

God's Sovereign Kindness

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[0 : 0 0] I want to pray for us before we look at our next installment of Ruth. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this lovely story in your word, this true story of your great and sovereign kindness to Ruth and to us. Father, we pray that as we look at it again this morning, that you might help us to understand what you are saying to us through your word.

But more than that, that you might give us hearts to live it out. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, there are all sorts of coincidences in life, aren't there? On December the 5th, 1660, a ship sank in the Straits of Dover and only one survivor was noted and his name was Hugh Williams.

Again, on December 5th, but this time 1767, another ship sank in the same waters. 127 lost their lives and the only survivor was another man called Hugh Williams.

On the 8th of August, 1820, a boat capsized in the Thames. There was only one survivor, a man called Hugh Williams. On the 10th of July, 1940, a British trawler was destroyed by a German mine and only two men survived, one man and his nephew, and they were both called Hugh Williams.

True story, I'm told. And I tell you what, if I ever get in a boat, I'm changing my name to Hugh Williams. Now, of course, whoever found out these facts excluded the other boat accidents, where there were many other survivors not called Hugh Williams.

[1 : 3 6] However, that is still quite an amazing coincidence. Well, today we see another couple of coincidences in Ruth, which, of course, are not really coincidences, are they? But God's sovereign hand silently at work.

Which brings us to point one on your outlines, in your bulletins, and verse one in your Bibles. It would be great if you could have your Bibles open at Ruth chapter 2, as we make our way through it.

So, Ruth chapter 2, page 264. Verse one and two. Now, Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a man of standing from the clan of Elimelech.

That was Naomi's husband, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favour.

Naomi said to her, Go ahead, my daughter. Well, here in verse one, we are introduced to Boaz, who just so happens to be a close relative of Naomi's.

[2 : 3 8] It's from her husband's family. And close relatives had a responsibility to care for their own relatives when they were in need. We'll see that particularly next week.

And we know that Naomi is in need. If you remember from last week, she returned to Bethlehem with Ruth, empty. She had nothing, she claimed. They were poor, without food.

But what's more, Boaz isn't just any old close relative, but he was a man of standing, we're told in verse one. That is, he was a man of godly character and wealth.

And we'll see both of those characteristics in a moment. But the point here is that this is the exact type of person that Naomi needs to provide for her. Boaz is a close relative who ought to do something to provide for her.

And he was a godly man, which means he probably will do something to provide for her. And he's a wealthy man, which means he can actually do something to provide for her.

[3 : 36] You see, Boaz is the perfect person to provide for Naomi. And so after arriving in Bethlehem, Ruth suggests the next day, it seems, that she goes to see if she can pick up any leftover grain missed by the harvesters in the field.

And this just so happens to be the very best thing to do. For God had instructed Israelites to leave grain for the alien or for the foreigners. In fact, on the slide, there's a verse from Deuteronomy.

And it says, And the overriding reason at the end of those verses in Deuteronomy is, Now, Ruth would not have known that law from Deuteronomy.

In fact, in verse 2, the narrator reminds us at the very point of her suggestion that Ruth is a Moabite. And she's not from Israel. And she would not have known this Israelite law.

And Naomi doesn't seem to have told her either, because notice it's Ruth taking all the initiative here. It seems Naomi is still bitter from the end of chapter 1. So Ruth takes the initiative and seems to be the very best suggestion.

[4 : 54] I mean, Ruth could have suggested to go and beg for food. She could have suggested to try and work as a slave or something like that. But she just so happens to make the very best suggestion possible. The very suggestion that the law of Israel provided for.

And so in verse 3, we read this. So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech.

Notice that phrase there? I love that phrase, as it turned out. Boaz is the very type of person that Naomi needs to provide for her. And as it turns out, Ruth just so happens to end up in his field.

And to make sure we realize how good this is, the narrator adds again that Boaz is from the clan of Elimelech. You see, this is a very happy coincidence. And then comes another one in verse 4.

It says, Just then, or literally, And behold, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters. The Lord be with you. And the Lord bless you, they answered.

[6 : 00] Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, Who does that young woman belong to? The overseer replied, She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. She said, Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.

And so she came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter. Boaz. See, when Ruth starts working in the field, who just so happens to turn up?

Boaz. And I love the way the narrator describes it. Verse 7 actually tells us that Ruth has been working all morning before Boaz turns up. But the way the narrator writes verses 3 and 4, it's as though as soon as Ruth starts working, Boaz appears.

Do you see verse 3 and 4 again? As it turned out, she went working in the field of belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. And just then, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem.

She's been there all morning, but the way the narrator describes it, it's like it just happens. Behold, Boaz turns up, the very person that they need. Do you see how the narrator is seeking to highlight one coincidence after another?

[7 : 04] Ruth just so happens to pick the very best thing to do. Then she just so happens to pick the part of the field belonging to Boaz, the very best person to provide for them. And then Boaz just so happens to turn up and check on his field and see Ruth.

It's coincidence after coincidence, isn't it? Now, you could argue, I suppose, that Ruth going to glean in the field is a very natural thing for a poor person to do, and it is. And Boaz coming to check on his field would be a very normal thing for a landowner to do, and it is.

But the way our narrator describes these events, he wants us to see that these ordinary things are too coincidental to be random. I mean, she could have ended up in anyone's field, but she ended up in Boaz's.

No, no, it's too coincidental for someone not to be working behind the scenes. A small church in Nebraska, USA, called Westside Baptist Church, held its choir practice every Wednesday night at 7.30 sharp.

But on the 1st of March, at 7.37, seven minutes after practice was due to start, a gas leak caused a massive explosion and destroyed the small church building. But it just so happened that all 15 choir members and the director were running late that night.

[8 : 15] And so there was no one in the building. No one was hurt. Now, I suppose you could argue that maybe there was an accident on the road that held them all up. But no, it's far too coincidental for someone not to be working behind the scenes, isn't it?

And so too here. For it is the Lord who is working behind the scenes to provide for Naomi. Naomi, his sovereign hand is silently working a way to provide. And I wonder if we get a glimpse of this in verse 4, that it's God doing this.

You see, in verse 4, where we have one of these so-called coincidences, you know, just then Boaz turns up. We also have the greeting of Boaz, which says, The Lord be with you. And they respond, The Lord bless you.

You see, at the very point of this coincidence, God is mentioned twice as the one who is with us and as the one who blesses us. Now, perhaps I'm reading too much into this, and we can sometimes do that.

But it's almost as though Boaz's greeting reminds us of who it is that's working behind the scenes to provide for his people, which is, in fact, what the whole book of Ruth is about, God's kindness in providing for his people.

[9 : 21] Of course, the greeting also shows us that Boaz is indeed a man of standing, for he greets his workers with a warm blessing, doesn't he? I used to work at McDonald's during high school, and I heard lots of things from my boss, like, Hurry up.

Clean as you go. No, you can't have a break. Cooking cheeseburgers was serious business, apparently. Not once did I hear from him, The Lord be with you. Nor did I expect him to say that he wasn't a Christian, in fact, he was anti-Christian.

But Boaz seems to treat his workers with respect, doesn't he? And honours the Lord in conversation. He truly is a man of standing, as we heard before. But he's also a man of extravagant kindness.

Which brings us to point two and verse number eight. Have a look at verse number eight and nine. 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 the women who work for me. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women.

[10 : 25] I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, just go and drink from the water jars the men have filled. Now, while Boaz would be obedient to the law about leaving leftover grain for foreigners and widows and so on, he actually goes further here than the law requires.

He tells Ruth she can help herself to the water anytime, and in fact tells Ruth to join herself to the young servant girls as they gather the harvest behind the men who presumably cut it.

In fact, he calls Ruth, My daughter, which not only shows there's an age difference, but it also shows that Boaz is treating this foreigner as one of his own people, as a fellow Israelite.

And he offers protection by instructing his men to leave Ruth alone. This was more than the law required, and so Ruth is overwhelmed. See what she says in verse 10 to 13? At this she bowed down with her face to the ground.

She asked him, Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me a foreigner? Boaz replied, I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before.

[11 : 35] 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 put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant, though I do not have the standing of one of your servants.

See, Ruth here is overwhelmed that Boaz would treat her as one of the fellow Israelites. In fact, the word favor here means grace or generosity.

And Ruth is so overwhelmed by Boaz's favor, his grace, that she falls face to the ground and says, Why have you done this? And Boaz says, It's because of your character that I've heard about.

And then he prays that God might bless her now that she has taken shelter under God's wings. And ironically, he then proceeds to answer his own prayer. Have a look at verse 14, where he continues to shower her with kindness.

[12 : 36] 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 harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over.

As she got up to glean again, Boaz gave orders to his men, Let her gather among the sheaves, you know, the ones that they haven't even packaged away yet, and don't reprimand her.

Even pull some of the 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. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah.

She carried it back into town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over from when she had eaten enough.

Do you see how richly Boaz is in kindness to her? Do you see his extravagant kindness to her? He welcomes a foreigner, not just as part of his harvest team, but then welcomes her to his own table as an equal at lunchtime.

[13 : 41] Then tells his workers she can glean among the good stuff. In fact, actually just pull some of it out and drop it behind you and leave it for her. And so Ruth returns to Naomi under the weight of 22 litres of grain.

That's what an ephah was. 22 litres of grain plus her lunch leftovers. Boaz shows grace upon grace, favour upon favour. It's extravagant kindness, you see.

I once heard a story of a family who was doing it tough. The parents had a small farm in the US, and they had a 15-year-old daughter called Sandy who was suffering from leukaemia.

And so with medical bills piling up and her parents doing it tough farming, Sandy decided to take her pet calf to the auction to sell it. Reluctantly, her mum and dad loaded the calf onto the trailer and off to the sale yards they went.

Now, they figured the calf was worth about \$200. But the auctioneer knew about their situation. And before he puts the calf up for sale, he says to the crowd, I hope you don't mind me saying this, but Sandy here is doing it tough.

[14 : 44] She's not well. And the family's got a lot of medical expenses. And so she's here selling her pet calf to try and raise a bit of cash. And so the auction continues. And the bids go up.

They reach \$200. The price the calf is worth, but then they keep going. \$500, \$1,000, and then \$2,000 the calf is sold for. Sandy and her family are astounded.

But then the man who bought the calf for \$2,000 said, I'll pay for it, and then she can have it back and we'll re-auction it again. And so they did. And it reached another \$2,000.

And again, and again. In fact, the book that this came from said that the calf was auctioned 10 times and Sandy went home with \$20,000 and her pet calf.

The family were overwhelmed and rejoiced in their community's kindness. That's extravagant kindness, isn't it? Generosity upon generosity, grace upon grace. And that's the kind of kindness that Boaz shows to Ruth.

[15 : 44] And Naomi knows it. For she rejoices when she hears about it. Point three, verse number 19. So have a look at verse number 19. 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 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. Sorry, then she added, that man is a close relative.

He is one of our guardian redeemers. Then Ruth the Moabite said, he even said to me, stay with my workers until they are finished, the whole harvest. Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, it will be good for you, my daughter, to go with the women who work for him, because in someone else's field, you might be harmed.

And so Ruth stayed close to the women of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law. Notice here in verse 19 and 20, that Naomi rejoices with thankfulness for the kindness of Boaz, doesn't she?

[16 : 56] But she also rejoices in God. Verse 20 is a little unclear in the English, but in the Hebrew, it literally reads, and I've got it on your outline, and there's a slide as well.

It literally reads, May he, that is Boaz, be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness, that's the Lord's kindness, has not forsaken the living or the dead.

In other words, Naomi rejoices in God's kindness. That's what she's saying. That's what the text is saying. You see, behind the kindness of Boaz, she sees the kindness of God, the hesed of God.

Remember that word from last week? Hesed is God's, the Hebrew word that describes God's overwhelming and gracious loving kindness. And so she is no longer bitter, is she?

No, no, rather she rejoices at God's extravagant hesed. And she rejoices with thankfulness, not only because God has provided in Boaz food, but also because God has provided in Boaz a redeemer.

[17 : 58] That is, a relative who could possibly redeem or buy back her husband in Limelech's land, and so provide for Naomi, not just this year, but every year to come. In other words, he could save their lives.

And so Naomi rejoices in God's loving kindness. It's a lovely story, isn't it? But what lessons are there in this for us, point four? Well, first, it reminds us that God is at work in history to provide for us, even if it doesn't look like it.

Did you notice that nothing really miraculous happens in Ruth? Did you notice that? That is, there are no angels that appear to guide people. God does not speak directly to anyone. There are no prophets with a message from God.

No miracles are performed. But God is clearly at work through the ordinary things of life to provide for his people. Here, God, it's God's silent, but sovereign hand was at work through the kindness of Boaz to provide for Ruth.

And as we heard last week from Romans chapter 8, God is at work in all things, actually, for the good of us, his people, who love him. He's done that in history time and time again, and we see it clearly at the cross.

[19 : 07] For at the cross, God works even through the evil acts of people to provide for our ultimate good in Jesus. In Acts chapter 2, which will come up on the screen, Acts chapter 2, verse 23, we read, This Jesus was handed over to you, this is Peter speaking to the Jews, by God's set plan and foreknowledge.

And you, with the help of wicked Romans, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. You see, it may have been the Jews and the ruthless Romans who put Jesus to death, but it was all according to God's set plan and foreknowledge.

You see, God's sovereign hand was at work even through the evil acts of people. And it was at work to provide for our ultimate good, to provide forgiveness for us through the death of his son on the cross.

And just as God works sovereignly behind the scenes to provide for Naomi through Boaz, so God works sovereignly behind the scenes to provide for us through Jesus. And so as we saw last week, we can and must trust him.

He is sovereign. He is at work behind the scenes even if it doesn't look like it. But before that, we actually also need to take refuge in him first.

[20 : 22] And so I guess the first question I need to ask this morning is, have you come to Jesus? Have you taken refuge in him? Have you taken refuge under his wings?

Remember, Ruth decides to trust in God and take refuge under his wings, the text says. Have you done that with Jesus? Have you come to Jesus and taken refuge under his wings which was spread out on the cross for you?

For there, you will find blessing upon blessing. And for those of us who have trusted in Jesus and who have taken shelter under his wings, then do we realise how blessed we are?

Remember Boaz? He prays that the Lord under whose wings Ruth has taken refuge would bless her. And then God answers his prayer by blessing Ruth through Boaz. Well, God has done the same for us through Jesus.

See, just as Ruth and Naomi find food and a redeemer in Boaz, we find every spiritual blessing in Christ. And it's at this point I want us to turn to our first reading.

[21 : 24] We won't come back to Ruth, so please flick in your Bibles to page 1173. And we'll end here. Page 1173 to Ephesians chapter 1.

Page 1173, Ephesians chapter 1. And as I read verse number 3, take note at what God has given us in Christ.

Paul writes, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Now, I've said this before, but it's worth saying again, if we have been given every spiritual blessing in Christ, then how many do we lack? None. We've been given every one of them, haven't we?

And these are the blessings that matter, for they are in the heavenly realms and so will last forever. We've been given every spiritual blessing in Christ. This is grace upon grace. And in case we don't believe it, then Paul fleshes it out in verse 4 to 8.

[22 : 38] He lists some of these blessings. He says, For he chose us in Christ before the creation of the world, chose us in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace which he has freely given us in the one he loves. In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us and on it goes.

So verse 14 and 13 we have the guarantee of heaven, the promised Holy Spirit and so on. You see here Paul talks about blessing after blessing that comes from taking refuge in Christ.

We have election, God chose us, verse 4. Or verse 5, we have adoption, God adopted us as his treasured children. Or verse 7, we have redemption, God paid to buy us back from sin and death.

And on it goes. Whether we realise it or not, what we have in Christ is so much greater than \$20,000 that Sandy received. For it costs God so much more to adopt us and redeem us as his children.

[23 : 48] It's extravagant kindness upon kindness that we receive. It's grace upon grace that we are given. In fact, do you see how Paul describes it in verses 7 and 8? He says, all this is in accord with God's favour, God's grace that he lavished on us.

I love that word. God lavished. God has shown us extravagant kindness, you see. And also notice that it's all in Christ or in him. In other words, just as God showed Ruth extravagant kindness in Boaz, so also God has shown us extravagant kindness in Christ.

So how are we to respond to this? Well, as Naomi did. By rejoicing in thankfulness to God whose loving kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead. We are to rejoice in God.

We are to give him praise and thanks. That's what Paul is doing here. He starts off in verse 3, praise be to the God and Father. In fact, he is so excited that from verse number 3 to verse number 14 is actually one sentence in the original.

He's too excited to pause for a full stop. That's how excited and how much he rejoices in what God has given us in Christ. We are to rejoice in God who has shown us extravagant kindness in Christ just as he did to Ruth and Naomi in Boaz.

[25 : 04] And not only are we to rejoice but we are also to show kindness to others. Remember the Israelites were to show kindness to foreigners because God had shown kindness to them in rescuing them from Egypt.

Or a little later on in Ephesians we read be kind and compassionate to one another. Forgive each other just as in Christ God forgave you. In other words because God has shown us kindness in Christ not only are we to rejoice but we are to show kindness to others.

Let me finish with a story. Some friends of ours used to live in Brunswick and we'll call them Jeff and Deb. Before they were married Deb's parents adopted a boy who struggled with a mental illness and after five years or so he became too much for Deb's parents to handle or more than they were prepared to handle I think was the case and so Deb's parents actually decided to send him back to the orphanage back to the boy's home.

The boy was about 12 years old and it wouldn't have done him his self-esteem any favours and so when Deb and Jeff got married they decided to adopt Deb's brother that was sent back and so Deb's brother became Deb's son and he was about 13 years old at this stage.

Now that's not the most convenient wedding present is it? A teenage boy. I know I was one once. In fact it cost them greatly and it still does.

[26 : 26] He's still living with them 10-15 years later but it was an amazing act of kindness wasn't it? Now why did they do that? Well they said if God adopted us at the cost of his son then how can we not also show the same kindness to Deb's brother?

It's clear isn't it? We had to show kindness to one another because God has shown kindness to us and can I say that I've been so encouraged by people here at this service who have shown kindness great kindness to one another whether it's by giving money to people in need or whether it's by making meals for those under pressure or whether it's by giving lifts to others or simply giving people a phone call that you haven't seen for a while to see how they're going it's great acts of kindness it's brilliant keep going for who knows perhaps God is using you as he used Boaz to show kindness to someone in need and to provide for them let's pray our gracious heavenly father we thank you that you have worked sovereignly through history to provide for us and that as we come to take shelter under the wings of Christ spread out at the cross we find blessing upon blessing we find extravagant kindness from you and so father help us to rejoice with a thankful heart and help us to show kindness to one another because you have shown incredible kindness to us we pray these things in Jesus name amen we're going to sing our next song which is called my heart is filled with thankfulness