

The Lord Provides (Ruth 1:19-2:13)

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Preacher: Brett Sanders

[0:00] Amen, amen. Children, we are ready for Children's Church at this time. You may make your way to the frontier with Miss Savannah.! What a joy it is to be gathering here today.

And I just want to say again how thankful I am for this church and your patience in our construction process. We are almost there. They are telling us we get to move into this new part that they're currently working on here in just a couple of weeks.

And we're thankful for that. Also, thank you for your patience with us as we're trying to get all the heat on. Part of tying in this to the new system, the old system, it all works together.

And they said it's going to be great when we're there, when we're done. But we're still working on getting to that point. So thank you so much for your patience with us through this process. We truly are grateful for that.

This week we're going to continue in our study of the book of Ruth. And so if you want, you can go ahead and make your way there. We'll be reading from it brief in just a few moments.

[1:03] But as we get ready to look at Ruth, I want to ask you a question. And this is a deep, deep theological question. Who likes to watch TV shows?

Who in here has a problem sometimes of getting to the end of a show and it leaves you with a cliffhanger, right? And you're just like, you know what? I'm going to watch a little bit more.

I'm going to watch another episode. And this is kind of a new phenomenon for us, right? I can remember growing up. You get to the end of a show. It leaves you in suspense. It leaves you with this cliffhanger.

And you have to wait all week long thinking about what's going to happen next. And in the worst case scenario, they do this at the end of a season. And you've got to wait until the next season comes out before you'll get to figure out what happens.

But now today, we get to the end of a show. We're like, you know what? I'm just going to watch five more minutes of the next show. I'm just going to watch five more minutes, see what happens. Then I'll cut it off.

[2:03] Problem is, we don't usually cut it off after that. But we all love to know what is going to happen next. Last week in Ruth, we ended with kind of a cliffhanger.

We have seen Naomi and Elimelech and her sons. They go off to Moab. They're trying to find food. There's a famine in Bethlehem. All of these things that are going on while in Moab, Elimelech and their sons, they all die.

And so all of a sudden, Naomi is left with just her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. And they begin this journey back to Bethlehem. For Naomi, it was going back to Bethlehem.

For Ruth and Orpah, it was going to a foreign land. It was going to a place they haven't been before. And so they begin this process of going back. And somewhere along the way, in this journey back, Naomi turns to her daughters-in-law and says, Look, girls, you really need to go back. I don't have anything to offer you. There's nothing that I have for you in Bethlehem. In fact, the best thing for you would probably be to just go home. Go back to your families.

[3:13] Maybe you can start over. Maybe you can find husbands. Maybe you can just kind of start over and have a do-over. That's probably going to be the best thing for you. That's what you need to do.

Well, Orpah takes her up on this. And she makes her way home. But we ended with Ruth having this determination to go with Naomi.

To continue with her. And so that's kind of where we left off. And I love how Tony Marita describes this determination from Ruth.

He says this. He says, Ruth has counted the cost. And she is following Yahweh and joining his people. The Hebrew literally reads, Your God, my God.

Your people, my people. Ruth is not pledging something in the future. But stating something that has already been done. A faith and an identity that she already has.

[4:11] She is saying, Naomi, because your God is my God, and your people are my people, I will go with you. Ruth's declaration is not primarily about her commitment to Naomi.

It is about her commitment to Yahweh. So we ended last week with this bold faith of Ruth determining herself to follow with Naomi and go back to Bethlehem.

This bold faith. Ruth has counted the cost and is saying, Because of my faith in Yahweh, it doesn't matter that you have nothing to offer me, because God is the real treasure.

She's saying, Because of my faith in God, from what you have shown me, from what I have learned, I am following God. And it doesn't matter that the future in front of me is uncertain.

It doesn't matter that I don't know what that next step is going to be. It doesn't matter that you don't have anything to offer me right now that I know about. I'm having faith in God that I'm going to continue with you.

[5:18] And so because God is my God, I am going to continue following. And so we finished last week with this statement. And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said, No more.

So we left off with Ruth's determination to go and continue with Naomi. And like a good cliffhanger to a show, we're excited to jump into this next chapter, right?

We want to see, Well, what does that end up looking like? What's that next step for Ruth? What's going to happen to Ruth? What's going to come of her in Bethlehem? And so we immediately want to jump from there and go straight into life in Bethlehem, right?

What is life looking like for Ruth in Bethlehem? What comes of this decision? But before we get there, before we get to that point, I think there's something very important for us to see in this passage.

And there's a truth that we need to remind ourselves of and that we need to consider this morning, and it is this. As believers, we can and should be honest with God.

[6:24] As believers, we can and should be honest with God. Listen to the end of chapter 1, starting in verse 19. This is what the Word of the Lord says.

It says, And so the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, Is this Naomi? She said to them, Do not call me Naomi. Call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty.

Why call me Naomi when the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me? So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab, and they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Ruth and Naomi, as they make their way into Bethlehem, they cause quite a scene, right? It says in here that it says that the whole town was stirred because of them.

[7:30] There's this buzz that is happening in Bethlehem as they make their way in, and all of a sudden people notice them. Who is this guy? Is this Naomi? Is this Naomi coming back?

And who is this girl with her? So they cause quite a stir as they make their way back into town.

Barry Webb says, he says, Naomi and Ruth are like storm-battered ships limping into the harbor. Neither of them are in good shape after their long journey. Ruth is a complete stranger in Bethlehem, and Naomi, while still herself, is also not herself.

And the truth is, Naomi realizes this. She understands this very clearly. In fact, when people ask her if she's Naomi, she replies, do not call me Naomi.

Call me Mara. For the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. You see, Naomi, it means pleasant or sweet.

[8:31] And so when the people are asking, is this Naomi? Is this pleasant? Is this sweetheart? Is she coming back to us? And she says, don't call me that. Call me Mara, because the Lord has dealt with me very bitterly.

The woman who went away sweet and pleasant is now returning very different. She is the same person, but she's not. And so Naomi has been through a lot over the last 10 years or so in Moab.

And from this, it seems pretty clear that Naomi realized leaving was wrong. Now she believes the Almighty is dealing with her very bitterly for this disobedience.

And so there's this struggle that she's going through. It seems from the way that she's telling people to refer to her, she understands that what she did was wrong as far as going away, leaving Bethlehem, and going into Moab.

She realizes this is wrong, but here's the thing. Does she really have much of a choice in the matter? This is being a patriarchal society where if the husband goes, if the sons are going, if the whole family's going, the wife really doesn't have much of a choice in this matter.

[9:41] And so she leaves with her family, but she also realizes she doesn't start making excuses. She doesn't start telling everybody, well, we went away, but I told Elimelech not to do this.

I told my sons we shouldn't be doing this. No, she takes responsibility and says, what we did was wrong. We went away and we are, and now the Lord is judging for this.

Others may have been able to make a decision, possibly the sons, depending on their ages, may have been able to make a decision, but Naomi was bound to go with her husband and sons.

But she takes responsibility for this and she shows very clearly the struggle that she is facing. And I think all too often we're afraid to be honest with God.

And I realize that sounds crazy, right? Because God knows all things, so He knows when we're not being honest with Him. But many times, we're afraid to be honest with Him.

[10:41] But the thing is, it can be very helpful at times to be honest with our feelings towards God. Now again, Naomi didn't abandon God. She didn't turn her back on Him, say that He's not there, that He's not real or anything like that, but she was very open and honest.

In fact, it tells us over and over again that she talks about God as the Almighty. He's dealt with her. The Lord has brought her. Again, the Lord and again, the Almighty. In fact, going back to when they're in Moab, she still remembers the Lord.

Because what we see as she begins to make her way back in verse 6, it says, then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return home from the country of Moab. For she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited His people and given them food.

She recognizes the Lord is there. She recognizes Naomi may not be seeing things clearly in her life, but she does see God in her situation.

And this is true of many other people in Scripture. Many of the Psalms of David that you read, you'll see David struggling with something in his feelings for God of how God is judging, how God is working, how God is moving.

[11:54] And he'll be very open and he'll be very honest in these Psalms of this struggle that he's going through. But it's not just David in the Psalms. You see this in Abraham's life.

You see this in Moses' life, in Jeremiah's life, in Paul's life, and many others. We're very honest with God. We see examples all throughout Scripture, but perhaps one of the clearest places that we can see this is in the book of Lamentations.

In this book, in Lamentations 3 in particular, it gives us a great example of people being real with God, but also understanding truth. In chapter 3, starting in verse 1, it says this, I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath.

He has driven me and brought me into darkness without any light. Surely against me he turns his hand and again and again the whole day long. Verse 7, it says, He has walled me about so that I cannot escape.

He has made my chains heavy. Though I call and cry out for help, he shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my ways with blocks of stones, and he has made my paths crooked.

[13:05] You see, Jeremiah is at a very low point in his life here. The nation that he loves, the people that he loves, they're all rightly experiencing the wrath of God.

They're all rightly experiencing this, but he's struggling with it. And he says, in the midst of this, it feels like God doesn't even hear me when I call out to him. It feels like God doesn't even, is not even there when I reach out to him.

But also in the midst of the frustration, in Lamentations chapter 3, Jeremiah reminds himself of a powerful truth. He says, But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul, and therefore I will hope in him.

The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves of truth that we already know.

[14 : 16] Sometimes we just have to tell ourselves. Sometimes we need to go to God's word and open it up and to see it with fresh eyes. Sometimes we need people in our lives who will speak truth into our life when it's hard for us to even see it ourselves.

For Jeremiah, it seems that this is something that he would call to mind. He says, This I call to mind, and therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

His mercies never come to an end. He says, These mercies, they're new every morning. For Naomi, it was difficult to see in the moment. She felt as though she were empty.

She says, The Lord has brought me back empty. But this was not true. She was not empty. In fact, we see in chapter 4 that she had some land that she was left with.

But more importantly than this, she has a daughter-in-law who loves the Lord, who is there with her, who says, You know what? Your people are my people.

[15 : 20] Because your God is my God, your people will be my people. And because of that, I'm going to be there. I'm going to go with you. I'm not going to leave you. I'm going to continue going with you.

And so what Naomi needed was to see God's faithfulness again. All she could see was what she was going through. She could only see her poverty, her lack of husband and sons, her lack of security.

Rita notes, she says, She pits herself against God even though it is part of God's character to care for widows. She pits herself against God even though it's a part of His character to care for widows. What she needed was to see God's faithfulness again. That faithfulness never changed, but she needed to see it again. And I want to encourage you this morning to be honest with God.

Let's face it, He knows the truth already. He knows what we're going through. But be encouraged that He is a big God, a powerful and strong God, a good Father that loves His children.

[16 : 27] So don't be afraid to be open and honest with Him. You're not going to catch Him off guard. You're not going to share something with Him that says, Wow, I didn't know that you were going through this.

Wow, I didn't know that you were experiencing this. He knows exactly what we're going through. He knows our heart. And so it's best if we're just open and honest with Him as we come to Him. There may be times when we feel very bitter like Naomi.

And I encourage you to share that with God. And in those moments, be reminded of His grace.

When you feel abandoned, cry out to God and remember His mercy.

When you doubt His love for you tell Him that and set your gaze, fix your eyes on the cross.

Because as we look to the cross, we are reminded of God's love for us.

We can't think about the cross. We can't fix our eyes on the cross without being reminded that we have a God who loves us, who saw our greatest need, stepped from the glory of heaven, a very humble birth, lived a humble life, lived the life that we couldn't live, died the death that we deserve so that we can have new life in Him.

[17 : 39] We set our gaze, we fixed our eyes on the cross and we're reminded of that love that He has for us. But not only should we be honest with God, this next scene of life in Bethlehem and the barley harvest reminds us of another very important truth.

Yes, we should be open and honest with God, but we're also reminded that the Lord is our provider. He's our provider. Verses 1 through 7 of chapter 2 says this, Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

And Ruth, the Moabite, said to Naomi, Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him whose sight I might find favor. And she said to her, Go, my daughter.

And so she set out and went and gleaned in the fields after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.

And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they all answered, The Lord bless you. Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, Whose young woman is this?

[18 : 58] 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. She said, Please let me glean and

gather among the sheaves after the reapers.

And so she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest. Now, before we even get into how the Lord provides through Boaz, we can see how the Lord provided for widows, for the poor, for sojourners, for the fatherless, all of those things right here just by with what Ruth is doing.

We are told that Ruth was going out to glean. And gleaning consisted of gathering dropped grain or grain that was left standing or the corners of the fields of grain.

They would leave these for people who were in need, for the weak, the poor, the widows, the sojourners, the fatherless. All of those people were able to go and gather for themselves.

In fact, this wasn't just a customary practice they did. It was something that the Lord told them to do. Back in Deuteronomy chapter 24, we read these words. It says, When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it.

[20:15] It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all of your work of your hands. It says, When you reap your olive trees, you shall not go over them again.

It shall be for the sojourner, for the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of the vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. So before we even get into the Lord's provision with Boaz, we clearly see that the Lord has a heart for the hurting. And since God is immutable, meaning he doesn't change, he's the same yesterday, today, and forever, we can safely say that God still has a heart for the hurting.

And what we're going to see in this passage is that he allows us to be a part of what he's doing to meet needs in this world. And so getting back into who Boaz is.

Now verse 1, it tells us some pretty significant things about Boaz. And so for us, we can read verse 1 and we just see a few descriptions of Boaz, but they really don't carry significant weight for us because of our cultural context reading this.

[21:34] But I want us to take just a minute to look at verse 1 and see the significant details it tells us about who Boaz is. To begin with, it says here, now Naomi had a relative of her husband's.

So the first thing we see is that this is a relative. Now for us, that's just a description. It doesn't really mean anything, but for the readers who were reading this, for the original audience who was reading this, they would have immediately thought, oh my goodness, I wonder, I wonder if this man's going to be a kinsman redeemer.

I wonder if this man's going to be a family redeemer for Ruth and Naomi. I wonder if this is the answer to their problem. And so he says he was a relative, but then it also says that he was a worthy man.

He was a worthy man. Now the Hebrew phrase that gets translated worthy man has many layers to it. In some contexts, it actually deals with someone who's in the military.

It means a mighty man of valor, a noble warrior, or a military hero. And it's the same phrase that is used in Judges chapter 6 talking about Gideon, that he was a mighty man of valor.

[22:51] In different contexts, it speaks of a person's character. But at the simplest, most basic level, it simply means that he's a man of substance, or a man of wealth.

And I think the CSB, if you have a copy of that, has one of the best translations when it tells us that he was a prominent man of noble character. This Boaz was a worthy man.

He was a prominent man of noble character. Boaz was no run-of-the-mill Israelite. He was a worthy man of noble character. He was a prominent man. He was a wealthy man. Boaz is introduced to us as someone who is both strong financially and strong morally.

And so there's a lot of build-up to this introduction, right? We're told that, okay, well, there's going to be this relative of Elimelech. Okay, we're listening. And this relative of Elimelech, he is a worthy man.

He's a prominent man, a man of character, a man of wealth. And we're thinking, okay, well, maybe this is going to be the answer. Maybe he's going to be the one who comes in on the scene.

[23:58] And all of this is significant because we're able to see from this story the conditions to being a redeemer, to being this family, this kinsman redeemer.

And there's three qualifications that must be present in order for this to happen. One must be a relative. Chapter two, verse one, tells us, check, he's a relative.

Well, he must be, have the means, he must have the ability to redeem. Well, he's a worthy man. He's prominent. He's wealthy. He has the means. He can do this. And then the final thing that must be present in order for this to be a redeemer is this willingness to do so.

Well, it tells us he's a man of character. He's a man who is strong morally. So our hope is that this is going to be the redeemer for Ruth and Naomi.

So it appears that Boaz could possibly be this redeemer. And so what we see as we continue to read is that the Lord continues to provide. Now, spoiler alert, of course, Boaz gets to be the kinsman redeemer.

[25:04] That's going to happen. If I just ruined Ruth for you, I'm sorry, but it's only four chapters long. You could have easily seen that coming. But he's going to be that kinsman redeemer.

He's going to do that. But even before he enters into that relationship with Ruth, there are ways that he provides for her, even just from a standpoint of someone looking on.

So I want you to listen to verses 8 through 13. It says this. Listen to the ways that the Lord provided through Boaz. Then Boaz said to Ruth, Now listen, my daughter, do not go 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 that the young men are not to touch you? And so the first thing he provides right here, Boaz provides security.

Going out for a young woman gleaning in the fields could be a very dangerous thing. There's a very little overwatch people that are out there. It could be a very dangerous place. And so Boaz is told the young men who are working the fields, don't touch her.

[26:17] And so he provides security for her. And he says, And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn. He provides nourishment for her. Then she fell on her face, bowing 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. But Boaz answered her, 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 in your native land and came to a people that you did not know.

And so he provides encouragement for her. And he says, The Lord repay you for what you have done and a full reward for what was given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

Provides a blessing for her. 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.

He provides kindness and encouragement to her again. And so over and over again, we see that Boaz is providing things for. But what we're also able to see in this passage right here is an encouragement for us in our faith.

[27:36] Both Boaz and Ruth give us an example to follow with our faith. Ruth gives us an example of great faith in the midst of suffering. She understands that the Lord provides.

She understands that there's ways that the Lord provides. And one of the ways that He's providing is to be a gleaner in this field. The Lord has commanded them to leave this grain back, not to go back and pick it up if they drop it, but to make sure they leave the corners so that those who are hurting like she is can be provided for.

The Lord is providing this. And so her faith allows her to step out and work boldly and faithfully for that. She goes out to the fields early in the morning and works without, with very little breaks.

And so she has this great faith. But Boaz, he also is an example for us. Boaz is not in a critical point of his life where he is suffering.

In fact, things seem to be going pretty well for Boaz. He has plenty of wealth, good relationships with his workers, and yet he shows us the importance of living out our faith in our everyday ordinary lives.

[28:47] to be honest, there's difficulties with both of these situations, right? Of course, there's difficulties of living out your faith in the midst of suffering like Ruth because many times in the suffering it's hard to see past the pain.

It's hard to see past the difficulties. It's hard to see past the suffering. But sometimes the bigger struggle is when things are going well, when we have an abundance in our refrigerators, when we have an abundance in our bank accounts, in the number of rooms in our houses, it can sometimes be hard to live by faith.

But Boaz shows us the importance of doing this by showing that living by faith means that we live out justice and mercy and seek to be a blessing to others.

Ruth was a Moabite widow. And for us, again, that's just a description. But for them in this context, that was saying something pretty significant. She had no one except Naomi in Bethlehem.

She was about as helpless as she could possibly be. But Boaz's faith allowed him to use his blessing as a way to bless others.

[30:06] Boaz's faith allowed him, even before he entered a relationship with Ruth, even before we see what comes in chapters three and four. Even before all of those things came, his faith allowed him to use his blessing to be a blessing to others.

And this is what God has called us to do as well. Right now, we have many opportunities that we can use our voice to give a voice to those who are struggling.

We're getting ready to start back with Reed Georgia. Reed Georgia is something we've been doing for a couple of years where we, in the past couple of years, we've gone into one elementary school. And in that elementary school, we come alongside children who need a little help with reading, who may not be quite on par at the same grade level as everybody else, but just need a little bit of encouragement.

Did you know that in many states that the government will look at the reading scores and the reading level of students in elementary school to determine how much space they'll need in prisons in the next 10 to 15 years?

Reading, literacy is something that's significant to being able to be in this society. And so we want to come alongside them. But this year, not only do we have an opportunity to go into one of the schools, the door is seeming to be open to all of our schools to be able to go into, all the schools in our county.

[31:26] So that means we need people who are willing to step up and do this. This week, we're getting ready to send some finances. You know, we've, as a church, set aside \$100,000 that we've been having in a bank and some investments to be invested in missions, to be invested in North American missions, international missions.

This week, we get an opportunity to start sending some of those finances. We're going to send some to Kenya to work with an organization that is building a well. We're going to send some to South Asia to help with the relief of one of our partners and the work that they're doing with some significant flooding that has happened in their country of residence.

We're going to be sending some of that to Mexico to work with Pastor Felipe who is working to love on and minister to so many children in his neighborhood. We're going to be sending those things, but here's the thing.

Sending money, that's the easy part. That makes us feel real good sometimes to send money. Oh, well, we're doing our part. We're just sending some money there. But what we're also called to do is to go ourselves, to use how God has blessed us to be a blessing to others, to speak up for those who are hurting and going through.

This is part of what it means to love our neighbor. The mission of God involves speaking up for those who have no voice. This is a vital part of sharing the gospel. May we never over-spiritualize missions and reduce it to only being concerned about a person's eternity and not what they're going through right now.

[33:01] When you look at Jesus' life and as he went around from town to town, you see him meeting physical needs. You see him telling people about the ultimate greatest need and when you look at it, comparing them, telling people about who Jesus is and the spiritual part of missions is far greater than the physical part because that has a far greater impact forever and ever and ever and ever.

but may we never forget about the real needs that people are going through. Needs that prevent them from seeing God's grace.

Needs that prevent them from understanding the gospel message. I love how Charles Spurgeon pleaded with his congregation. He said this, he says, If any of you can do anything to help the toil-worn workers, I pray that you do it.

Let us do all that we can to alleviate their present suffering. Let us open our eyes to see suffering that is around us here in this community and this nation around the world.

Let us do all we can to alleviate that and let us do all we can to tell them of a Savior who made a way where there was no way. Who left heaven and lived a life that we couldn't and died a death that

[34:58] And so as we close, I want to ask you to pray today. Thank God for the ways that He has provided for you over and over again and ask Him to clearly help you see needs that are around us.

[36:10] So I want to encourage you to pray to Him and say, Lord, open the doors and help me to be honest with you. Help me to walk through those doors and be a light for you wherever you call me to go.

Lord, we thank you for this story. A story that we're familiar with but Lord, I pray that we see it with fresh eyes being reminded of the faith of Ruth, the faith of Boaz.

Lord, we ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I'm going to invite you to take your singing hymnal and turn to one of my favorite hymns, hymn number 362, Jesus Strong and Kind.

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