

The Providence of God in Ordinary Life

Ruth 2

August 9th, 2020

Intro:

Providence vs miracle

“1,000 people applied for the job, but I got it! It was a miracle!”

“If I would have been to the intersection 30 seconds earlier I would have been in a car accident. It was a miracle!”

Providence: God’s constant care for, and His absolute rule over, all creation for His own glory and the good of His people. (Jerry Bridges)

Ephesians 1:11b who works all things after the counsel of His will,

Romans 8:28 ²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

Miracle: God suspending natural laws and personally reaching into life to rearrange people and their circumstances according to His will.

Jerry Bridges: A miracle is God’s working **outside** of His creation laws. Providence is God’s working **inside** of His creation laws.

Example: Wine is produced from grapes going through a natural process (fermentation) that was designed by God and is controlled by God. It is a part of God’s providence. By contrast, Jesus turning water into wine was outside of God’s ordinary process; it was supernatural. It was a miracle.

Example: The metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly is a fascinating process. But it is not a miracle. From the very beginning of creation, God designed the butterfly to morph from a caterpillar. That metamorphosis is an expression of God’s providence.

This may seem like just an issue of semantics, but it’s not. If we only think of God’s involvement in terms of *miracles*, then we will look at life and conclude God’s hand is absent. But if we see that God’s providence orchestrates His world, we see His hand everywhere.

We see miracles on the pages of scripture, but not as often as you might think. God parts the Red Sea, heals the blind, turns water into wine. But we go generations with few if any recorded miracles. But that doesn’t mean God is absent or no longer at work. He’s behind the scenes guiding, directing, moving, arranging, preparing events to accomplish His plan.

The same is true in your life and mine. There are times that we might see true miracles – God has not ceased from performing miracles today and He could certainly do so. He could heal in response to prayer, for example. But have you seen God’s providence? Have you seen Him working through ordinary means to accomplish His plans?

Last week we saw the tragic beginning to the powerful short story of Ruth.

Naomi is hit with three hard blows – losing her husband and both her sons.

One daughter-in-law chooses to return home to Moab, the other, Ruth, chooses to come with Naomi and join herself to the people of Israel and the Lord.

1. Foreshadowing: The introduction of **Boaz** (2:1)

- a. Boaz is introduced into the story as the kinsman of Elimelech (Naomi's late husband and Ruth's late father-in-law) and a man of great wealth (2:1)
 - i. Just like in any movie or novel, when a character is introduced early on, you know he will play a role, even if you aren't sure what that role will be yet. Clearly he will be key to the story.

2. Ruth requests to go **glean** in the field (2:2-3)

- a. Steps for harvesting grain
 - i. cutting the ripened standing grain with hand sickles, usually done by men
 - ii. binding the grain into sheaves, usually done by women
 - iii. gleaning, that is, gathering the stalks of grain left behind
 - iv. transporting the sheaves to the threshing floor, often by donkey and sometimes by cart
 - v. threshing, that is, loosening the grain from the straw, usually done by the treading of cattle, but sometimes done by tooth threshing sledges or the wheels of carts.
 - vi. Winnowing, done by tossing the grain into the air with winnowing forks so that the wind, which usually came up for a few hours in the afternoon, blew away the straw and chaff, leaving the grain at the winnower's feet.
 - vii. Sifting the grain to remove any residual foreign matter
 - viii. Bagging for transportation and storage

b. **Glean: j;q;l'**

- i. Israelite landowners were required to leave the crops in corners of their field and the grain and fruit that fall on the ground for the needy and stranger. It was a type of welfare system to provide for the needs of the poor.
 - 1. **Leviticus 19:9-10** 'Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰ 'Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God.
- ii. Ruth was certainly needy so she asked to go utilize this system to provide for their needs.
- iii. Although the law directed landowners to leave the gleanings, the landowners might not have always followed it out of a desire to yield a larger harvest.
- iv. That Boaz followed the command was indicative of his character.

c. Ruth "**happened**" to come to the portion that belonged to Boaz (2:3)

- i. **hr,q.mi** what happens by itself without any assistance or wish of person involved, without any known originator.
 - 1. "As it happened," "as it turned out" or lit. "she happened to happen upon."
 - 2. In light of the frequent mentioning of the Lord's providential guidance, this phrase stands out.
 - a. 1:6 – The Lord provided food in Israel
 - b. 2:20 – The Lord shows kindness through arranging the circumstances

- c. 4:13 – The Lord enabled Ruth to conceive
 - 3. From Boaz and Ruth’s perspective, their meeting was by chance. From the Lord’s perspective, it was not.
 - ii. Think about how much of your life “just happened” and yet looking back you can see God’s providential direction and provision.
 - 1. In high school I needed to find someone to help me with some work I was doing for a day down river. I just so happened to invite a friend who was a Christian. He shared Christ with me and I came to Christ later that fall. Two years later I just so happened to end up at ISU for school (after some other opportunities didn’t work out). Meanwhile, on the other side of the mountains in Montana, Sarah just so happened to choose ISU as well. We just so happened to sit near each other at church and made introductions.
 - d. What is Ruth after? Food. What does God have planned? Something far bigger.
 - i. Marriage. Family. Lineage. Does Ruth know that? Not at all. She’s just making choices that are wise, diligent, and honorable. She’s working hard, providing for herself and her mother in law.
3. Boaz meets Ruth and demonstrates kindness and generosity. (2:4-16)
 - a. Boaz greets his reapers and asks about the identity of Ruth (2:4-7)
 - i. Behold!
 - 1. Look! See! Pay attention! Keep your eyes glued to this man!
 - 2. His first words are meant to highlight his personal godliness, care for his workers, and the continued involvement of the Lord in the unfolding situation.
 - ii. Boaz takes notice of her and asks about her connection. (2:5-7)
 - 1. Don’t take the phrase “Whose young woman is this?” as demeaning to women.
 - a. He was asking about her relationship, connection, employment status, connections, etc.
 - b. May have reflected ancient cultural tradition that it would seem impolite (or worse) for a strange man to show too much interest directly in a woman
 - 2. The workers describe Naomi – apparently Boaz had heard of her already because when they said, “She is **the** young Moabite woman . . . ,” he knew who they were referring to (vs. 11).
 - b. Boaz meets Ruth and immediately shows kindness to her (2:8-16)
 - i. Encourages her to stay in his field and drink water as needed (2:8-9)
 - 1. “listen carefully, my daughter”
 - a. Speaks with warmth and affection
 - b. “my daughter” likely is a reflection of their age disparity
 - 2. Perhaps he is interested in her or perhaps he is just showing kindness.
 - a. Ruth doesn’t know he is related to her late father-in-law; only the audience does at this point.
 - 3. Goes beyond the letter of the law by offering her protection and water.

- a. Implication of violence and danger for women –
 - i. “not to touch you”
 - ii. “and do not insult her”
 - iii. ‘do not rebuke her”
 - iv. “so that others do not fall upon you in the field”
 - v. Remember, this takes place during the time of the judges.
 1. The book of judges ends with a scene in which men kidnap women to find wives for themselves. We see it as the culminating action in a section designed to show the sinfulness of people who throw off restraint and do what is right in their own eyes.
 - vi. We see his appropriate concern as a godly man for her physical safety.
 - b. Giving access to the water and, later, the lunchroom gives her status in the household, shows acceptance and went far beyond what was required by the letter of the law.
- ii. She responds with surprise and gratefulness (2:10)
 1. Bows on her face, clearly indicating that he was showing special favor to her and she was very grateful.
 2. Why would he take notice of her as a foreigner?
 - iii. Boaz knows about Ruth’s faithful service and loyal love to Naomi and prays for the Lord to reward her (2:11-12)
 1. Left father, mother, and land of her birth to come to an unknown people.
 2. Ask the Lord to reward her (2:12)
 - a. A beautiful prayer that indicates his character as well as the hope that Ruth was trusting in – the God of Israel under whose wings she has come to seek refuge.
 - b. **Psalm 36:7** How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings.
 - c. Boaz is both affirming that the Lord shows care and provision for her AND is tangibly meeting her needs.
 - i. **James 2:15-16** If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?
 - iv. Ruth expresses her gratefulness for his kindness (2:13)
 1. He comforted her and spoke kindly when undeserved
 - v. Boaz shows even greater kindness to Ruth (2:14-16)
 1. Boaz invites her to eat with them (2:14)

- a. She ate and was satisfied – rare enough for Ruth in her desperate situation that it deserves mention in the narrative.
 2. Boaz commanded his servants to let her glean with them and even drop some extra grain on purpose (2:15-16)
 - a. Don't insult (humiliate, rebuke, embarrass)
 - i. Might feel humiliating to depend on the kindness of others.
 - b. Still maintaining her dignity of work.
4. Ruth gleaned until evening and then returned to Naomi who rejoiced in God's provision (2:17-23)
 - a. About an ephah of barley (2:17)
 - i. About half a bushel – 30 pounds – enough food for many days – quite a bit for one day's gleaning.
 1. About as much as a large bag of dogfood
 2. Some ancient records in nearby Babylon show that the ration for a male worker was about 1-2 pounds of grain per day. So in one day she gleaned about a month's worth of wages.
 - b. Naomi prays for God's blessing on the man who took notice of Ruth (2:19)
 - i. Clearly this was an exceptional amount of barley for her to bring home because someone must have taken notice of her for there to be such a large amount of grain.
 - ii. Ruth identifies the man who showed such kindness as Boaz
 1. You can hear the background music to emphasize this statement – Ruth is going to learn the truth about this man that we already know about from 2:1.
 - c. Naomi rejoices because Boaz is their relative (2:20)
 - i. The Lord has not withdrawn his kindness after all!
 1. Another expression of faith from Naomi
 - a. To the living (Naomi and Ruth) and the dead (deceased husbands whose legacy can live on through the provision of a kinsman-redeemer)
 - b. Again, the Lord is working through ordinary circumstances to show kindness to those in need.
 - ii. He is one of our closest relatives - He is one of our kinsmen-redeemers.
 1. The kinsmen-redeemer doesn't describe a precise kinsmen relationship but rather the near relatives to whom law and custom gave certain duties towards the "clan" or extended family. (Hubbard)
 - a. Repurchase of property once owned by clan members but sold from economic necessity
 - i. **Leviticus 25:25** 'If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman is to come and buy back what his relative has sold.
 - b. If financially able, he also redeemed relatives whose poverty had forced them to sell themselves into slavery

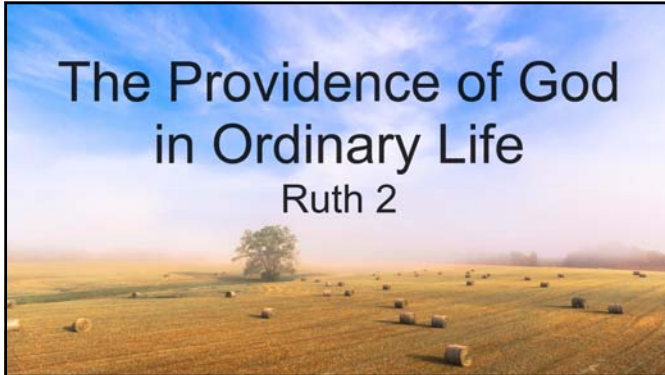
- i. **Leviticus 25:47-49** 'Now if the means of a stranger or of a sojourner with you becomes sufficient, and a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to him as to sell himself to a stranger who is sojourning with you, or to the descendants of a stranger's family, ⁴⁸ then he shall have redemption right after he has been sold. One of his brothers may redeem him, ⁴⁹ or his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or one of his blood relatives from his family may redeem him; or if he prospers, he may redeem himself.
 - c. He had the duty to avenge the killing of a relative by tracking down and execute the killer
 - i. **Numbers 35:19-21** 'The blood avenger himself shall put the murderer to death; he shall put him to death when he meets him. ²⁰ 'If he pushed him of hatred, or threw something at him lying in wait and *as a result* he died, ²¹ or if he struck him down with his hand in enmity, and *as a result* he died, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death, he is a murderer; the blood avenger shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.
 - d. Ruth (the Moabitess) shares his further kindness (2:21)
 - i. Her position as an outsider is mentioned again
 - e. Naomi encourages Ruth to follow Boaz's invitation (2:22)
 - f. Ruth gleaned with them in Boaz's field until the end of the barley and wheat harvest (2:23)
 - i. Each harvest was about a month so this extends out to a two month period.
 - ii. Tension – what would happen to the widows after the harvest?
 - 1. Should have enough food for several months at this point, but still in very difficult and impoverished circumstances.

5. Truth From Ruth

- a. God's **providence** often works through **ordinary** means.
 - i. **Proverbs 16:33** The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.
 - 1. The Lord directs even the casting of dice.
 - ii. Like we talked about last Sunday, from our perspective we can't see how God is at work sometimes (and sometime we never understand it fully) but we can trust in His character and goodness.
 - 1. It may seem like they just "happen."
 - iii. The events of your life are not by chance
 - 1. Your marriage
 - 2. Your work
 - 3. Your neighborhood
 - 4. Your classmates
 - a. Aaron on the basketball team with me
 - iv. Difference between providence and miracle

1. Jerry Bridges: A miracle is God's working outside of His creation laws. Providence is God's working inside of His creation laws.
 - v. Michael Horton: "We frequently distinguish natural and supernatural causes, but this too may reflect the false choice of attributing circumstances either to God or to nature. The Scriptures know nothing of a creation or a history that is at a single moment independent of God's agency. The question is not *whether* God is involved in every aspect of our lives but *how* God is involved. *Therefore, with respect to providence, the question is never whether causes are exclusively natural or supernatural, but whether God's involvement in every moment is providential or miraculous.*"
 - vi. Faithfully working out His plan through the fragile line of human history – fragile from our perspective but never in doubt from His perspective.
 1. Boaz and Ruth → Obed → Jesse → David - - - > Jesus
- b. What is desirable in a man is his kindness.
- i. **Proverbs 19:22** What is desirable in a man is his kindness, And *it is* better to be a poor man than a liar.
 - ii. Boaz showed kindness to Ruth in many ways.
 1. Kind words (2:13)
 - a. He comforted her and spoke kindly when undeserved
 - b. **Proverbs 12:18** There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.
 2. Protecting her from dangerous people she might encounter in other fields (2:8-9; 22)
 3. Gives generously to her while still maintaining her dignity of work
 - iii. Boaz showed kindness to his reapers by greeting them with a prayer for the Lord to be with them. (2:4)
 1. Typical Israelite greeting but again it gives insight into his character.
 - iv. **Colossians 3:12** And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, **kindness**, humility, gentleness and patience
 - v. Growing up as a man doesn't mean increased freedom to do what you want. It means taking loving responsibility for people around you.
 1. Showing kindness to meet their needs.
 2. Kindness doesn't equal weakness.
- c. Jesus is our redeemer.
- i. **Hebrews 2:14-17** Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.¹⁶ For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.¹⁷ Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

1. Jesus plays the role of our kinsman redeemer
 - a. To free us
 - b. To give help
 - c. He had to be made like His brethren – like us – in all things



1

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