

Ruth 2:1-23

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Date: 22 January 2017

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening everybody and thank you for having me here at Bruntsfield this evening. It's a pleasure to be with you. Just a word of prayer before we turn to the Word of God. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the privilege we have of being in a country where we can open your words and read it publicly and we can learn from it without fear of persecution.

We pray that we would never take this for granted, but that this evening we would hear your words, that we would listen to it, and that we would allow your words to change our hearts. That we would be transformed and become more like Christ with every day of our lives.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. I wonder how many of us here this evening have seen the series called Sherlock. So Sherlock Holmes starring Benedict Cumberbatch.

If you haven't yet, I highly recommend it. Don't tell me anything about series two because I haven't seen it yet and I won't tell you anything about series one if you haven't seen it yet. But one of the main features of the whole series of this Sherlock Holmes is that it's full of events which appear to be coincidences.

Each episode is full of a sequence of events which appear to have absolutely nothing to do with each other. But at some point down the line, either when you get to the end of an episode or the end of a season, you can look back and you can see how everything did have something to do with each other.

[1 : 26] Everything suddenly falls into place. It makes sense. And you understand how the famous Sherlock Holmes solves his crimes. Well, the book of Ruth that we're going to look at this evening is pretty similar to a Sherlock Holmes episode.

I doubt you've ever heard that said before. Particularly chapters one and two because they're full of events which seem ordinary. They seem to be consequences. They seem to be coincidences. But in hindsight, we can see that they're not coincidences. This evening we'll look at Ruth chapter 2. But before we do that, let's just have a brief look at the context because it is relevant to chapter 2. And we'll look also at the main theme of the book of Ruth. So I think the main theme of the book of Ruth can be summed up like this. God is working out his salvation plan and he is making the way for his king.

So God is working out his salvation plan and he is making the way for his king. So let's look at the context and hopefully you'll be able to see why I say that is the main theme of the book of Ruth.

[2 : 31] If you turn to Ruth, it's on page 267 of the Pew Bibles. And if you look at chapter 1, verse 1, you'll see that the events described in the book of Ruth take place during the period of history of Israel known as the time of the Judges.

If you're familiar with the Bible, you'll know that the book of Judges was a time period in Israel that was terrible. It was a time that was full of war, of famine and idolatry.

Over three centuries of it, so it was a long, terrible time. And the strap line of the book of Judges is in chapter 21, verse 25.

If you just look over the page, you'll see it there. It says, in those days, Israel had no king. Everyone did as he saw fit. Now you don't have to think very long to realize just how terrible that would be for a nation.

The people, they had no leader. They had no authoritative voice who could lead them and no authoritative voice to lead them to live according to the word and law of the Lord their God.

[3 : 40] Throughout the book of Judges, the author reminds the reader again and again, Israel has no king. And it just goes to show how much Israel needed a king. But more importantly, they needed God's king.

They needed the man that God would put on the throne. So the book of Judges shows that Israel needs a king. And the book of Ruth shows how God was making the way for his king.

We see that right at the very end of Ruth in chapter 4. Because it ends with a genealogy. But not the genealogy of a random person. It ends with the genealogy of King David.

God's greatest king of the Old Testament. So this story leads us to consider how God was paving the way for his king to his chosen people.

This short narrative is a book ended with Israel's... This short narrative is bookended with a need of Israel's... That shows the need Israel had for a king.

[4 : 41] Judges shows they needed a king. After that, the book of 1 Samuel shows that the search was beginning as they were looking for God's king. So when we look at the context of the book of Ruth, its position within the pages of the Bible, and the story that unfolds within this short narrative, it's obvious about...

It's obviously about how God was bringing about his king. How God was paving the way for his king. And how he was caring for his people in the process. So the main point of the book of Ruth ultimately isn't to tell the story of Ruth.

How she went from being a Gentile, meaning a non-Jew, to then being a child of God. Ultimately, it isn't about Naomi and how God showed kindness and his covenant love with a woman who became bitter because of everything that had happened in her life.

It also isn't about Boaz, who would eventually... Spoiler alert, I'm sorry. But he will save the day. So let's read chapter 2 together and let's see what this chapter can tell us about God and about his amazing words, works.

Ruth chapter 2. Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.

[6 : 02] Naomi said to her, Go ahead, my daughter. So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech.

Just then, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters. The Lord be with you. The Lord bless you, they called back. Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, Whose young woman is that?

The foreman replied, She is the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi. She said, Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters. She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.

So Boaz said to Ruth, My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where the men are harvesting and follow along after the girls.

I've told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled. But this she bowed with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, And Boaz replies, I've been told all about what you've done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband.

[7 : 24] And you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. 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.

May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my Lord, she said. You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant, though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls.

At mealtime, Boaz said to her, Come over here, have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar. When she sat down with the harvester, he offered her some roasted grain.

She ate all she wanted and had some left over. As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, Even if she gathers among the sheaves, do not embarrass her.

Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up. And don't rebuke her. So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening.

[8 : 26] Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough.

Her mother-in-law asked her, Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you. Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working.

The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz, she said. The Lord bless him, Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.

She added, That man is our close relative. He is one of our kinsmen redeemers. Then Ruth the Moabitess said, He even said to me, Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain. Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law. It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with his girls, because in someone else's field you might be harmed. So Ruth stayed close to the servant girls of Boaz to glean until the barley harvest and wheat harvest were finished.

[9 : 36] And she lived with her mother-in-law. The first thing I think we can see from this passage is the providential purposes of God.

The providential purpose of God. As we look at the end of chapter one, we see a terrible situation. Naomi feels bitter as she returned to Bethlehem.

She feels the pain of loss because her husband and two sons had died in Moab. And looking at her current situation as a widow in a land that would have made her an outsider, the future was not looking great for her.

But chapter one ends with a small description. Ruth and Naomi arrived at Bethlehem during the barley harvest. Now that might seem like an insignificant remark, but it is of great importance to the whole book of Ruth.

And it is the one of many apparent coincidences that takes place in these first two chapters. So I think that God is orchestrating events to bring about his chosen king.

[10 : 41] God can use the most terrible of circumstances to do that. And we see that in chapter one. God uses these terrible circumstances to bring Naomi back to Bethlehem.

Even though Ruth was a Moabitess and not a Jew, it appears that Malon, Ruth's husband who died in Moab, had married a godly woman. Maybe she became a believer of God during their marriage. We don't know. But her faith is seen in the fact that she willingly goes back to Bethlehem with Naomi. All of these things are not coincidences. But they are events that God is orchestrating to bring about his purposes.

He is using terrible events to bring about the good of his children. This harvest time was important, especially for Ruth and Naomi, because of certain laws that were in place about how the people of Israel were to tend to their fields.

One particular law in Leviticus 23 is very helpful. And it's helpful for us to know this law as we look at the chapter together. So Leviticus, let me read it.

[11 : 45] Leviticus 23, verse 22. When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest.

Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you. I am the Lord your God. Do you see why this would be significant for Naomi and Ruth? They were both widows.

Both sat on the fringes of society. But both were poor. But Ruth was even more of an outsider because she was a foreigner. She was a Moabite test.

But God in his providence had made a way for them both to get food. When farmers went to harvest, they weren't allowed to go over their field a second time. They had to leave little bits for the poor or for the foreigners among them.

So Naomi and Ruth were able to survive for the time being. But the question still remained, how would they survive after the barley harvest was over? How would they make ends meet until the next barley harvest?

[12 : 47] And this is where we can look and see a number of coincidences that all point to the truth that God is orchestrating events to bring about his will and to bring about his king. The author helps us to see this by the way that they write.

You might have noticed as we read over the passage, they write with a sense of irony sometimes. And the coincidences go like this. Ruth and Naomi arrive in Bethlehem.

They arrive during the barley harvest. Ruth goes to glean and verse 3 says, So that's too many coincidences in just a few verses.

And the way the author explains them shows that he's trying to bring out the main theme of the book. It looks more like somebody's orchestrating these events. All of these events are signs that

God is working behind the scenes.

Any good author will tell you that if you write a book, you need to build up the story before you give away too many details. You need to build up suspense, build up some kind of tension between characters, and then only at the very end reveal the solution to that tension.

[14:10] And then as you do that, you watch the puzzle pieces fall into place. And people suddenly understand. With every single detail you write, make the reader want to read it more and more.

And that is how you grab an audience. And that is exactly what the author Ruth does. In Ruth chapter 2 verse 1, we're introduced to Boaz, a man of the clan of Elimelech, a close relative of Naomi and her family.

The only other detail that we're given about Boaz at the moment is that he is a man of standing. The phrase man of standing sometimes translated as a worthy man.

The original word for upstanding or worthy means mighty or strong. Elsewhere in the Bible, it refers to somebody's military might. But for Boaz, who isn't a warrior, but he's a farmer, it shows that he is a man of character.

So suddenly in this bleak situation where there appears to be very little hope, God's providence is evident. In this bitter situation where Naomi's life of pain brings bitterness, and where Ruth's apparent misfortune makes her glean in the fields of strangers, in this bleak situation we can see hope.

[15:22] In hindsight, we can see how God was in control and how he was making way for his king. In hindsight, Ruth and Naomi would have been able to see how all of these things were working out for their own good.

God was orchestrating events to fulfill his purposes, and the truth is that that hasn't stopped. That still happens today. In the narrative of Ruth and Naomi, God was working to make the way for his king.

And we see that because Ruth gleans in the field of Boaz. She's come all the way from Moab, but now she lives in Israel. She lives in God's land with God's people.

The genealogy of chapter 4 helps us with this, because all of these events paved the way for God's chosen king of the Old Testament, King David. But even more importantly, if you look at Matthew chapter 1 and the huge genealogy that is there, we can see that Ruth is also mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

This little story of Ruth in one of the bleakest times of Israel's history is one link in the chain that points to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. This story is of great significance, not only because Ruth is the ancestor of King David, but also the ancestor of Jesus Christ, God's true king, who reigns today.

[16:45] This story is of great significance for the whole storyline of the Bible, starting with Genesis chapter 3, where a Saviour is promised, and then all the way through to the Gospels, where Jesus Christ is born.

The book of Ruth is one link in that very, very long chain connecting these two events. So you might ask the question, how do we know that God was really in control and making the way for his king? Well, we know it's true because that is exactly what happened. Jesus Christ was born. What strikes you about these events? The people involved in this story are ordinary.

They're ordinary, normal people just like you and me. So then the question is, what about now? Does this same principle affect us? Well, now the King Jesus has come, but his kingdom has not yet fully come.

This story encourages us on the big scale that God is still working out his purposes through all kinds of events and all kinds of people, possibly even you and me.

[17:53] We don't know. In the book of Ruth, God uses people's obedience to further his purposes, and he could use our obedience as well. This gives us confidence in God.

This says that the principle is true. In all different things that happen in our lives, God is no less in control of that than he is in control of the grand scheme of salvation that plays out in the pages of the Bible.

And that is what Paul talks about in Romans 8, 28, where he says, And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. We might not see it now, but God works for the good of those who love him, those who have been called according to his purpose.

Has life made you bitter? Has a situation maybe caused you to doubt God?

[18 : 56] Take this as an example. Even if it doesn't seem like it, even if the situation is painful and you're torn apart inside, even if you cry out to God day in and day out asking why, God has not left you.

God promises never to forsake his people, but that he will work all things for their good. This doesn't necessarily take away the pain that we feel in day-to-day life.

It didn't take away Naomi's pain of loss, but it does encourage us and help us through the day. God is our strength and he is our comforter, and only with his help can we make it through each day, because by his providence he is working out his purposes, even if we don't know what they are just yet.

So the providential purpose of God. The second thing that this chapter shows us is the provision for God's people. The provision for God's people.

We've already seen how Boaz is described as a man of standing, or a worthy man, meaning strong and mighty. Boaz is described as a great man because of his character. If you look at verse 4, you can see his character right there.

[20 : 09] He shows up to work, and the first thing he says is not, how are you guys doing? You need to work a bit faster. The first thing he says is, the Lord be with you. Boaz is a godly man.

Boaz then asks his foreman, the man in charge, who Ruth is. The foreman explains that she's the Moabites who came to Bethlehem with Naomi. She asked to glean, was given permission, and she hasn't stopped since.

Except for a short break in the shade. So it appears that Ruth is also a person of great character. She's a worker, and Boaz is pretty impressed. In verse 8 and 9, Boaz tells Ruth not to glean in anyone else's fields, but he also goes a step further.

He tells her that she's allowed to drink from Boaz's men's water. Boaz is treating Ruth as one of his own workers, one of his own household. But Boaz's kindness doesn't stop there.

He then invited her to eat with him and his workers at mealtime. Verse 14 says that she ate all she wanted. She stood up when she was full to go back to work. And as soon as she's out of earshot, as soon as she's a little further away, Boaz tells his men, not only that they should let her gather among the sheaves, not only that they should continue to let her gather until the harvest is over, but that they should pull out some of the stalks from the bundles and let her glean, and they shouldn't rebuke her.

[21 : 38] She is being shown a kindness that is beyond expectation. It's beyond words. And we see how she reacts to Boaz in verse 10. Ruth is saying, Why me?

Why am I a foreigner? I'm more by test being shown such kindness. She probably sat out that morning from the house thinking that she was going to glean in anybody's field, just on the fringes, just on the edges to scrape enough food to feed her and her mother-in-law that day.

She never anticipated to be met with such kindness and compassion. In the year 2000, a movie called Paying It Forward came out.

I'm not sure if many of you remember it. I was shocked on Friday night when the youth told me that they felt old because they remembered the movie. Paying It Forward, and the idea that is behind the movie, is that one person shows great kindness to three people, and then those three people take it to another three people, and another three people.

And in one of the scenes where a man is paying it forward, he stops in his brand new shiny silver Jaguar, stops at the scene of a car crash, and as the young man gets out, looks at the car, sees it's wrecked, this billionaire just hands over the keys to his Jaguar and says, Now go pay this forward to three people.

[23 : 03] So this act of kindness was beyond expectations. This man had given him a brand new car for a heap of junk. And that is exactly how Boaz is treating Ruth, far beyond any expectations.

In amazement, Ruth asks Boaz why he's treating her like this. And in verse 11, he tells her. In verse 11, he says, He's heard how Ruth stuck by her mother-in-law, even though she didn't have to, and even though it might have seemed wiser to return home, to find a new husband, to live in the life that she'd always lived.

But instead, she's stuck by Naomi. She was caring for her even now as she was in the field gleaning. Ruth is a woman of character. And then in verse 12, Boaz pronounces a short benediction or blessing on Naomi.

He says, 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. Do you see what Boaz is saying?

Ruth has come under the wings of God. She has placed her hope and her trust in God. She's put her entire future in the hands of God. In the words of Psalm 91, Ruth has come to dwell in the shelter of the Most High.

[24 : 37] She has called God her refuge and fortress, and the God in whom she trusts. Boaz is saying that Ruth is like the young of an eagle, under the protection of God, who is like an eagle protecting its young.

A quick Google will show you a video of a bold eagle sitting on its wings. And they will do that regardless of what happens around them. There's footage online of an eagle who's sheltering her wings like that, and she's covered in about four or five inches of snow.

The only thing that you can see popping out of the snow is a head and a yellow beak. The bird was freezing, was close to starvation, but the eagle will never, ever stop protecting its young.

Even after the eggs hatch, the eagle will never stop protecting its young. It's said to be one of the closest bonds within the animal kingdom. And this is the illustration that Boaz uses to show God's provision and protection for his people.

God's protection and provision for his people is never, ever ending. It doesn't waver. Boaz sees that Ruth has come under God's wings, and he has decided not only to speak a blessing to her, but he has decided to be a blessing to her.

[26 : 00] He is the means by which God is providing for Ruth, and not only to the amount that is sufficient, not to the amount where she just has enough to scrape by, but Ruth is going to be blessed in an abundance, far beyond what she needs.

Verse 17 tells us how much she had gleaned that day, an ephah, approximately 22 kilograms of barley, so much that she can hardly carry it home to Bethlehem.

The interesting thing to notice here is Boaz's attitude towards the law of God. He doesn't see the law of God as a burden. He doesn't think of the law as something that he needs to obey to find favor in God's sight.

He doesn't look at the law with a divided heart, thinking, should I or shouldn't I do this? But he sees the law of God as a way of glorifying God. He doesn't just obey the law.

He doesn't just allow Ruth to glean because he has to. But he goes above and beyond what the law demands. He goes above and beyond. He sees his position as a way of glorifying God Almighty.

[27 : 10] It would be great if we were that enthusiastic about serving God with our lives. If we viewed everything we have and everything we do as an opportunity to glorify God, it would change the way we view God.

And I think it could also change the way that those around us view God. This attitude towards God and the resources that he has given us could change our lives.

They could make our lives more of a witness to the grace and provision of God. If we serve him and if we worship him with everything and in everything that we do.

Ruth staggers home under the weight of her reward for a day's labor. And she is greeted with the amazement of her mother-in-law. You can imagine the ear-to-ear grin on Naomi's face as she sees Ruth struggling down the road.

The reward was far beyond Ruth's expectations for that day. And it was contrary to Naomi's experience of bitterness. God had provided far more than they needed.

[28 : 14] But we need to keep in mind Ruth's situation. Her life was bitter. She was pained. She was mourning. Almost destroyed, understandably, by terrible things that had happened. She is completely unprepared for the kindness that has been shown to the both of them through Boaz.

Ruth explains that she gleaned in Boaz's field. And as Naomi hears this, you can kind of imagine a light bulb moment. She hears Boaz's name and then starts thinking about the future.

Suddenly, things are looking a bit better. Suddenly, there might actually be a chance of survival. And then she says in verse 20, The Lord bless him.

He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead. Do you notice the difference between what Naomi has just said and what we last heard her say in chapter 1?

The last words of Naomi were in chapter 1, verses 20 and 21, where she said, Suddenly, Naomi has gone from God has brought misfortune upon me to the kindness of the Lord has not forsaken

the living or the dead.

[29 : 43] Naomi is seeing the hand of God at work. She sees kindness in place of misfortune. And then she states that Boaz is one of their kinsmen redeemers.

This is an Old Testament practice that Israel was to abide by, known as leveret marriage. You can read about it in Deuteronomy 25, verses 5 to 6, but I'll just summarize what it is for us.

The law states that if a man dies before he has a male child with his wife, then the brother of the deceased was to marry his sister-in-law. And the first male child of their marriage was to carry the name of the first husband who had died.

That way the inheritance stayed within the family and the name of the deceased husband wouldn't be forgotten. In Ruth's case, her brother-in-law and husband had both died in Moab.

But Boaz remained. And because Boaz was a member of Ruth's deceased husband's clan, he could marry her and the first son would carry the name of Ruth's first husband who died in Moab.

[30 : 48] Boaz could prolong the family line of Elimelech. That is why Naomi says that God has not stopped showing kindness to the living and to the dead. Because Boaz could redeem Ruth and by doing so continue the line of her deceased husband.

Naomi sees that God is working behind the scenes. God is providing for his people. Naomi sees a whole new future for her daughter-in-law. One that is filled with kindness.

Naomi tells Ruth to stay and work in Boaz's field and to work with his people. And as Naomi's mind is thinking of a possible future between Ruth and Boaz, do you see how God has provided for his people?

All of the things that have happened up until now are not coincidences, but they are God orchestrating events to bring about his purposes. In chapter 1, Naomi was bitter and saw misfortune, but now, after all of these events, she sees kindness and blessings from God.

Now we can sit here this evening and think, well that's a lovely story from thousands of years ago. But the truth of the matter is that God still provides for his people today. I think there are two major ways that we can see God providing for his people today.

[32 : 07] And the first is that he provides for our daily needs. Jesus has this to say about God's provision in Matthew chapter 6. God provides us.

God provided for Ruth and Naomi in the darkest of times. I'm sure they had worries about how it would all turn out, how they would survive, but God still provided for them.

In those times when we worry about things, when we are in need, we can remember the truth that God provides for his people. We can know and be encouraged by the fact that God is always there for us and his provision continues even today.

The second major way that God provides for his people, very similar to the case of Boaz and Ruth, is far beyond expectation. It is far beyond what we deserve.

God has given us an abundance of grace. He has shown us love and forgiveness through his King, Jesus Christ. In God's love for his people, he chose to send his Son, his perfect Son, to pay the punishment for the sin that we deserve, so that we can be reconciled to him.

[33 : 47] There is no greater story of grace, and there is no greater story of undeserved kindness and love than the Son of God dying for the sins of the world. And the amazing thing is that this is the God we have the privilege of worshipping.

This is the God that we have the privilege of being in a relationship with. The same God whose kindness is unrelenting, whose love is unfathomable.

The same God who works in all things for the good of his people. The same God who saw fit to take away our deepest need, the forgiveness of our sins by our Lord Jesus Christ.

This story also shows us that this relationship with God is possible for everybody. It was even possible for a Moabitess, a woman who back then would have had no connection whatsoever with God, but by God's providence, she came from Moab to Bethlehem.

And then she became a child of God. God in his love and his providence worked out his purposes, which led to the birth of Jesus Christ, God's true and reigning king.

[35 : 00] If you're listening to this and you're not a Christian, then God's purposes in this world are still being worked out. And all the time God is drawing people to himself.

If you want to follow the same God who cared for Ruth, the same God who provided for Ruth, who brought about his purposes through his people and who brings refuge to them under his protective wings, then you need to do what Ruth did.

You need to make a decision to follow him as your Lord and Savior. That is the message of the book of Ruth. That God is working out his salvation plan and that he is making the way for his king. In Ruth chapter 2, we see the providential purpose of God and the provision for God's people. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for the truths that we can read about, which give us strength to make it through each day. Help us remember your providence in our times of doubt and our times of confusion, in our times of need.

[36 : 12] Help us remember your provision when we need it most. More importantly, help us come under the shelter of your wings. We pray all of this in the mighty and powerful name of your Son and our Lord and King, Jesus Christ.

Amen.