

Understanding God's Providence

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Ruth 2:1-23

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Ruth chapter two. If you got a Bible from an usher that's page 247, 247. Ruth chapter two, if you are there and you are able, please stand for the reading of God's word. Ruth chapter two, we're just going to read the first three verses to set the context. So Ruth chapter two, verse one. Now Naomi had a relative of her husband, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech whose name was Boaz. And Ruth and 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." 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 the clan of Elimelech. That is God's word. You may be seated. As you are, let's pray one more time, ok.

God, I'm praying now, not because it's formal or some ritual. I'm praying because truthfully, nothing of any spiritual worth happens in these services unless you do the things that only you can do. So I pray that you would take these truths and open our eyes to them. I pray that you would you would remove hard hearts and replace them with soft hearts. I pray that you would remove spiritual blindness, replace it with spiritual sight. Take these truths and make them real in each of our lives, I pray.

And right now I'm sure pastor Jared is praying over at Trinity Church in Mesa so I pray that you would bless his preaching right now. Pray that you would use it to do the same things to soften hearts and to open eyes and to give grace so that people leave the Trinity Church in Mesa, leave us here today at Redeemer more desiring to live for Jesus because what they see in your Word. Do that there and do that here, please I pray. In Jesus name, Amen.

So last week I ended our time together by talking about a poem that uh written by a man named William Cooper. William Cooper I learned this week was one of England's most famous poets in the late 1700s, today poets don't make that much money I don't think, but he was one of the most famous then. God saved him after spending 18 months in a mental hospital after attempting suicide. He battled depression and despair his entire life, but that didn't stop him from writing with the encouragement of John Newton, you know the man who wrote Amazing Grace. Because of John Newton's impact on his life, Cooper wrote the song that I read last week, God Moves in a Mysterious Way. And I want to remind you of the first two verses of that song, it starts like this.

The first, God Moves in a Mysterious Way, his wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm. You think about it, the scariest, the most uncontrollable forces in our experience. That would be storms, hurricanes and things like that, as well as the seas and the ocean. Both of those, he is so calm he just walks over them. He just kinda glides, rides right over the top of them both. The second line goes like this. Deep in unfathomable minds of never-failing skill. He treasures up his bright designs and he works his sovereign will. Listen, God has designs. He has plans for all of his people, and it is this with an incomprehensible amount of skill that God works those plans out in the lives of his people. This is what we're going to see in the life of Ruth and in the life of her mother-in-law, Naomi.

However, from these events in this account, we're all going to better understand God's providence. Now you might be sitting there, God's providence, what in the world does that mean? God's providence is just a 50-cent word for God working his will out in the events of history. It's his guidance of all people, all events, all things based on what he planned to happen. He directs everything to do what he wants it to do, every single thing. There is not a single atom that is out of control and not doing what he wants it to do. Even the role of the dice, just just rolling the dice. Proverbs 16:33 says it's every decision is from the Lord. And what I'm saying about God's providence is really just a restatement of Ephesians 1:11, where it says that God "works all things according to the council of his will."

So he's taking all things and he's working them, he's maneuvering them and he's orchestrating them to do exactly what his wise, perfect, good will had decided for them to do. You can see this in the words of Nebuchadnezzar, do you remember him? He was the Babylonian king who went crazy for a little while because he got so arrogant and prideful. And then what happens is he comes to his senses after seven years of being crazy, and the first words out of his mouth are a testimony to God's providence.

He says, "God does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth." Did you catch that? He's working in the heavens and he's working on the earth to do whatever he wants to do. Everything. And really there are some passages in the Bible that make absolutely no sense, unless this is true. Like James 1:17, every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from God. Anybody have any good things in their life, anything good? Every single good thing that you or I have ever experienced is evidence that God is working in our lives. Everyone, even even your synapse is firing in your brains right now, all of that a gift from God. And then there's Romans 8:28. We know, not guess, wish, or hope. We know that God causes all things to work, work together for the good of those who love God. This verse can't be true unless God is using all people, all events, all things to do what he planned for them to do.

And this is what we're going to see in the people in the book of Ruth. And if you weren't here last week, I just want to summarize chapter one for us right now, because we've we've got to get into the text and understand, okay, what's going on here? So there is a famine in the land of Bethlehem, in the city of Bethlehem, in the surrounding regions. Famine, no food. And so this family, this husband and wife and their two sons, they they leave Bethlehem and they trek about 80 to 100 miles to the east until they get to Moab. And uh I think the text is pretty clear that that's not something God wanted them to do, but they do it anyway. They leave Bethlehem to save their lives. And in no time, all three of the men lose their lives. So now we're left with Naomi, the wife, the mother, and the wives of her two sons. No no men in the home in that culture of destitution, poverty, starvation. It's not good. Naomi says, "I don't want to be under this anymore so I'm going to move. And I'm going to, Im going to move, from Moab. I'm going to take the trek back and I'm going to go back to Bethlehem." And that's exactly what she does. And lo and behold, both of her daughter-in-laws leave their family, leave what's normal for them and follow their mother-in-law back to Bethlehem.

Now, Naomi thinks, well, that's pretty great. Until after a while, really realizes, wait a minute, this isn't going to be good for them. And so she's she's trying to convince them, "Hey, you need to go home." And the first one, finally convinces her. So she goes home. But the second one named Ruth says to her, "Listen Naomi, stop telling me to go home."

And then this incredible statement of sacrifice and commitment, where she says, "Where you go, I will go. where you die, I will die. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God." Unbelievable sacrifice and commitment to Naomi. This is a saving commitment to the God of Israel. And then it fast forwards and they arrive at Bethlehem.

And there's an uproar. There's all these people. Wow, Naomi's back. Isn't that wonderful? And Naomi says, "No, it's not wonderful." And then she summarizes the past 10 years in chapter one verse 20 with quote, the almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full and the Lord has brought me back empty. And the chapter ends though, not on this Debbie Downer note of bitterness and emptiness, the chapter ends with these, what I called last week these glimpses of grace. Chapter one verse 22 says Ruth was with Naomi. And we're going to see in chapter two why that is such a gift of God's grace to Naomi. And then second it says the the famine was over, it says because they arrived chapter one verse 22 at the beginning of the barley harvest. Now here are these two destitute widows on the verge of poverty, probably on the verge of starvation. And they get there right as the harvest is starting and they can eat some food.

Now we're going to see more glimpses of grace as we go to chapter two, we're going to see more of what Cooper called God's bright designs. We're going to see God skillfully working his sovereign will causing all things to work in the story together for good, mostly for Naomi. But by seeing something that happened 3000 years ago in this story, in chapter two, we are we are going to see that these events actually make a difference in our lives. So remember the Bible was written for us but the Bible wasn't written to us, it was written to people 3000 years ago. At least this part of the Bible. And so we need to jump into that culture to understand the story and that's what I'm going to try to do today. I'm going to walk us, I'm going to tell the story, fill in some details, and then I'm going to pause and say, "Okay, what can we learn about God from that?"

So look at chapter two verse one. Chapter two begins with a third glimpse of grace as we are introduced to Boaz. But I want you to notice how he's introduced. The sentence, every every phrase in the sentence builds on the next until we get to the crescendo, verse one. Now Naomi had a relative of her husbands, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech whose name was Boaz. So the important things about Boaz are all front loaded in the sentence, and it's out of order so that you and I go, wait, something important is happening here. Something important is here. This is like in a movie when they when they drop something in the movie, and then you realize at the end of the movie, oh, that was really important. That's what's happening right here. There's this sense of like, oh, there's something important here. We're supposed to catch this. But often we don't. Boaz is connected to Naomi by marriage. He's part of her husband's clan.

Now an individual in ancient Israel had individual, family, clan, tribe, people. And so he is he is part of the clan, larger than a family, smaller than a tribe. He's part of the clan. And notice the text says that he's a worthy man. That word is typically used to describe warriors. And so maybe he was a soldier on the battlefield as a younger man, but but in our context in the book of Ruth, this phrase refers to his godly character, his wealth, his property, his influence in the community. He is a solid man of substance, a Godly, successful man.

Now Ruth isn't going to let their poverty stop her right. We've seen her determination. We've seen her grit. And so she stayed with Naomi to help and that's exactly what she's going to do. Chapter two verse two. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain," and this important phrase, after him in who's sight I shall find favor.

First thing I want you to notice is that she's called the Moabite. Foreigners were not trusted and they were not liked in this culture, so they're pretty vulnerable. And you might be thinking, well,

that's kind of discrimination. Well in this culture, they didn't discriminate based on race. The Bible doesn't have this concept of race. What is happening here, the discrimination is not based on ethnicity or some location where they're from, or the way that they looked, the discrimination was based on religion, where you were from was determinative of which God you worshiped. So they said, "We don't want foreigners. We don't like foreigners because they bring in a false God. And we don't want that false God to get in here and infect our people."

So she's vulnerable in that sense, she's vulnerable because she doesn't have a have a clan or a family to protect her. She's just with a widow. And in that culture she's also a woman, and that leaves her vulnerable as well. There's no there's no larger group to protect her, she is on her own. So the reader of these first two verses would've been like, yeah, she better find somebody to find favor, someone better find favor in their eyes towards her because she is going to have a hard time. They're going to starve, not a chance. So what is what is going on here in verse two, she's going to go gleaning. Well, I don't know about you, I don't use that word very often, gleaning. What is that?

Well, God set things up in ancient Israel so that the poor and the foreigner were allowed to go into the fields of the Israelites and take any food that fell to the ground. And so that's that's what gleaning is. And so if something was missed or something was left behind, that's like, well, you got to just leave it there, that's for the poor. As on top of that, the the landowners, God told the landowners, "Hey, you can't harvest the edges of your field. You harvest the middle but not the edges." And so that was to be left for the poor. And so this is what she wants to do, she wants to go into the fields and find some food so that they can they can eat.

But what you hear in that is that gleaning is not a handout, it's like going to the local food bank, except when you go to the food bank, because you need food and you're starving, they say, "No, you got to work for the food that we're going to give you." And that's what's going to happen. And this wasn't like going to the country club, this was tedious labor. This was hot in the sun. This was this was work for the poorest of the poor. But that's not going to stop her either. She's a woman of courage and action and determination who just happened to arrive at harvest time. And and Naomi knows, she knows this. She knows we're not stopping Ruth. And so to Ruth's request she just simply replies. Verse two, she said to her, "Go my daughter. Yeah, get out of here. I'm not going to stop you. Go for it." And so verse three, Ruth 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. Did you catch that? She just happened, just as a happy coincidence. How lucky. Of all the fields surrounding Bethlehem she just happened to find the part of the massive field that belonged to Boaz.

You can imagine the author winking, chuckling as he wrote that. You know This is a subtle, ironic, even humorous way to alert us that God's plan is starting to unfold. That she didn't know the significance of where she started to work that day but God knew. Think about it. We know Boaz from verse one, but Ruth doesn't know him. We know he's a relative, she doesn't. We know he's a Godly, gracious man. She doesn't. If it feels like we're being set up, it should. This is exactly what the author is doing. He wants us to anticipate something is about to happen. What some call chance, fate, or luck, the Bible calls the providence of God, the hand of God working in all events, all people and all things to accomplish his will.

So what can we learn from this? We learn about God, namely that we should point **#1) rest in God's orchestrated control. Rest in God's orchestrated control.** Do you think if Naomi knew everything God was causing to work together for her good. Do you think if she was watching

Ruth, if she was meandering around the fields, I'm going to choose this one. And she just happens to find the one field that's that's connected to Naomi. Do you think that if Naomi knew all of that that she would be sitting pouting at home and despair going, oh, woe is me and God hates me? I don't think so. I think she'd be going God, "God you're working. No way."

We know it and we chuckle at the " coincidence," but God is orchestrating this. He's the conductor. He's orchestrating all the facts, these facets of the story to accomplish exactly what he wants to accomplish, to show the good of his people, to give love to his people. Because he wants what's best for his people. We have Romans 8:28, God causing all things to work together for our good. But listen, that promise doesn't do anything for us, unless we rest in it. Jesus puts it this way. He asks us to consider, he says Matthew 10:29, are are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yeah, two sparrows sold for one penny, that's pretty expensive stuff, right? Not really. He says, think about, are there just a couple hundred birds in the world, like a hundred couple quadrillion birds in the world right? And Jesus says, "Not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father. He knows it all. He sees it all. He's in control of everything." So he's saying, something as worthless as a bird, there are trillions of them all over the place. God knows. And then he adds, "But even the hairs of your head are all numbered." And then he gives the conclusion, "Fear not therefore, you are more value than many sparrows." Translation, you are more valuable than every single animal on the planet to God. He hasn't forgotten you. He doesn't miss you. He doesn't sneeze and he doesn't forget to see you. He's with you. He cares. He knows. And so rest.

Listen, according to Genesis 50:20, God even takes other people's sins against us, means those sins for good, and uses those sins to do good to us. So even the worst that people can do to us can cause us to rest. Jesus, they could even kill your body, and then what happens? You go to heaven where you're going to eternally rest. So like nothing can happen to you apart from God's orchestrated control for your good.

So do you see life through the lens of chance, luck, fate or accidents? If so, then you don't see reality correctly. Nothing happens by chance. Nothing at all. God knows. So rest, God controls all of it. So that marriage that you're in, it's not a mistake. God knows. So rest and keep doing his will. That traumatic experience, that lost opportunity, God knows and he's using it for your good. So rest. That sin you committed that hurt people you love. God can and God is using it for your good if you're a Christian, so confess it, receive his forgiveness. And then rest. This truth is meant to shut off the static in your brain. It's meant to turn off the blender in your mind that is mulling back and forth, going doubt and second guessing and contingencies and what ifs and if I only would've's. No, the orchestrated control of reality for the good of God's people is meant to be the most luxurious pillow for your head to rest on for the rest of your life.

Again, if Naomi knew all God was doing to care for her, pain and loss, emptiness and depression would be the farthest thing from her mind. And it can be the farthest thing from our minds when we rest in the orchestrated control of God's providence. Now we're not pawns in the divine chess game. Our choices are real choices. Our choices matter. We should care about the choices we make and God is in control. And you see this in Ruth right. Ruth meandering finds a field which just happens to be wink, wink the exact field that God planned for her to go to. And wouldn't you know it, verse four, and behold, It's like, and look at that. Boaz came from Bethlehem. Wow, another coincidence. Boaz arrives at the field on the same day that Ruth comes to work in the field that he just happens to own. And he greets his workers, verse four, he said to the reapers, "The Lord be with you." And they answered, "The Lord bless you." It's like showing up to work

at Mr. Rogers neighborhood, does that happen at your job? The boss walks in, the Lord be with you, and everyone's head pops up from their cubicles. And the Lord bless you, and then they go back to circling.

Probably doesn't happen at your job. It happens here though. Yeah, just kidding. But what's happening here is that not only did this happen historically, but it's showing that Boaz has created a Godly work environment, that he is he is a Godly businessman. That even in the time of judges where there wasn't a lot of Godly going on, he was different. And their prayer for him at the end where it says there, the Lord bless you, it actually starts being answered in verse five. Then Boaz said to the young man who was in charge of the reapers, "Who's young woman is this?" He's not asking who is she because he's interested in her. What he's asking is whose daughter, whose sister, whose whose wife is she? Which clan does she belong to? How do I know that? Because of the way the foreman responds in verse six. And the 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."

So he, Notice the foreman focuses on her ethnic identity not on her marital status, focuses on her her family association as a relative of Naomi. And did you notice in verse six where he calls her the young Moabite? She's she's the young Moabite. The idea there being that, you know, the one whose story has been spreading all over Bethlehem since last night, she's she's the one. She's that Moabite. And then he recounts their interaction, he says in verse seven. And she said to the foreman, "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. So she's been working hard most of the day except for a little rest. So what that means is that it seems that the foreman has granted her first request, where it says there in verse seven she wanted to glean. But this this second request is pretty audacious, gather among the sheaves of the reapers.

We read that, we have no idea what that means. But here's what it means. I am so desperate, I'm in 'm in so much need, can you put me at the front of the line, please? I need to get everything that they drop, I must have all of it. We are about to die. This is desperation. Put me at the front of the line, please. Well, that's probably not something that he could he could okay, but Boaz does. Look at verse eight. 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. 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."

Now there's a lot here, and we miss it because remember the Bible was written for us, but not to us. So let me explain this welfare program that he sets up for her. This is so far beyond what God's law required, it is it is audacious how kind he is to her. First, notice he calls her daughter, showing that I see myself as two things. One I'm older than you, but two, I see my job is to protect you like a father to his daughter. Second, stay in my part of the field. I can't vouch for those other landowners. I can't vouch for those who own those other fields so you just stay in mine. And if you stay here, I will protect you. Third, stay by my girls. He said, they'll protect you. And since you'll be with them, you will get the first crack at the grain that's left behind. You will. Now I will put you at the front of the line with them. Fourth Verse nine, my men can't touch you. That's a word that means a strike, harass, take advantage of, or in any way mistreats you. The men in the field were likely the security force, so anyone who tried to get in and try to mess things up or take stuff they shouldn't, it was the men in the group that that kept people away. And he's saying, Look, you have access. You can go right past the security guards and work in my

field. Fifth, drink the waters my workers get for themselves. Translation, you don't need to go get your own. I'll take care of you. You're part of the team. You're part of my team. All of this is so beyond anything the readers would imagine that they would either be chuckling, like this is a fairytale. Or they'd just be in awe. Nobody does that. No one shows that kind of kindness. And this level of kindness is so unheard of. I mean Look at Ruth's response in verse 10. She didn't just say, "Hey, thank you. Hey, high five. That's really kind."

Then she fell on her face bowing to the ground. That's nose and forehead in the dirt, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes?" Exactly what she prayed for in chapter two verse two. Why have I found favor in your eyes that you should take notice of me? Why, since I am a foreigner? She is shocked. She's grateful. The poor aren't treated this kindly let alone the foreign poor. She's like, this is unreal. This is unfathomable. Even though this is the answer to her prayer from verse two, this is far more than she ever could have imagined. This is what she's saying to him. You have just saved us from starvation. You have made it possible for us to have food. She's she's blown away. They are not going to starve.

So God answers her prayer in verse two, and then Boaz answers her question why in verse 11. Why am I being so kind to you? Verse 11, 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, all that sacrifice, and came to a people that you did not know before. The Lord repay you for what you have done and the full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

Ruth's sacrifice and her commitment to Naomi has become famous, and Boaz has heard about it. If her commitment to Naomi was the high point of chapter one, then Boaz's response to her right here is the high point of chapter two. He recounts how you not only committed yourself, sacrificed yourself for the good of your mother-in-law, who who may not have even made it from Moab to back to Bethlehem without you. But you committed yourself to the God of Israel. You you converted from Moabite religion to the religion of the Jews. And as a result of that, God has become your protector, your trust, and your security. Extraordinary. Think about this. She's got this miraculous love for her mother-in-law, and Boaz is like, "I know what you did and that deserves God's blessing on your life."

But then Boaz takes it a step farther. He goes, "Not only do you deserve that blessing, God repay you and rewards you." But think about it. Boaz becomes the channel through which God uses to bless Ruth and Naomi. Boaz kindness is the human expression of God's protective wings, like like a hand that gathers her chicks under her wings and protects them from harm. I mean Ruth has hit the gleaning jackpot. This is the gleaning lottery that she just won. This is again, the readers would be reading this going, this is so audacious, this is not possible. It's like Jesus parable of the good Samaritan. If you know all the details in there you walk away from that going, that is so beyond anything anybody would ever do. And notice she's in awe, verse 13. And then 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."

His words must have meant the absolute world to her. Think about it. These are the first kind words that she has heard from anybody in this book. There's nothing romantic yet either, that she calls him Lord out of respect. All this kindness, this generosity, all this comfort. What she's saying is, it's it's dawning on her, my crisis is over. I'm a widow. I'm a foreigner. I'm lowest than the least of your servants, but now I get to eat. We're going to be okay. And notice Boaz doesn't

stop blessing her. Verse 14, and at mealtime 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. He invites her to share a meal with him, and this isn't their first date. He's got his whole team around him. But did you notice what he's doing? He's serving his whole team the food. So here's here's the boss serving all of his staff. And she eats the same food as they do. It's not like, "Okay, here's some scraps. You can eat that." He treats her like one of the team. He he serves her. He gives her far more food than she could finish. Do you have any family members like that? You look skinny, keep eating, keep eating. That's Boaz to her. Keep eating, I know you haven't had food in a while so keep eating. And she eats so much there's stuff left over, and so she puts it in her pocket. And then she goes back to work.

Look at look at verse 15. She goes back to work before the rest do. Boaz grabs his young men and he says to them, verse 15, "Let her glean even among the sheaves. You security guards, let her glean among the sheaves and do not reproach her. And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean and do not rebuke her. Don't humiliate her or embarrass her. Don't be harsh with her. That will not be tolerated." And we don't know what this means. So let me tell you the background of verse 15, let her glean even among the sheaves. Translation, let her go to the front of the line. You guys are going to knock down the wheat with your sickle. The group is going to come over and and bundle it into a sheave, and she can be right there next to them. Them. And then did you see verse 16? This is crazy. While you guys are going, Hey, just grab a whole handful and just drop it on the ground and keep going. Yeah, just keep doing that while you go. Just keep just keep dropping bundles of that so she can just grab it and pick it up.

Remarkable generosity. And what's the result of all that? Look at verse 17. So she gleaned in the field until evening, then she beat out what she had gleaned. And she probably goes to Boaz's threshing floor to do all of that. And it was about an ephah of barley. And you and I are like, great, ephah. I know what that is. Well I do now. And um you probably have some little thing by the word ephah and it takes you to a footnote that says, oh, it's three fists of a bushel. I know what that is right.

Let me tell you, the average ration of a field worker for a day at this time was about one to two pounds of barley. An ephah of barley is 30 to 50 pounds. That's, that is just magnanimous generosity, it is just unbelievable. That would feed these two women, just one day of work would feed these two women for at least a couple of weeks. Translation, they're not going to starve. They're going to live.

So what does this teach us about God. In point #2) ***we should realize God uses his people to do his will. God uses his people to do his will.*** Even though God controls every molecule in the universe, even though he doesn't need any of us to do anything, in his grace he uses his people to accomplish his will in his world. Take Naomi for instance, God doesn't use people to bless her in the fact that he ends the famine in 1:6, and he gets them to Bethlehem just as they happen to be starting the harvest season. But then God also uses people to bless her.

First is Ruth, God uses Ruth to go glean in the field of Boaz, and as a result of that Naomi is taken care of. She's blessed. The extraordinary nature of Ruth's sacrifice and commitment to Naomi shows that that God had placed Ruth in her life. Because there's nothing that explains why Ruth would be there. Everything says Ruth, we should go back home and go find a husband in her own land. Nothing says she should go with Naomi and take care of her. But she does. That is miraculous grace to Naomi.

And then there's this extraordinary nature of Boaz's is a generosity in protection, and even more that we're going to see next time. And all of that shows that he is placed in Naomi's life like Ruth to do God's will and to produce good for her. In 2 Cor. 7, Paul describes his situation is dire. He's exhausted, his conflict with other Christians. He says, there's fear on the outside. There's desperate need for comfort. And it says in 2 Cor. chapter seven, it says that God... Listen to how God works in Paul's life. Paul wrote, so quote, God who comforts the downcast, comforts those in despair, comforted us by... And then he says what it is. What do you think it is? He comforted... Well, what comforted Paul in his anxiety, his fear, his conflict, his exhaustion? Was it a vision? Was it a dream? Was it an angel? Was it just some supernatural zap of comfort? No, it says God comforted us by the coming of Titus. When it was God's will to comfort his despairing people, he sent another one of his people.

I wonder, who would he send you to to do his will in someone else's life? Listen, God used Ruth's determination or energy to do his will in Naomi's life. He uses Boaz's business, his wealth, his Godly character to do his will in Naomi's life too, and in Ruth's.

In chapter one, God uses Naomi's prayers in verses eight and nine to do his will in Ruth's life. In fact, every prayer in the book of Ruth is answered, showing that God uses the prayers of his people to accomplish his will. This is what he does. He uses his people to do his will in the world. The way my my first mentor talked about it with me when I was an older teenager, he said to me, "Jon, you need to understand that we are blessed to be a what? A blessing. We are blessed to be a blessing. That that God blesses our lives so that we can be a blessing to other people's lives. So when God saves me at 18 years old, it was during a time in life when I'm thinking, okay, what do I want to do with my life?

When I got saved something happened. And and that desire started to switch from what do I want to do with my life to what? What does God want me to do with my life? And I wonder, has that shift happened in in you yet? That your life is about what he wants to do through you rather than you, what you want to do, that you are blessed by God to be a blessing to others. It starts with the people that live in your home. If that's true, if that's what you're thinking, God's blessing me to be a blessing, we'll say it means that like Ruth, your health, your strength, your energy, your determination is not just for you, it's all there so that God can use you to do his will in the life of another person.

That means that like Boaz, your business, your wealth, your income is not just for you, it's there so that God can use you to accomplish his will in someone else. And we could just keep like multiplying that. Your prayers and your Bible reading and your sermon listening and your good works and all of that, your experiences, the good times, the bad, the trauma, the pain, the comfort that God has given you, you are able to take and give to somebody else as God uses it to accomplish his will in their lives. And so maybe this is a moment to pray and tell God, whatever I have, whatever you can use, like it's yours. You can have it. I give it to you. No matter what it is, no matter where I'll have to go, no matter who I've got to be with, I will do what you want me to do. I'm yours. My mouth, my hands, my feet, my mind, my stuff, my pain, my life, the good, the bad, all the ugly. It's all yours. Do with my life whatever you want to do, do your will in my life so that you can better do your will through my life.

Be a blessing to others. That is what we see in Boaz. And look at how God used him to bless people, verse 18. And she took it up, that's the 50 pounds. That's uh like one of those dog food bags, one of those huge ones. And so she picks it up, don't quite know why I'm doing this because I have no idea how she held it right but. On her shoulder, I have no idea. It says there in

verse 18, and she took it up and went into the city. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She seized this massive amount of barley, ok. But notice she also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied. So she takes the food out of her pocket, that even though she was starving before she doesn't eat it all day, takes it out and gives it to Naomi and says, "Naomi, here you get to eat now. God has taken care of us." And now look at what Naomi says. She has some questions. I just imagine her, Naomi's belly is getting full and her frown is turned upside down, and she's so excited. She can't believe what she's seeing. And look at verse 19. And her mother-in-law said to her, where did you glean today? And where have you been working? And bless the man who took notice of you. There's just this avalanche of words, she's just amazed at what she's seeing.

And this isn't funny that we know the answers to all her questions right, but the author waits until the last word of the sentence to answer her questions. Look at verse 19 again. So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, "The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz." There's that crescendo again, the author wants us to know something important is happening here. I'm not going to tell you what yet, but something's happening here. And here's the key verse of this section, where the man is identified that Ruth found favor with and who God is using to reward her for her sacrifice. Verse 20. And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed by the Lord. May God be so kind to him. May he do great good to him for being so incredibly generous to us." And notice, Naomi doesn't see herself as disciplined by the Lord anymore. The the shower of his discipline, she's moved out from under that and now realizes, wait a minute. God has been at work here to do something remarkable. Look at verse 20 again. She knows it's the Lord, verse 20, blessed by the Lord whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead. He didn't abandon us. He's been causing all things to work together for our good because he loves us. I can't believe this is happening. He He noticed, he sees. All of this despair wasn't needed because he's been at work. He hasn't walked away from us. He's been actively involved with us.

Ruth didn't just meet a kind man in the fields, notice the last thing that Naomi says. Naomi also said to her, "The man is a close relative of ours. One of our redeemers." That sounds important. What in the world does that mean? I'll tell you next time. We're not going to look at that. Meanwhile, by saying Ruth was a Moabite. Look at that in verse verse 21. And Ruth the Moabite said. So the text wants to remind just one more time, Hey, she's not from around there. She's one of the bad guys. None of this stuff should have happened to her. you know It's highlighting this unforeseen extent of Boaz's kindness and generosity, verse 21. And Ruth the Moabite said, "Besides he said to me you shall keep close by my young men." That that translation, that's not just the men, that's the whole team. You should keep close by my team until they have finished all my harvest. And Naomi replies, verse 22, and Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It is good my daughter that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you'd be assaulted." Boaz took care of everything, physical provision, physical safety, and Ruth is compliant. She does exactly what Naomi says, exactly what Boaz says. Look at verse 23. So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Now again, I don't know about you. I don't organize my calendar around the harvests, but listen, what he said to her is that you can stay here for two to three months and you can do this every day. You have nothing to worry about anymore. You are free. And if she got close to that much food every day, they're going to have enough food for a year just by working seven, eight months.

Now what's going to happen to these widows after the harvest though? Again, be here for chapter three. Now, what can we take away from this last paragraph? I think it's part of the Bible, it's profitable for us. And I think what it shows us is that we should admit God's providence means no good reason for despair. God's providence means no good reason for despair. Notice I didn't say no good reason to be sad or no good reason to be really sad or no good reason to grieve or to hurt or to cry or to sob. I said no good reason for despair. No good reason to think all hope is lost. No good reason to think that things are never going to change, it's always going to be this way. It's never going to get better. Listen, not if God is sovereign and not if God is good. And not if God is sovereignly skillfully taking all the things that happen in our lives and working them for our good, for those who love God.

So we see this in Job, the first round of trials, at least. He loses his kids, he loses his property, and we see him grieving but not despairing. We can see this in Gideon and Elijah and David and Jeremiah and Peter and Paul, all of them grieve, going through intense times of pain, but not despairing. Naomi though, grieves the loss of her husband, her two boys. She's on the brink of starvation. So we can sympathize with her where she was so grieved that she became bitter. But in verses 19 and 20 that we just saw, hope is broken back into her life. Her hope has come back and notice verse 20, hope came back because she recognized the Lord's kindness. His love, his mercy, his loyalty, his goodness. Notice he has not forsaken her. He's not abandoned her. He's not passed her by.

I wonder if there's some circumstance in your life where you've gone from healthy, normal grieving to despair, to bitterness, to a loss of hope. Yes Godly people go through these hard times, but notice I said they go through those times. But the goal is not to stay there. We experience it sometimes for a while, but we trudge through the swamp of despair. Why? Because the fact that God is with them, causing all things to work together for their good, even the hardest times give us hope. Can we admit that like Naomi, we don't know everything God is causing to work for our good?

We don't have all the information. We have no idea. Like Naomi, she had no idea until this moment that God was at work in her life. Maybe there will be a moment later down the road when you will realize, not in the front of your windshield but in the rearview mirror where you look and go, whoa, God was at work the whole time. There can be an anchor in your soul that keeps you from floating away, and that anchor's the providence of God, the loving providence of God. So maybe it's an illness that's causing despair, some external circumstance, maybe it's fear, like fear of a person or a failure or fear of the future. Maybe it's your own sin. Maybe it's like life just isn't meaningful anymore. Or maybe a feeling, God left me or maybe it's created despair or loneliness or confusion or some deep sorrow. Maybe it's caused you to go like I don't even want to live anymore.

So what do you do with that? How do you respond to that? I'm going to give you seven things quickly here. Seven ways to respond to despair when it tries to show up in your life and take over your life. **First** way to respond is ***you should ask God to search your heart***. You should ask him to search your heart to see if it's your own sin that's causing your despair. If he searches your heart and he's like, yeah, it's this. You should confess that to him and rid it from your life as soon as possible.

Second, sing songs of truth. That's what you see in the book of Psalms. The book of Psalms is not some happy clappy book for 150 Psalms, it's the heights of worship, it's the depths of despair. And you see how do people respond to despair? And what they do is they

speaking truth to themselves. They sing truth to themselves. That's another way to respond to despair. **Third, you should pray.** Pray, Philippians 4:6 and 7 says, be anxious about nothing, pray about everything. Why? So that the peace of God will guard your heart and your mind. The peace of God will turn off the blender of our thoughts and despair.

Fourth, you should remember God's past grace to you, the grace of your salvation, the grace of his providence. What a perfect week to do that. It's Thanksgiving. Make a list. Make a list of all the things you're thankful for and then and then take James 1:17, put it on top of that and say, wait a minute. If James 1:17 is true then this is actual, tangible proof that God is in my life. He is giving me every one of these good things. He hasn't left me. He is in my life. Take those ideas, those truths and speak that to yourself. This is what Naomi did. As soon as she sees all the stuff, she finds out where where Ruth has been, her response is God has not abandoned us. This is this is proof.

Fifth, you should remember God's future grace. All that he's promised to those who love him. The assured future that you have as his child. **Six, you should remember God's character, that he is good.** Because he is loyal and faithful. There's no good reason to grieve. I'm sorry to despair because he is working for your good, no matter what is happening. And **seventh, when all seems lost. Psalm 42:11 shows a man who's just going through the roller coaster of despair and back up again and then down again. He just can't get a handle on this. And the way that he does it is he grabs a hold of his own soul, and he says, "Hey soul, listen up." And then he commands his soul, hope in God. He's trustworthy. Hope in him. Trust him.** Maybe you just need to command your own soul. Hey, soul, stop it. Trust him, he's good. I know he's good. I've seen Him do good. Do these things, and like Naomi, you can experience fresh waves of hope when the tidal wave of despair is seeking to break over your life.

There's a third line in William Cooper's song God Moves in a Mysterious Way. And I think it's a fitting conclusion to our time together this morning, or I guess it's now this afternoon. It says, quote, you fearful saints, or you anxious saints, or you hurting saints, you despairing saints. It says you fearful saints, fresh courage take, the clouds you so much dread are big with mercy and shall break with blessings on your head.

Here's Naomi staring down the prospect of abject poverty. She describes herself as bitter and empty at the end of chapter one. But by the end of chapter two, the clouds of destitution that she so much dreaded broke with mercy and blessing on her head from Boaz and Ruth.

Listen Christian, you have far more blessing than anyone in this story could have ever possibly imagined. The kindness, the generosity of God through Boaz and Naomi, it pales in in comparison to the kindness and generosity you have experienced in Christ. You weren't just physically needy. It's probably pretty safe to say that nobody in this room has ever been on the verge of destitution, but everyone in this room is spiritually destitute. Every one of us.

Jesus called it being poor in spirit, spiritually bankrupt, nothing at all to offer God of any worth. Our resumes mean nothing. Our good works, our good intentions mean nothing. They do not come close to making us acceptable to God. They they get us nothing before Him but his wrath. Our sins have impoverished us, have left us destitute without any hope and without God in the world. However, God moves towards the spiritually bankrupt just like he moved towards Naomi and Ruth. He shows us kindness. He shows us mercy. He lavishes us with generosity, not by giving us 50 pounds of barley but by giving us his precious Son. Grace has been called God's riches at Christ expense. It's the blessing of God, the forgiveness of God, the perfection, the

perfect righteousness of God, gifted to us. People, that like Ruth, who can only receive it, but receive it when Jesus exchanges his perfection for our sin.

As we come to the end this morning, before we we leave, it's important in this moment to assess our own hearts. It's one thing to hear about all this. Oh, isn't that wonderful story, and blah, blah, blah. But have you experienced the lavish grace of God? You personally? Has that exchange happened where where Jesus takes all of your sin? Past, present, future, takes all of your sin, everything you've done and that's been done to you and he exchanges it. He trades it for his perfect life. His sinless life. Has that trade happened in your life? If not it can happen right now. He offers mercy. He offers forgiveness. Listen, no starving person would refuse a free meal but until you're convinced that you are spiritually destitute, lost and without any real hope, you will never see the absolute marvel that the God of the universe would be kind to you. But he has, in Christ, so come to Him. Come to Him and he will accept you. Come to Him and he will wash you white as snow. Come to Him and He will forgive you for all of your sins. All of them. He will accept you into his family forever. Forever. Let's pray.