

SUMMER B2 - God's Sovereign Kindness

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening and welcome, particularly if you're visiting us, but it's also good to be amongst our regular folk from 6pm as well.

If you weren't here on Wednesday night, we're up to the Book of Ruth, which is another one of the five scrolls in the Jewish Bible. So Andrew looked at the Book of Lamentations, which is one of the scrolls, and I'm looking at the Book of Ruth. If you need to know more about the scrolls, then you can listen to the recording from Wednesday night, and you might find that helpful.

Why don't I pray for us, and then we'll get into Ruth chapter 2. So let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word, and we thank you that you continue to speak to us through it. And so we pray, as Julian prayed before, that you would give us minds to understand it, and hearts that would seek to live in light of it. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, there are all sorts of true stories. Well, there are all sorts of so-called coincidences in life. I want to tell you about a true coincidence that happened. On December the 5th, 1660, a ship sank in the Straits of Dover. The only survivor was a man named Hugh Williams. On the 5th of December, same day, but 107 years later, in 1767, another ship sank in the same waters.

127 people lost their lives, and the only survivor was a man named Hugh Williams. On the 8th of August, 1820, a picnic boat capsized on the Thames, and there was only one survivor, a man named Hugh Williams. And on the 10th of July, 1940, a British trawler was destroyed by a German mine. Only two men survived, one man and his nephew, and they were both called Hugh Williams. True story. I'll tell you what, if I ever go on a boat, I'm changing my name to Hugh Williams. Now, of course, whoever found these facts out excluded all the other boats and all the other accidents where there are many other survivors not called Hugh Williams.

[2 : 21] Yet, even so, it's still quite an amazing coincidence, isn't it? Well, last Wednesday, we saw that Naomi's family left the land of Israel and went to Moab. And there she suffered great loss. Her foolish husband died in Limelech. He died. And then she lost her two sons who had those rather, you know, unfortunate names, which were, you know, similar to naming your child hepatitis and swine flu, if you remember that. And so Naomi is left in a foreign land with no one to provide for her. And so she returns home with her daughter-in-law, Ruth.

But Naomi is very bitter about all her suffering. So if you look back, just to remind you, chapter 1, verse 19. So it's just above chapter 2 there. Same page. So from verse 19, So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women exclaimed, Can this really be Naomi? I mean, she's changed so much from when she left.

Don't call me Naomi, she told them. Call me Mara, which means bitter. Because the Lord Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me. The Lord Almighty has brought misfortune upon me. And so Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning. And we saw last week that even in suffering, God still shows his kindness because he provided Ruth for Naomi, who by the end of the book turns out to be better than seven sons. And what's more, in the last verse of chapter 1 there, they just so happened to arrive as the barley harvest was starting, where there would be lots of food around to provide for them. And as we move into chapter 2, we'll see more coincidences, which of course are not really coincidences at all. Rather, they are God incidences, if you like.

Examples of God's sovereign hand silently at work. And so at point 1 on your outlines and verse 1 of chapter 2. Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a man of standing from the clan of Elimelech, 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. Here in verse 1, we are

introduced to Boaz, who just so happens to be a close relative of Naomi's, from her husband's family. And close relatives had a responsibility to take care of their own, as we'll see next week. And what's more, Boaz wasn't any old close relative. He was a man of standing, we are told. That is, he was a man of godliness and wealth. And we'll see both of those characteristics in a moment. But the point here is that this is exactly the type of person who Naomi needs to provide for her. He's a close relative who ought to do something to provide for her. And he's of godly character, which means he probably will do something to provide for her. And he is a wealthy man so that he actually can do something to provide for her.

You see, Boaz just so happens to be the perfect person that Naomi needs to provide for her. And so after arriving in Bethlehem, Ruth suggests the very next day, it seems, that she should go and see if she can pick up any leftover bits of grain missed by the harvesters in the field. And this just so happens to be the very best thing to do. For God had said to the Israelites this on the next slide from Deuteronomy chapter 24. He says to his people, Israel, when you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt.

[6 : 36] That is why I command you to do this. Now, Ruth wouldn't have known, I don't think, this law from Deuteronomy. In fact, in verse 2, the narrator reminds us at the very point of her suggestion that Ruth is a Moabite, a Moabitess.

She is not from Israel and would not have been taught these laws from a young age like the Israelites would have been. And Naomi doesn't seem to have told her either because, do you notice, it's Ruth who takes all the initiative here.

It's her suggestion. She's the one that comes up with it. Naomi, it seems, is still bitter at God. She's continuing in her pity party, as it were. And when Ruth does take the initiative, of all the things she could have suggested, like maybe I should go and beg for food or maybe I should look for work as a slave or something else, out of all the things she could have suggested, she just so happens to make the very best suggestion possible.

The one that fits with what God has provided for in his law from Deuteronomy. And so in verse 3, we read this. Verse 3, 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. I love that phrase in verse 3, As it turned out.

[8 : 03] Boaz is the very tough a person, as I've just said, that Naomi needs. And as it turns out, Ruth just so happens to end up in his field, of all fields. And to make sure that we realise how good this is, the narrator again adds that Boaz is from the clan of Elimelech, a close relative who should help them.

This is a very happy coincidence. And then comes another in verse 4. 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. Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, Who does that young woman belong to? The overseer replied, In verse 4, Who just so happens to turn up and see Ruth?

Boaz. The best possible solution for Naomi's predicament. And notice 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 in the field, Boaz turns up. Let me read it to you again to show you the sense.

[9 : 35] As it turned out, she was working in the field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. And behold, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem. Do you see the point the narrator's trying to make? He's trying to highlight that there is one coincidence after another.

Ruth just so happens to pick the very best thing to do, and then she just so happens to pick the part of the field belonging to Boaz, the very best man to provide for them, and then Boaz just so happens to check on his field and spot Ruth straight away.

Now you could argue that Ruth is going to glean in the field. It's a very normal thing to do for the poor, and at one level 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, Ruth could have ended up in any field, but she ends up in Boaz's.

It's too coincidental for someone not to be working behind the scenes. A small church, I mentioned this story to the morning congregation, but a small church in Nebraska, USA, called Westside Baptist Church, held its choir practice every Wednesday night at 7.30pm sharp.

[10:58] The director of the choir was very insistent about the sharp. And on the 1st of March, at 7.37pm, seven minutes after the practice was due to start, a gas leak caused a massive explosion in the church, destroying the whole building.

But it just so happened that all 15 choir members, including the director, were running late that night. And no one was in the building when it exploded.

Now perhaps there's a natural explanation for why they were all late, but all 15 members. It's too coincidental for someone not to be working behind the scenes.

And so too here, for it is the Lord who is quietly working behind the scenes to provide for Naomi. And I wonder if we get a glimpse of this in verse 4.

You see, in verse 4, where we have one of those so-called coincidences, Boaz greets his worker, or workers with, The Lord be with you. And they respond with, The Lord bless you.

[12:00] Do you see that in verse 4? And at that very point of a coincidence, God's name is mentioned. And God is described as the one who is with us, and the one who blesses us.

Now perhaps I'm reading too much into this, and you can do that sometimes. But remember, the narrator of Ruth makes a lot of names. If you were here last Wednesday, you would have seen this. There's a lot of meaning behind the names. And so I suspect here, he uses Boaz's greeting with the mention of the Lord's name to remind the readers, us, of who it is that is working behind the scenes to provide for his people.

Indeed, as I said last Wednesday, the whole book of Ruth is about God's kindness in providing for his people. Hence the name of the series, Providence and Kindness.

But Boaz's greeting also shows us what type of man he is, for he greets even his workers with a warm blessing. I used to work at McDonald's when I was going through 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.

[13:16] Apparently cooking cheeseburgers was very serious business. Not once did I hear from him, the Lord bless you. And nor did I expect to. They were anti-Christian.

But Boaz seems to treat his workers with respect and honours the Lord in conversation. He truly is a man of standing, you see, as we heard.

But he is also a man of extravagant kindness, which brings us to point to verse 8. 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.

I have told the men not to lay a hand on you and whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled. Here we see that Boaz is not only obedient to the law about leaving leftover grain for foreigners and widows, but he goes further than the law required.

[14:19] He tells Ruth that she can help herself to the water at any time and that she can join herself to his young servant girls as they gather the harvest behind the men.

In fact, he even calls Ruth, my daughter, which shows he is treating her as one of his own people even though she is a foreigner, a Moabite person to boot.

You might remember that the Moabites and the Israelites didn't always get on. They were enemies at certain stages in history. And he offers protection by instructing his men to leave Ruth alone.

This was certainly more than the law required. He shows great kindness and Ruth knows it because she's overwhelmed. And look what she says in verse 10. 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.

[15:27] 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. Ruth replies, may I continue to find favor in your eyes, my Lord.

You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant, though I do not have the standing of even one of your servants. And verse 10, the word for favor there, it means grace.

It means generosity. And Ruth is overwhelmed with the grace and generosity of Boaz. So much so that she asks why.

And Boaz says, it's because of your character, Ruth. Your character, which we heard about last week, which showed kindness and loyalty to Naomi and a new and firm faith in God.

And so Boaz prays that God might bless her now that she has taken shelter under God's wings.

And then Boaz actually proceeds to answer his own prayer by being kind to Ruth yet again.

[16:34] So have a look at verse 14. At mealtime, Boaz said to her, come over here, have some bread and dip it in wine vinegar. And when she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain.

She ate all that she wanted and had some left over. As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, let her gather among the sheaves and don't reprimand her. Even pull out some of the stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up and don't rebuke her.

And so Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered and it mounted to about an ephah. She carried it back to the 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. You notice Boaz's extravagant kindness here to a foreigner.

He not only welcomes this foreigner as part of his harvest team, he then even welcomes her to his own table, the boss's table, as an equal at lunchtime.

[17:39] And then he tells his workers she can glean among the good sheaves, not just the leftovers that they forgot to get all cut. And then he even tells the workers, in fact, why don't you just pull out some of the stalks and just randomly drop them on the ground for her to pick up and don't reprimand her.

Let her glean as much as she can. And so Ruth eats and has enough to eat as she can. She has leftovers to take home and then she carries home all the grain that she has harvested amounting to an ephah.

And if you look at your footnote down the bottom of verse 17, it says probably about 30 pounds, about 13 kilos and here's the rice. Okay? Now if you want to this is going to be hard to carry home, right?

She went home heavy laden leftovers, 13 kilos and she didn't even go to Costco to get it. She went to Boaz's field randomly or was it?

It's a very happy coincidence, you see. And Boaz shows grace upon grace upon grace. It's extravagant kindness.

[18:53] I once heard a story of a family who was doing it tough. The parents had a small farm in the US and a 15-year-old daughter called Sandy. She was suffering from leukemia.

And so with medical bills mounting and her parents doing it tough with the farm, Sandy decided to take her pet calf to the auctions and sell it to help pay for the medical bills. Reluctantly, the mum and dad load up her calf on the trailer and head off to the sale yards.

They figure the calf is worth about \$200. But the auctioneer knows their situation and so he puts, so before he puts the calf up for auction, he says to the crowd, I hope you don't mind me saying this, but Sandy here is doing it tough, she's not well and the family's got a lot of medical expenses and she's selling her pet calf here just to try and get a bit of cash.

And then he starts the auction and the bids go up to \$200 the price the calf is worth. But then it keeps going up, up to \$500, \$1,000, \$2,000 the calf is sold for.

Sandy and her family are astounded but then the man who bought it for \$2,000 says, I'll pay for it now and she can have it back and we'll auction it again. Which they did and it reached another \$2,000 and they did it again.

[20:19] And it reached another \$2,000. According to the book this came from, they sold the calf 10 times and Sandy went home with \$20,000 and her pet calf.

This family was overwhelmed and they 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 Boaz has shown to Ruth for this time. And Naomi knows it. For she rejoices when she hears about it. Which brings us to point 3, verse 19.

Verse 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 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.

[21 : 21] And she added, that man is our 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 finish harvesting all my grain, so the whole months of 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, Naomi. Here, Naomi rejoices for the kindness of Boaz. But she also rejoices in God.

Verse 20 is a little unclear in our translations. But on the next slide, I think I've got a more literal rendering of the Hebrew. It says, May he, that's Boaz, be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness, which is the word *hesed*, that's the word that Andrew's pointed out and I've pointed out, has not forsaken the living or the dead.

In other words, if you look at the slide, Naomi rejoices in God's kindness. He has not stopped showing kindness to the living and the dead. They just met Boaz, it can't be his kindness, he's just shown to Ruth that day.

[22 : 42] In other words, Naomi rejoices in God's kindness, the *hesed* of God, his overwhelming, gracious, loving kindness. And so Naomi is no longer bitter, but rather she rejoices at God's extravagant kindness.

kindness. And she rejoices with thankfulness, not only because God has provided in Boaz food, but also do you notice, because God has provided in Boaz a redeemer, that is, a relative who could possibly redeem or buy back Elimelech's land.

And so provide for Naomi, not just this harvest, not just this harvest year, but every year to come. In other words, Boaz could save their lives.

And so Naomi rejoices in God's loving kindness. It's a lovely story, Ruth, isn't it? It's a lovely story.

But what lessons are there for us, which is our final point, point four?

Well, it reminds us that God's sovereign kindness is at work in history to provide for us, even if it doesn't look like it. Did you notice in chapter two that nothing really miraculous happens?

[23 : 47] In fact, nothing really miraculous happens in all of Ruth. There are no angels that appear to guide people. God does not speak directly to anyone in visions or dreams. In fact, there are no prophets with a message from God, and no miracles were performed.

But God was clearly at work, wasn't he? Through the ordinary things of life to provide for his people. God's sovereign kindness was clearly seen by the way he abundantly provides for Ruth and Naomi, through Boaz, and will continue to do so in the rest of the story.

God's sovereign kindness is seen in the way God abundantly provides for us, his people, through Jesus. You see, God is always at work, even through evil acts of people, to provide for our ultimate good.

On the next slide is a verse from Acts chapter two, verse twenty-three. three, this Jesus was handed over to you by God's set plan and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

You see, even at the cross, even with this work of wickedness that the Jews performed on Jesus, we see God's sovereign kindness at work to provide forgiveness for us through the death of his son.

[25 : 18] And just as God works sovereignly behind the scenes to provide for Naomi through Boaz, so too has God worked sovereignly behind the scenes to provide for us through Jesus. So, as we saw last Wednesday, we can and must trust in him.

But before that, we need to take refuge in him. And so the first question I want to ask us tonight is, have you come to Jesus? Have you taken refuge under his wings that were stretched out at the cross for you?

Remember, Ruth decides to trust in God and take refuge under his wings? Have you done that with Jesus? Have you put your faith and trust in him? And for us who have, then do remember that that comes with blessing upon blessing, that we've been showered with grace upon grace as Ruth was.

At this point, I want us to turn to our second reading and let me show you there. So, from Ephesians chapter 1, page 1173. 3. Let me just begin by reading chapter 1, verse 3.

And as I do, notice what God gives us. 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. [27 : 04] What has he given us in Christ? Every spiritual blessing. I know I've said this before, but it's worth saying again, if he has given us every spiritual blessing in Christ, then how many do we lack?

None. Notice, though, that these are not earthly blessings as Ruth received, and you might think, oh, we're being ripped off, we only get spiritual blessings, she got earthly ones.

But you need to remember that spiritual blessings are actually better, because earthly blessings only make a limited difference in this life, and then they too will pass away.

But our spiritual blessings in Christ make an eternity of difference, and will never pass away. So what are some of these blessings? Well, have a look in verses 4 to 8.

It says, For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted 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 loved.

[28 : 13] In him we also have redemption through his blood and the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us, and on it goes.

You see what Paul is doing here? He's just listing blessing after blessing. We have been chosen, verse 4. We have been adopted as sons, verse 5. We have been redeemed and forgiven, verse 7, and on it goes.

Whether we realise it or not, this is of much greater worth than \$20,000. That Sandy received. For these blessings cost God much, much more.

It costs him the death of his only son. You see God's extravagant kindness to us in Christ? This is grace upon grace. In fact, do you see how Paul describes it there in verses 7 and 8?

It says it's all in accordance with God's favour or grace that he lavished on us. I love that word, lavished on us. God has shown us extravagant kindness, but it's all in Christ.

[29 : 17] So as I said, just as God showed Ruth extravagant kindness in Boaz, so also God has shown us extravagant kindness in Christ. So for us who have taken refuge under Christ's wings, who have received every spiritual blessing in him, how will we just respond to that?

Well, as Naomi did, I take it. We have to rejoice in God, rejoicing in thankfulness to God whose loving kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead. We have to rejoice in God. That's what Paul is doing here.

He starts off in verse 3, praising God, and from verse 3 to verse 14 it's actually one sentence in the original language. No full stops. He can't help him. He can't stop praising God. And neither are we to stop.

We have to rejoice in God who has shown extravagant kindness to us in Christ. And lastly, since we have been shown kindness from God, then we too are to show kindness to others.

Do you remember that quote from Deuteronomy where the Israelites were to show kindness to foreigners? Do you remember the reason they were to do this? It said because God had shown kindness to them by rescuing them from Egypt.

[30 : 27] That was the reason that was given. And it's similar for us. Just in, you're in Ephesians, so just turn over. Two pages to Ephesians, the end of Ephesians chapter four, page 1176.

Verse 32, chapter four, verse 32, Paul writes, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other. Why?

Well, just as in Christ, God forgave you. And then he repeats it in different language. Follow God's example, people, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

In other words, we are to imitate God's character of kindness. Some friends of ours who used to live in Brunswick, whom we'll call Jeff and Deb, before Jeff and Deb were married, Deb had an adopted brother who struggled with a mental illness.

And after five years or so, this adopted brother became too much for Deb's parents, or at least more than they wanted to handle. And so Deb's parents decided to send him back to the boys' home.

[31 : 49] He was about 12 years old, I think. Must have been devastating for him. And so when Deb and Jeff got married, in their first year of marriage, they decided to adopt. Deb's brother, who is now a teenage son.

Not the most convenient wedding present, really. In fact, it cost them greatly, and it still does to this day. But it was an amazing act of kindness. Now, why did they do that?

Well, they said, God adopted us, and it cost him a lot more. See, in doing so, they represented God's character.

they reflected God's character of kindness. And God used their kindness to sovereignly provide for this orphan. And so we too are to keep showing kindness to one another and to others.

For who knows, perhaps God will use you and me to sovereignly provide for another in need, just as he did through Boaz for Naomi, and just as he has done for us through Jesus.

[32 : 55] Let's pray. Gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you that you are a sovereign God, and even though we may not see it, you are still at work, even through the ordinary things of life, to provide for your people.

Father, we thank you so much for the example of Boaz's kindness, but that pales in comparison to your kindness to us in the Lord Jesus, and the blessings that we have in him.

Father, help us to rejoice in all that you have given us, and let that motivate us to show kindness to others. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.