

## 2. Another providence of the graceful God

April 28, 2011

I am sure that you all have heard and even used a phrase, "God works in a mysterious way." Personally, I don't like it, nor do I use it. I'd prefer to say, "God knows what He is doing, but I don't." If I must add, I add this, "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

It might be mysterious to us, but not to the Lord. Some people would like to use the word "coincidence." Hardly in God's way. Everything and all things are arranged according to His foreknowledge and providential will of God. Even though we foul up bad; even though we make a royal mess in just about everything we thought that we could handle ourselves; even though our sins brought more disasters than we want to count, God can still take care of everything for His glory and our benefits. We sure serve a great God, amen?

Please allow me to define 'Providence' of God:

Providence: The beneficent outworking of God's sovereignty whereby all events are directed and disposed to bring about those purposes of glory and good for which the universe was made.

Sometimes understanding the providence of God is like Hebrew letters. It must be read backward to understand it.

Last Thursday night, after her family's disobedient departure to the land of Moab and living there for ten years against the Lord's will, she and her daughter-in-law Ruth the Moabite were returning to Bethlehem. Naomi was full of bitterness toward God for the consequences of her own sins. That is about to be changed.

Ruth and Naomi had no idea that they were part of an eternal plan that would fulfill God's promise to Abraham that his Seed would bring blessing to the whole world. Ruth's story begins with the death of a husband, but it will end with the birth of a baby. Her tears will be turned into triumph through faith, grace, and hope in God.

### A. LED BY GOD

*Ruth 2:1-3 There was a relative of Naomi's husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz. 2 So Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." 3 Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.*

Naomi and her family made a choice ten years before – a time of famine in Bethlehem. But they didn't have to make the wrong choice they did. The people of Bethlehem had not perished from hunger. They were still there. And they were blessed more than Naomi's family.

Sometimes we justify wrong choices because of difficult circumstances. But God will strengthen us, and bless us, to make the right choice, even in difficult circumstances.

This was one of the social assistance programs in Israel. According to Leviticus 19:9-10, farmers were not to completely harvest their fields, so the poor and needy could

come and glean the remains for themselves. This is a wonderful way of helping the poor. It commanded the farmers to have a generous heart, and it commanded the poor to be active and work for their food – and a way for them to provide for their own needs with dignity instead of handouts.

## **B. GOD'S GRACE THROUGH BOAZ**

*Ruth 2:4-7 Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, "The Lord be with you!" And they answered him, "The Lord bless you!" 5 Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" 6 So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, "It is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. 7 And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.' So she came and has continued from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house."*

No sooner had Boaz greeted his workers than his eye caught the presence of a stranger in the field, and a lovely stranger you might add. It must have been love at first sight to Boaz. What you don't see here in the English translation but they are in the original Hebrew manuscripts are a whistling by Boaz and "Wow, what a babe!" From that point on, Boaz focuses his interest on Ruth, no longer on the harvest.

The Spirit of the Living God led Ruth to go to one of Boaz's fields. Many times when we are looking for the will and way of God in some spectacular ways, the Lord often uses natural ways to lead us to do what He wants. So don't look for a gold embossed letter from heaven or a sign in the sky.

When we commit our lives to the Lord, what happens to us happens by way of appointment and not by accident. Ruth was still a poor widow and an alien, but God was about to create a new relationship that would completely alter her circumstances and future.

Many Bible students have seen in Boaz a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ in His relationship to His bride, the church. Like Ruth, the lost sinner is outside the covenant family of God, bankrupt, with no claim on God's mercy. But God took the initiative and provided a way for us to enter His family through faith in Jesus Christ. We will learn more about this relationship when we get to the next chapter and we consider the "Kinsman Redeemer."

One more thing we must pay attention to here is that Ruth may not have noticed, but the servant who was in charge of the reapers noticed how she interacted with the people around her and how humble she was. The unbelievers around us notice that we are Christians and we are under their constant observations.

## **C. GOD'S GRACE PERSONIFIED**

*Ruth 2:8-9 Then Boaz said to Ruth, "You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women. 9 Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn."*

Grace means that God makes the first move to come to our aid, not because we deserve anything, but because He loves us first with His unending love.

*1 John 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us.*

God took the initiative in salvation when we were spiritually dead, without strength, sinners, and His enemies. Salvation was not an afterthought of God but that which He planned from eternity. We have every reason to believe Boaz loved Ruth and therefore took the first steps to meet her needs.

*Ruth 2:10-16 So she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" 11 And Boaz answered and said to her, "It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before. 12 The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge." 13 Then she said, "Let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you have comforted me, and have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants." 14 Now Boaz said to her at mealtime, "Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar." So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed parched grain to her; and she ate and was satisfied, and kept some back. 15 And when she rose up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. 16 Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her."*

I want you all to see a beautiful picture of the grace of God here.

- God made us be joint heirs with Jesus Christ. – Romans 8:17
  - Boaz took Ruth under his care as a member of his family.
- God provides all our needs according to His riches in glory. – Philippians 4:19
  - Boaz provided Ruth's needs without her knowledge.
- God protects us. – 1 John 4:4; Philippians 4:7
  - Boaz ordered his young men not to touch her.

I don't think that Boaz extended his kindness to Ruth because he had a crush on her, rather it was his character. We could see that the conversation with his own servants. True kindness is shown when we extend ourselves to others who, as far as we can see, have nothing to give us back.

I am not surprised why the Lord blessed this man Boaz. He was not only kind to others, first he had the right priority in his heart. Look at the v12:

*Ruth 2:12 The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge."*

Contrary to Naomi's concept of the God of Israel, Boaz acknowledged the graciousness of the Lord.

#### **D. HIS PROMISES, NOT YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES**

Please notice the reaction of Ruth:

*Ruth 2:10 So she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"*

She fell at the feet of the master and submitted herself to him. She looked away from her poverty and focused on his riches.

Many people are miserable because they don't obey the admonition of Hebrews 12:2:

*Hebrews 12:2a looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith*

They spend so much time looking at themselves, their circumstances, and other people that they fail to do what Ruth did, namely, center their attention on their Master. Instead of resting in His perfections, they focus on their own imperfections; instead of seeing His spiritual riches, they complain about their bankruptcy.

I read this short poem which is very appropriate for those who keep their eyes on people and their circumstance rather than the Lord.

Look at self and be distressed,  
Look at others and be depressed,  
Look at Jesus and you'll be blessed!

If you listen to the voices of the world, you will be discouraged; but if you listen to the voice of God from His Word, your heart will be encouraged.

### **E. HOPE IN THE LORD**

*Ruth 2:17-23 So she gleaned in the field until evening, and beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. 18 Then she took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. So she brought out and gave to her what she had kept back after she had been satisfied. 19 And her mother-in-law said to her, "Where have you gleaned today? And where did you work? Blessed be the one who took notice of you." 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." 20 Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he of the Lord, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!" And Naomi said to her, "This man is a relation of ours, one of our close relatives." 21 Ruth the Moabitess said, "He also said to me, 'You shall stay close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.'" 22 And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, and that people do not meet you in any other field." 23 So she stayed close by the young women of Boaz, to glean until the end of barley harvest and wheat harvest; and she dwelt with her mother-in-law.*

Yes, God blessed Ruth. Yes, people were generous to her. At the same time, she did work hard. This was a sun-up to sun-down day, and Ruth worked hard all day long. The grain she gleaned amounted to about five and a half liters, enough food for the two women for nearly a week. She also had some food left over from her lunch.

The last time we met Naomi, she was sharing her bitterness with the women of Bethlehem and blaming God for her sorrow and poverty. When Ruth had asked permission to go to the fields to glean, all Naomi said to her was "Go, my daughter". She gave her daughter-in-law no word of encouragement, not even the promise of her prayers.

But now we hear a new word from Naomi's lips, "Blessed!" She not only blessed Ruth's benefactor, Boaz, but she also blessed the Lord. We have moved from bitterness to blessedness. What a change has taken place in the heart of this grieving and bitter widow! This change came about because of the new hope she had in her heart, and the One who gave her that new hope was the Lord through Boaz.

Should not we who believe and have assurance in Jesus Christ rejoice in hope even more? When you consider who He is, what He has done for us, and what He says to us in His Word, there is no reason for us to feel hopeless. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He has died for us, and now He intercedes for us in heaven.

*2 Peter 1:4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

For the Christian believer, hope is not wishful thinking, rather it is grounded in the promises of God Almighty. It is ours to trust and keep. The hopes that the world clings to are dead hopes, but ours is a living hope because it is rooted in the living Christ.

It is encouraging to see the changes that have taken place in Naomi because of what Ruth did. God used Ruth to turn Naomi's bitterness into gratitude, her unbelief into faith, and her despair into hope. One person, trusting the Lord and obeying His will, can change a situation from defeat to victory.

### **F. APPLICATIONS**

- 1) We must live by faith in the Lord.**
- 2) We must live by grace in the Lord.**
- 3) We must live by hope in the Lord.**