

# Who is Orchestrating your life?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well let's just draw our hearts for the Lord as I talk about and speak about the passage read there from Ruth. Let's just pray. Heavenly Father as we come now at this point in our service of worship this morning to reflect on that passage from Ruth. I pray the words Lord that I prepare in advance.

The words that you have anointed for today and that you know people and their situations Lord and you're the one who can speak into their hearts, into their reality and understanding.

So be wise Lord now and bless this time of reflecting upon the scriptures in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Well back in November I was here in Invergordon and I preached then from Ruth chapter 1.

So this morning I thought I would pick up from Ruth chapter 1 and preach on Ruth chapter 2. That was quite a while ago wasn't it November so I thought we'd better have a recap.

So we'll do that. Who is Ruth? Ruth is from a neighboring country to Israel called Moab. And in this passage, in this text, in this book really, she's referred to as the Moabite S.

[ 1 : 16 ] In chapter 1 we learn that Naomi, her late husband at Elimelech, during a time of famine, moved from the land of Israel to a land called Moab, which is a neighboring country.

We can only assume the reason they moved was literally because the grass was greener on the other side, greener in Moab. The important thing, the thing we need to understand is that by moving out of Israel, Elimelech is disinherit himself from the land, from the land of Israel.

Remember Israel was a nation called into being, called into existence by God. And called into being, to be his people, a holy people, a holy nation, to live in the land that God had promised to them.

Therefore, they were not free. They were not free just to up, sticks and go. Go and leave Israel when it got difficult, when it got tough. Just because there was drought and famine in that country.

So what should Elimelech have done? Well, he should have turned to God. That's what Elimelech should have done.

[ 2 : 28 ] And whilst that's not explicitly said in this book, that is the underlying theme of the book. That when things get difficult, when it gets tough, instead of running away, we turn to God.

Well, you could argue that Elimelech now suffers a judgment of God because having moved to Moab, he dies in that country. But they had two sons, Marlon and Killian.

And they've married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. But sadly, this family goes from misfortune to misfortune. Ten years after Elimelech dies, their sons Marlon and Killian also die.

And what's more, there's no grandchildren. There's no heirs. And the writer is communicating to us through this book, that Elimelech, as I said, should never have left the land, should never have left Israel.

Naomi is now a widow with two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, who were also widows and childless. Theirs is a desperately tragic situation.

[ 3 : 38 ] But then they hear that there's plenty of food in the land that they left. There's plenty of food back in Israel. So naturally, Naomi wants to return to her homeland. So she sets off with her two daughters-in-law.

Of course, Orpah and Ruth are not Israelite women. They never had sons. So there's no reason for them to leave their roots, their extended families, and their culture, and journey back with Naomi to the land of Israel.

So Orpah chooses to stay. But Ruth insists on going with Naomi. She says, and I wonder if you remember this from chapter 1 when we looked at it in November. Chapter 1, verse 16.

Ruth says, Don't urge me to leave you or turn back from you. Where you go, I will go. Where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God, my God.

Where you die, I will die. And there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely. If anything but death separates you and me.

[ 4 : 43 ] Not only is Ruth determined to travel with her mother-in-law back to Israel, but she says something that is key. Your God will be my God.

May the Lord deal with me if anything separates us other than death. Well, that's more than loyalty, isn't it? It's something else.

It's like a covenant promise. And it comes from the heart. It comes from a deep sense of love. Loyalty. And as we will see, God is at work here in the background.

He's orchestrating what happens next. He's in overall control of what's about to unfold. So now, we come to chapter 2. And what's clear right at the very beginning of chapter 2 is just how vulnerable these two women are, Naomi and Ruth.

When Elimelech left Israel, he gave up his land. So there's no land to return to. And Ruth, as I said, is a Moabite. And of course, there's no social services or welfare state or anything like that.

[ 5 : 51 ] But there was provision for widows and orphans. And it was actually enshrined in Mosaic law in Deuteronomy. And the law is given to Moses before the Israelites entered the promised land.

Law is specifically for widows, the fatherless, and the alien. Law is about harvest time. Basically encouraging almost a degree of inefficiency, really.

Leaving behind a portion of the yield so that people in these vulnerable groups get an opportunity to glean, to gain some of the harvest. Probably not the modern approach to farming, is it really, to leave some of your crops behind?

But, hey-ho, that's what was instituted by the laws of Moses back in the time of Ruth. Deuteronomy chapter 24, verses 19.

Don't go over your fields a second time. And it was the same with the three-year tithe offering. Give a tenth to support the priesthood, but also for the widow, the fatherless, and the alien.

[ 6 : 55 ] In Deuteronomy chapter 14. In other words, the laws of Moses made welfare provision, and it qualified this by saying, Remember who you were.

Remember at one time you were slaves in Egypt, and the Lord rescued you. So do this, that the Lord may bless the work of your hands. In today's world, people generally are reluctant to give freebies, aren't they?

But the inference here is that the Lord can increase your yield, which more than compensates for the generosity you show. If only more of us would grasp that principle.

Because that's exactly how God works. And it was often said, God is no man's debtor. You can put them to the test if you like. Well, when Naomi and Ruth arrived back in Israel, in Bethlehem, where Naomi's roots are, where her family's from, Naomi doesn't refer to herself by a name, does she?

She calls herself Mara, which means bitter. Because that's how she felt about herself. She felt that a lot had been a struggle. It was really a bitter, horrible situation she found herself in.

[ 8 : 11 ] She felt the Lord had dealt her very bitter hand. And so it's Ruth that takes the initiative to try and improve their chances of survival. She's courteous and respectful.

And she asks Naomi for her blessing. So that she can go out and glean in whoever's field she finds favour. And that tells that Ruth understands the complexities of being a stranger in a foreign land.

Foreigners are not always welcome, are they? So it's in whoever's field she finds favour. But of course there would be people who will not openly welcome Ruth, the Moabite, the foreigner.

And it's here at this point in the story that we begin to see how God is orchestrating the whole thing. Orchestrating the event. How God is an overall sovereign authority over what begins to unfold, what happens next.

Because Ruth goes to glean in a field that she's never visited before, in a place that she doesn't know. And she finds herself working in a field owned by a man called Boaz.

[ 9 : 16 ] She's of course unaware of whose field it is. But the writer tells that Boaz is a well respected man. A man of some wealth it would appear. And he's also a relative of Elimelech.

Which of course was Naomi's late husband. So unbeknown to Ruth, there is this family connection to Naomi. And as Ruth is working behind the harvesters, Boaz suddenly turns up, rocks up.

Coincidence? Maybe? We'll see. He greets his men, his workers with, the Lord be with you. And then turn their reply, the Lord bless you.

That tells us something, doesn't it, about Boaz. There's a reverence and a pite about this man. It affirms a type of God-fearing character he is, a man of integrity. After arriving, almost immediately, Boaz notices this hard-working young woman gleaning behind the harvesters.

And once he learns that she's the Moabite that came with Naomi, he then goes over to speak to her. He invites her to stay in his field. She'll be safe from attack. Inferring that as a young foreign woman, she's at risk.

[ 10 : 29 ] She's vulnerable, risk of being abused, or even worse, raped or attacked. But Boaz assures her that she's safe whilst on his land.

And if she's thirsty, she's welcome to help herself to a drink of water. It's very likely that Boaz's kindness is due to his family connection with Naomi.

But of course, Ruth, Ruth doesn't know that, does she? Was it by chance that Naomi found herself in Boaz's field? Or was it just random?

Because of course, there would have been plenty of other fields to choose from. And the writer really wants her to understand this is about God. This is about God being in sovereign control of the situation.

Ruth's reaction to Boaz's invitation is, Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you would notice me a foreigner? She's very self-aware, isn't she, of being a foreigner without rights or protection.

[ 11 : 35 ] She knows that the situation could be very different. Boaz responds by telling Ruth her reputation precedes her. He knows, he knows who she is and what she's done for the widow Naomi, the self-sacrifice that Ruth has made.

He says, May the Lord repay you for what you've done, he says. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you've come to take refuge.

In verse 12. The reality is that Boaz is actually the very fulfilment of his own words here. God is blessing Ruth through Boaz.

Boaz is providing the very wings that he speaks of. Our God is a wonderfully practical God, isn't he? He's not some heavenly abstract God that we can't connect with, that we can't make sense of.

God is bang up to date. He's down to earth practical. Instead of waiting around for God to do something, he encourages us to get on with our situation, as bad as it may appear to us.

[ 12 : 46 ] Because when we get on with things, God delights in working with us and through us. That's how practical God is. Even at lunchtime, Boaz makes special provision for Ruth.

In fact, he gives her all the food she needs and more besides. The writer doesn't say he's doing this because of his family connection to Naomi.

But the likelihood is that is exactly the reason for his great generosity. He then instructs his form to make special provision for Ruth by pulling extra stalks for her.

But then he says, Don't embarrass her. Just as Ruth showed dedicated loyalty and love to her mother-in-law, Boaz is showing kinship love to Ruth through his family connection with Naomi.

Our lives are so full of choices, aren't they? Sometimes we encounter scenarios and situations which present an opportunity. An opportunity. An opportunity to help.

[ 13 : 49 ] To make a difference. It's about choice, isn't it? Because especially in today's sort of self-culture, there's always the option to turn around and say, Well, it's not my problem.

And likely, many people around you might agree with that as well. Ruth worked hard gleaning and gathering. At the end of the day, when she thrust it all out, it amounted to approximately enough grain for a whole week to feed both her and Naomi.

An epath of grain, which is about approximately 15 litres or so. Boaz had been extremely generous. On returning home, or returning back to Naomi, Naomi's really lifted out that sense of despair and hopelessness by Ruth's good news.

Blessed be the man who took notice of you, she says in verse 19. And when Ruth explains whose field she's been working, Naomi responds with, Is not stop showing his kindness to the living and the dead.

Naomi's suggesting that Boaz has given this special treatment because of that family connection. But also his upright character, demonstrating compassion for their dire circumstances.

[ 15 : 16 ] Naomi refers to Boaz as a kinsman redeemer. Again, under Mosaic law, there were obligations to family members in slavery and those who had unfortunately lost their land and were in need.

It was kind of a social responsibility written to law, a form of welfare, which God had instituted. Boaz invites Ruth to continue gleaning in his field throughout the remaining barley harvest and wheat harvest.

If Ruth continued gleaning at the same rate of an epath today, over the two-month harvest period, she would have enough grain to keep her and Naomi supplied for a significant portion, not the whole year, but a significant portion of that year.

That's how generous Boaz was to Ruth. And the question is, did all this happen by chance? Was it just pure coincidence?

Well, clearly not. That's the point of the passage, isn't it? Ruth had made this selfless commitment to her mother-in-law and had determined to make Israel's God now her God.

[ 16 : 32 ] And God was clearly responding and working the background, orchestrating these events. But in order to see these things, we need to have eyes of faith, don't we?

We need to believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ is actually true. Otherwise, we just remain blind to the activity of God.

And as we make our own personal journeys with the Lord, we need to develop eyes, eyes that are open and sensitive to seeing the Lord's hand at work.

That may not be immediately obvious. I can think back over my 34 years of journeying with the Lord. There have been clear occasions where God has been orchestrating events, coincidences, in order to bring about His purpose in our lives.

Sometimes, people refer to them as God incidences. Occasions when key people would turn up in our lives to bless us in a way that encouraged us to trust or to do whatever God wanted us to do next.

[ 17 : 48 ] Back in a past life, Marianne and I used to be crofters on the West Coast. And in order to progress our obedience to a call to go into mission, we decided to sell all our sheep back in 1993.

So we sent them through to Dingle Auction Mart and I went through with my son. And we actually got the best price in the sale that day. Now, I'm no sheep farmer, I can tell you that.

But that's what happened. In our experience of going forward for mission, there were times when God sent key people, people who encouraged us to trust for the next part of the journey.

When it came to me getting a job as a pilot so I could build up the hours of flying to go forward at MEF, he opened exactly the right door at the right time so I could build those flying hours.

When it came to finding a sending church, now that we'd moved down to England where I was working, again, he opened the right doors at the right time. When it came to finding accommodation so we could be together as a family, again he went before us.

[ 18 : 57 ] School places for our children. I could tell you stories about all of these things and how the Lord went before us. When we went overseas as missionaries, we got a GP.

We didn't make the decision, we got a GP who gave us all our inoculations for free. We were like pin cushions. There was a lot of inoculations. I remember when Mary-Anne went to MEF to buy cotton sheets to take over to Africa for bed in.

She arrived on a day when the store happened to be having a bargain sale. She got loads of cotton sheets. In 2001, when I had a serious flying accident in Tanzania, the Lord gave me the right surgeon who prepared me to make the right choices when I returned back to the UK.

And I could tell you more about my journey into ministry. How the Lord found a buyer for our house at exactly the right time. Folks, this is real.

This is real. This isn't wishful thinking. God will do this, not because I'm special, but because He's faithful. My faith is weak and it often strokes to trust Him.

[ 20 : 10 ] But that's what God's about. It's about being faithful to those who will trust Him. Now, God may not be calling you into some sort of full-time ministry whether here in this country or overseas, but He does want to have a relationship with each and every one of you, if you're willing.

Some of you are in that relationship, I'm sure you are. But in order to do that, you need to know Him. You need to be in relationship with Him. Because it's through relationship, isn't it, that we learn to build trust.

I guarantee, God wants to bless you. He doesn't want to harm you. He doesn't want to test you or damage you. He wants to bless you. But before you can see Him, so to speak, you need to know Him.

And the only way you can know Him is through His Word. In the Bible, through a life of prayer, and by His Spirit.

The big question is, the big challenge is, will you trust Him? That's a really big challenge. Will you trust Him? Will you allow Him to bless you?

[ 21 : 26 ] He'll never let you down. It's said that nobody's ever leaned on God too much. Maybe you were here this morning and you recognize the Lord has been speaking to you in recent times.

Maybe He's speaking to you this morning, I don't know. What I would say is, never let the opportunity pass you by. As I said earlier, when we're looking at painting, when He knocks, open the door, and invite it in.

You'll never regret it, I can assure you. And there are millions who will testify exactly the same. Amen.