now you're moving along a path you never expected—it feels like God is doing something cool in your life...he has you here today...perhaps even your friends and family are as surprised as you are! How are you going to respond to God's loving pursuit of you? I want to talk more about that at the end of this message.

[Transition] - As I was thinking about this story in Ruth, I was struck by the idea that...when it comes to unique or unusually favorable circumstances in life...

B. Some recognize God's fingerprints while others don't.

Some people realize that God is doing something—that he's at work—while others don't see his work at all—or at least they don't recognize it at the moment.

I've met a lot of people whose circumstances seem to be so obviously the hand of God leading and preparing them for that place where they can see His love for them and respond to it. But some see this and respond—others don't. That's the mystery of our salvation and God's providence.

He's working, always working, but not everyone sees Him working. I'm wondering if you recognize his activity in your life.

You might want to take an honest look—as honestly as you are able—take a second look at your life. Does God have you in a place where he's using the unique or unusually favorable situations in your life to reveal Himself to you. Of course, the opposite could also be true. God may also choose to use routine or even unfavorable situations in life to reveal himself to you.

Over the years, I've heard people tell me it was their cancer, their failed business, or their marriage struggles that brought them back to Jesus. God is sovereign and can use whichever means he wants.

But I personally think that *His kindness is his specialty*. Romans 2 tells us the "kindness of God leads us to repentance." That means God uses his kindness to lead us to his salvation.

[**Transition**] - And in our story today, God uses his kindness to Ruth to lead her to an encounter with her kinsman-redeemer.

God uses his kindness to introduce us to our kinsman-redeemer (v.20).

God's kindness isn't coincidental. It is purposeful. He intentionally uses kindness to lead Ruth to see the kind of God he is. This part of the story creates some wonderful dramatic tension. Naomi has no idea where Ruth has been gleaning. She has no idea how she could have possibly brought home such an amazing harvest in just one day! All she could think about is how blessed Ruth was to end up wherever she had been that day and declare her hope that God would bless whoever it was who showed Ruth such favor and grace.

Then, in the narrative, Ruth comes to the end of her explanation, nearly interrupting Naomi: **"The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz," she said** (Ruth 2:19b). Now comes the part of the story that is so revealing and powerful! Naomi **knows who Boaz is**—he is a relative and one who had the right to fix their unfortunate situation. For the first time in the book, the designation of **"kinsman-redeemer"** is mentioned.

[**Transition**] - Now who or what is a kinsman-redeemer and why is he important? Let's unpack this...

A. The kinsman-redeemer played a critical role in Ruth's day.

Here's the history: The law of Moses made provision for various hardships that might fall on individuals in the community of God's people. Deuteronomy 25 outlines the basic role of the kinsman-redeemer.

The two primary hardships where a kinsman-redeemer could make the world of difference was:

1) When a woman was widowed and childless, a kinsman-redeemer (the brother or relative of the deceased) would fulfill his responsibility to take on the widow as his wife so that the name of the deceased would be preserved. This was known as *levirate marriage*.¹

2) The other hardship was when someone who had become impoverished and had sold himself into slavery. He/she could be "bought back" by a kinsman-redeemer. The title, Redeemer means basically, *"the one whose right it is to buy back."*

These two hardships were the primary functions of the kinsman-redeemer. But there was also the "avenger of blood kinsman." The "avenger of blood" kinsman was the who carried out the death penalty on the one who murdered their deceased family member.²

The kinsman-redeemer was God's way of coming to the aid of those who needed rescue—or justice or both. This system—the kinsmen redeemer, provided:

1. Hope for the poor
2. Comfort for the grieving
3. And dignity and justice for those who had been unjustly treated.

There may be no greater or beautiful picture of benevolent help than what the kinsman redeemer provided among God's people.

But to be a kinsman redeemer, you had to qualify:

¹ Bower, R.K., Knapp, G. L. "Marriage; Marry". *The New International Bible Encyclopedia*. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids. 1986. 263.

² Motyer, J. A. "Avenger of Blood". *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Walter Elwell, Editor. Baker Books: Grand Rapids. 1984. 107.

Only certain people qualified to play the role of kinsman-redeemer.

- a. To qualify, the kinsman-redeemer had to be a blood-relative. No exceptions.
- b. Secondly, he had to have the “means” or “ability” to redeem.
- c. Third, he had to be willing. The kinsman-redeemer, for reasons of his own, may not be willing. In some cases, it would make sense—in others, it would be embarrassing if he was a relative and had the ability to redeem but refused to do so when he could. This was frowned upon heavily. In fact, the guy was basically publicly humiliated at the town gate—spit in the face...and sandal slapped.
- d. Finally, he had to actually carry out the transaction—meaning he had to pay in full whatever the ransom price was.

When Naomi informs Ruth that Boaz is a kinsman redeemer—she is saying that by blood, Boaz is related...he qualifies, and that he has the ability to do it. But was he willing? Would he actually carry this out? Naomi could only hope...and now Ruth may have been wondering...

One can only imagine the curiosity that this piqued in Ruth when considering the amazing day she had just had with Boaz—and to come home and discover that this was a kinsman-redeemer!?

Before we finish this development in the story, I think it’s important to point out...

B. The kinsman-redeemer role is just as critical for each of us today.

We need a redeemer too. Just like Ruth, our poverty of soul and enslavement to sin requires a ransom. For our names to live on, they must be written in the Lamb’s book of life. Is your name written there? And just like in ancient times, today...***Only Jesus Christ qualifies, is capable, and is willing to pay the role of our redeemer.***

Think about it.

1. He qualifies because He is related to us by taking on flesh.

The writer of Hebrews declares, *“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death”* (Heb. 2:14). He qualifies.

2. He qualifies because he is able to redeem us.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich”* (2 Cor. 8:9). He qualifies.

3. He qualifies because he is willing.

Jesus Christ *“gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good”* (Titus 2:14). *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Mk. 10:45). He qualifies.

4. Finally, He qualifies because he actually did pay the ransom.

In Ephesians we read that, *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace...”* (Eph. 1:7). He qualifies!

Like Ruth, you and I need a Redeemer. And the truth is, like Ruth, we also have one! He is our redeemer—one whose right it is to buy back—to pay the ransom—his name is Jesus the Christ.

This is the story within the story of Ruth and Boaz. But it is also our story—It is every person’s story.

The passionate cry of Job in his darkest moment expresses our hope in the reality of our Kinsmen-redeemer: *“For I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has*

been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me” (Job. 19:25)!

Did you know that YOU have a kinsman-redeemer?

Did you know that He is Jesus, the Christ?

Do you need to embrace your redeemer today?

And did you know that through God’s kindness, he has been leading you to the place where you can recognize and embrace him. You can do that today...you can do that right now!

REMEMBER: It’s NOT a coincidence that you are here today hearing this message.

Reflect on where you are with God in your life. I want to invite you to draw near to your redeemer—open your heart to him for the first time...or re-commit to him for the first time in a long time.