

Sermon Series: Ruth
Speaker: Jake Greer
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Intro

Good morning Mercy Family! My name is Jake Greer and I'm really excited to get the opportunity to share God's Word with you today. I consider this task both a privilege and a weighty burden, so I'd love to go to the Lord before we dig in.

Prayer of thanksgiving and petition

So I don't know about you, but growing up I always struggled with the idea of "the one". I'm talking about a soul mate. I mean don't get me wrong, I believed in love. I've always LOVED love. But I remained a skeptic of this notion that there's one person that you're destined to be with. I think I've struggled with believing in this idea because it seems so hard for my analytical brain to wrap itself around the sequence of universe-aligning moments that have to happen in order to create even just the initial moment when you meet your true love for the first time. Not to mention the many other course corrections that have to take place to ensure that this

new and fragile relationship isn't crushed by the footsteps of doubts, failures, hurt, poorly handled conflicts, or the misinterpreted moments where you're like "But I didn't mean to seem disinterested by not responding to that text for one whole day."

I don't know, it just seemed hard to believe that God would set it all up this way. Maybe I struggled to believe that **He could**. Maybe I struggled to believe **He would**. If I'm honest, I think I just struggled to believe **He would have wanted to**. To spend His energy and time orchestrating all these little moments just so one person could meet another. Just so two people could find love-be provided for. Maybe He'd do it for someone else, but not me. Why me? I'm just an ordinary guy.

BUT, while I still don't claim to understand whether "the one" is a real thing or not, I do know with absolute certainty that God provided my wife Meredith to me. She is, in every way, a GIFT from God. She's God's provision to me. I can see that now as I look back in the rearview mirror. God's provision is like that, you know?! Sometimes we can't see it as CLEARLY as we move forward as we can when we look back. God's provision in the windshield often seems miraculous and wonderful. The "parting of the Red Sea" kind of provision. But today's story isn't full of windshield provision. Rather,

God's provision in the story of Ruth, and specifically where we'll be today in Ruth chapter 2, is in the simple, common, and ordinary moments with simple, common, and ordinary people.

Today's story has some things to say not just about love and how it's sometimes found, but about the CREATOR of love itself and how He sometimes works. I hope to challenge us all to begin to ask ourselves in the ordinary moments.

"How does God want to provide to and through me today?"

Recap & Summary

Recap

Last week, Joseph preached on Ruth chapter one. We learned about a woman named Naomi who, in the wake of a famine, fled in search of rescue to the foreign land of Moab with her husband and two sons. We saw how death hit Naomi's home and left her not just a widow but a mother who outlived her only two sons and found herself broke, broken, and bitter. Upon returning to her home, she self-proclaimed, "Don't call me Naomi. Call me Bitter. For I went away full but the Lord has brought me back empty."

Then, we met Ruth. Ruth, a Moabite woman, left her

family, people, her gods; instead she clung to Naomi, committing to stay with her to the very end!

The author ends chapter 1 strategically with a key statement,

"And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest." Ruth 1:22

This is a glimmer of hope. They're now in Bethlehem, known as the city of bread, at the beginning of the barley harvest, which if you don't know what barley is...all you need to know is that it's used for bread.

And that brings us to Ruth chapter 2. This is "Scene 2" in the storyline. And here's what happens...

Summary

So it's around spring time, which was the beginning of the barley harvest, Ruth and Naomi find themselves poor and with no real way to earn money. Ruth tells Naomi she's going to go out into the field to glean from the edges of a field. Now in this agrarian context, gleaning was a normal practice where someone, usually a poor or homeless person, would pick up the scraps of the crop left behind the workers of that particular farm. This was NOT EASY

work and likely wouldn't yield much to eat, but it was a start!

Anyways, she ends up in a field owned by a man named Boaz. Now Boaz, apart from having an awesome name that means "strong", is going to be a crucial character in the lives of these two women and the author of Ruth tips us off that he's significant by opening the chapter with a brief introduction of him.

But the story continues.

Ruth is diligently gleaning in the field when Boaz shows up on the scene. When Boaz sees Ruth, he asks his workers about her and they tell him that

"she's the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi" Ruth 2:7

Word had spread of this story. Moab wasn't exactly a place that you want to be from and Naomi had come back much differently than she left.

Boaz proceeds to bless her and invites her to continue to glean from his field under protection from the young men.

Listen up men in the room! Sometimes, you may need to be like a man, named "Strong", and protect the young women around you from the young men around them. That one's for free ladies!

Shocked by his kindness, Ruth asks him "why me?" He tells 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 and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. The LORD repay you for what you've done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" Ruth 2:11-12

We're starting to see the story turn a little here. First of all, go Ruth! Gosh, I can't imagine working that hard in that type of environment for such a small amount of barley bread! I mean, I like carbs, but I don't think I'd be willing to work even half as hard for half as long as this young woman to eat even a full loaf of my wife's dutch oven bread! Mmmmm!

Back to reality!

Secondly, Boaz! This dude is awesome! I love this guy! But check this out, the story continues.

Boaz ends up not just blessing Ruth with a full meal at his table, but actually tells his workers "Hey guys! Let her continue to glean, but also, leave out some of the bundles you've put together for her to pick from." Now we're starting to see more of the kind of man that Boaz is.

Well, Ruth ends up working past sundown and returning home late in the evening with enough

barley for *two weeks' worth of eating* and her “to go box” from Boaz’s kitchen with food for Naomi.

Now remember Naomi? Yeah, her mother-in-law who renamed herself “Bitter”? So, she sees her and all of this bounty that she has in tow and she asks

“Where did you glean today? And where have you worked?” Ruth 2:19

Fair question, Naomi! I can’t help but think she’s gotta be like, “What in the sweet yella barley harvest happened?” Okay, maybe not. But nonetheless, Naomi is SURPRISED. But, little does she know what’s coming next. Ruth then tells her she was gleaning in Boaz’s field.

Now Naomi knows that Boaz was a family member of her husband’s. She also knows that, based on the laws and customs of her people, he could play a key role in the turning of her and Ruth’s circumstances. So the same woman that just a few short verses ago blamed God for her hardships is starting to see things turning around and she acknowledges that this is a kindness from the Lord.

Just like last week’s chapter closed with a glimmer of light peeking through Naomi’s dark circumstances, this chapter too is ending with a little more light shining in on these two women’s lives. But we’re going to dig more into that next week! So hang with us!

The second scene of the book of Ruth ends with Naomi encouraging Ruth to take Boaz up on his offer to continue to safely work his fields. And the chapter concludes:

“So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law.” Ruth 2:23

Church, there’s is so much packed in this story! The Bible is awesome! Read it! Everyday there’s something new! Something life-giving!

We’re going to pull out some observations from this chapter that I think can help us to shape how we see God’s provision at work to and through us. This will help us answer that question from earlier that I want us to start asking ourselves.

“How does God want to provide **to and through me today?**”

First, let’s talk about God’s provision **TO** us Then we’ll move into His provision **THROUGH** us.

While I think there's a lot that we can pull from this story about God's provision in our lives, I want to focus in on three characteristics of God's provision TO us.

First,

God's provision TO us

Is sovereign

Look with me at verse 3,

"So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech." Ruth 2:3

Church, the author here is using irony to make a point. This word "happened" is like saying chance or "as luck would have it". But don't let the author's use of irony get past you. This is God's Word-breathed out by God himself. GOD IS BEHIND THIS.

Make no mistake, the same God that took the dust and formed a man breathing life into his nostrils (Gen 2:7), the same God that knows the count of hairs on your head right now (Matt 10:30,31), the same God who "works all things according to the counsel of his will" (Eph 1:11), the same God who used the verdicts of Herod and Pilate to bring about the death of His very own son, Jesus, THAT GOD

WAS BEHIND THIS MOMENT IN RUTH'S LIFE.

She didn't happen upon the field of a kinsman redeemer because of chance, she happened upon the field because of the GREAT REDEEMER'S hand. And God's provision is about to come to her.

If God's provision to us is **sovereign**, meaning He is behind it, then what moments in your life might later be written as a "she happened to _____ FILL IN THE BLANK? He happened to take that exit off of the highway on his way to Tennessee. She happened to come to Mercy Church on May 16th. Make no mistake, God can change your life today! As a matter of fact, we EXPECT God to change a life today. Our God is sovereign and with Him, things don't "happen" to happen. He IS IN IT.

God's provision TO us, to me, to you, whether in the simple or the small is sovereign and intentional!

Secondly,

God's provision TO us

Is sovereign

Comes from work with faith

Look at the character of Ruth. She's a young single woman who's immigrated to a new land. She left everything for her mother-in-law. In our underdog world, we look at Ruth and think, she deserves a

break. Right?! But we don't see an ounce of entitlement in her. We don't see any idleness in her. Her and Naomi get to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. And she's like "Let's go!! Let me get to work."

Ruth is a DOER. She's not sitting around waiting for a freebie. But she's also not just a doer. She's full of faith in her new God! We see a confidence in Ruth that leads her to expectant action. When she says, let me go to the field, she also acknowledges that she needs favor. Little does she know just how much favor she will find! She left her family, her people, her god. She gained so much more! You'll see. Stick around for the rest of Ruth!

But don't miss her *faith* as she steps out to work. It seems like Ruth knows what Jesus' brother James would teach thousands of years later, that there's no real faith without works. True faith is evidenced by what we DO.

If God's provision often comes from work WITH faith, then I think we have to take a hard look at where we are hoping or wanting God to provide and make sure that there's action that proves that desire. Expectant action for us might not look like gleaning in a field in order to eat that evening. Rather it might look like, applying to 5 jobs while asking the Lord to provide the one we really want. Or digging into God's

Word consistently each day even though we haven't "felt" God's presence in a while and we ultimately need Him to pour out His presence on us. Or being generous and good stewards with the little money we have now while we're waiting on God to help grow our savings over the long haul. I don't know what it is for you, but wherever you're wanting provision from God in your life, ask yourself, ask Him, what should you be DOING to demonstrate and authenticate your faith in **His provision** to you.

Let's move on!

The last characteristic of God's provision TO us, is that

God's provision TO us

Is sovereign

Comes from work with faith

Is for the humble

Not only is Ruth a hard worker who knows that she has to work to eat, but she's humble about it. She doesn't presume that anyone will be generous to her. There's an awareness of her position that makes Ruth a great candidate for mercy. She's humbled. She's vulnerable. She's helpless. Don't mistake her humility though for weakness. This is a strong woman that bows. This is a strong woman

that works without a break. This is a strong woman that works in the field until it's evening and THEN beats out the barley she's been gleaning all day.

But Ruth does all of this, not for herself. But for her mother-in-law! I don't know about you, but if my wife died and my mother-in-law changed her name from Naomi, which means pleasant, to Mara, which means bitter, I'd be like, "Yeah I'm about to change my name from Jake which means Supplanter to Adios which means "Goooodbyyyee!!"

Ruth is humble. She's a loyal and faithful servant. The thing about Ruth's humility that I think really challenged me is that while she has a humble set of circumstances, being widowed, being a young woman in this time period, being poor, being from a foreign land, she also WALKS in humility. I think for us, this is the challenge. We all have some humbling circumstances in our lives, if we haven't yet, we will. But finding yourself in humble circumstances isn't the same thing as walking in humility or being humble.

The scriptures have a lot to say about God's perspective on the humble. Things like, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6) or "'Whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt 23:12), or "For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly" (Ps 137:6). So whether you feel humbled by the job that you have, the role that

you play in your family, or the circumstances around you, know that God's provision is for the humble- those that WALK in humility!

Here's what I love about the story of Ruth. It's so easy to relate to. We don't see what would be considered a miraculous provision to Ruth. God doesn't just rain down a bountiful load of barley that's already beat into flour. No, God USES ordinary circumstances with ordinary behavior to provide for Ruth- for Naomi.

Check this out! God's got something to provide TO us, yes! But, He's also got something to provide THROUGH us.

Listen church, don't let this slide by. God USES people. There are two people in this story. While Boaz may have an awesome name, he's just a regular guy. This is a man of God who happens to own a business. The thing though to note here is that Boaz doesn't see the business that he owns as his. When he blesses Ruth and says in verse 12 "The Lord repay you for what you have done" and when he tells her that she will find shelter under God's

wings, he isn't just washing his hands of responsibility, no, he's taking ownership.

Boaz's theology convinces him that it is HIS responsibility to carry out God's provision. He doesn't think of his ability to provide for Ruth and God's blessing over her as separated things. I think for us, this is HUGE. If we want to begin to answer the question of how does God want to provide through us, we first have to change our perspective on all the things that we think are ours. If God is the provider TO us, then that means, He's also the provider THROUGH us.

Let's take a look again at the story and see what God's provision THROUGH us might look like.

First,

**God's provision THROUGH us
Protects the marginalized**

The story of Ruth in Boaz's field is a story of the marginalized. Our God loves those on the margins. He loves widows, orphans, the poor, the discouraged, the sick, the lonely, the discarded of society, the failures. All too often, the people that we reject are the ones that God chases down first! You

see there was a law that the people of Bethlehem would have been expected to follow that would have provided for Ruth. God wrote into the statues for HIS people, the people called by HIS name, that they MUST leave room for the poor. As a law abiding Israelite in this time, letting the homeless or the traveler glean wasn't just acceptable, it was expected. It was law-God's law. God wrote this law. Look with me at Leviticus 19

9 When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. 10 And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God." Lev 19:9-10

Ruth is a young, foreign, widow working alone with no community to watch out for her. She is vulnerable. Boaz doesn't look upon her weakness as something to exploit for his own gain. No! He doesn't even look at her weakness as something to ignore and let someone else deal with. Have you ever done that? Man, I know I have. No, no, no. Like our Lord Jesus, he looks at his own resources, his own position, and his own power as something to use for HER gain. Like our Lord, he provides. Like our Lord, he protects.

Mercy, this is the heart of our God! If you want to know how God wants to provide THROUGH you, go to the margins and look for the one that's gleaning.

God's provision through us doesn't just protect the marginalized, but it is characterized by generosity.

**God's provision THROUGH us
Protects the marginalized
Is characterized by generosity**

Is Boaz a stingy business owner holding onto every last piece of his profits? No!

Is Boaz a man who knows the law and follows it right up to the minimum it requires? No!

What we see in Boaz, looks a lot more like our Jesus! We see a generous man! We see a man that doesn't hold tightly to his resources as if they were his. We see a rich man that doesn't look at his profits as something that only he should benefit from.

I mean, Boaz has run a successful business despite there being a famine in the land.

Don't miss this church! I love this part of the story. Ruth doesn't just find the food that she's looking for on the margins of this law-abiding-citizen's farm. She doesn't just find a kind farmer. No! She finds a

GENEROUS farmer who provides not just water to drink and protection from the young men of the day. Listen, she finds a meal with leftovers. She finds a kind business owner who actually tells his employees to take the harvest he's paid them to yield and has them set it out for her to pick from! This is crazy!

God is providing to Ruth through Boaz and He's ensuring that she has more than enough.

God's provision to others often comes THROUGH us. So we have to ask ourselves some hard questions to see how we're allowing God's provision to work through us. I think to do this, we can ask ourselves three basic questions.

1. What do we have?

2. What needs are around us?

3. How does God want to use what we have to meet those needs?

So business owner, how are you leveraging the business that the Lord has given you to provide generously for the needs of others? What if instead of keeping all of the profits for yourself or for your business, you found creative ways to reward your hard-working employees over and above the market

standard-generously sharing your profits with them? Do you see your business as YOUR business or do you see it as GOD'S business that you've been tasked to steward.

Stay at home parent, how are you using your time with your kids to let God provide for their every need THROUGH you? What if you saw the hours you have with your kids this summer not as a burden you have to carry until school starts back up, but instead as opportunities to share God's abundant love for you with them, leveraging this time to shepherd their hearts and cultivate their minds to become followers of Jesus.

Charlottean, how are you seeking out ways to serve the marginalized of our city? What if you and I saw our abundance of time, money, skills, or energy as means to PROVIDE for the orphan, the refugee, the homeless, or the trafficked. What if God's provision to these groups is supposed to come THROUGH you or through me?

Empty nester, single person, husband, wife, teacher, student, neighbor, pastor, how are you letting God provide to others THROUGH you?

What do you have?
What needs are around you?

How does God want to use what you have to meet those needs?

Here's the thing about God's provision that I think we can learn from the book of Ruth. It's not just in the big moments, the miraculous, that God's provision is at work. It's in the small and ordinary moments too!

I think that part of the reason that it was always hard for me to believe in something like THE ONE, you know that soulmate stuff from earlier, is because it's hard for me to believe that God is at work in the ordinary. I don't know about you, but it's **hard** for me to see the ordinary moments as God's provision TO me or THROUGH me.

But in the rearview mirror, I can see how God provided exactly who I needed in a wife and I can see a little of HOW he did it. He orchestrated each little moment. The scholarship that led me to a college in Oregon. The family crisis that led Mere to break up with her other boyfriend. My new best friend that happened to like her best friend. The fact that I couldn't afford to go home for thanksgiving and so I went to another Thanksgiving meal as a wingman with a friend only to fall in love with his

crush's wing-woman. Now that the story is written, I do believe that God provided to me through ordinary moments and in ordinary ways.

And now that the story of Ruth is written, we can see in the rearview how God provides to Ruth, and Naomi, and ultimately YOU AND ME. As we continue this series in Ruth, we'll see more of God's provision. And, church, this story of Ruth ultimately leads to another story, another rearview moment, where we can see God's provision at work. It's the moment a couple thousand years later in that same town where Ruth was gleaning. In an ordinary stable in the town of Bethlehem, to another young woman named Mary, a baby was born. This baby, though ordinary in many ways, would live an EXTRAORDINARY life.

This baby's name was Jesus and He's the GREATER Boaz!!!

Boaz' name MEANS, "strong." Jesus' name IS a strong tower that the righteous run to and find safety (prov 18:10).

Boaz' presence led to Ruth bowing. One day, Jesus' presence will lead to EVERY SINGLE KNEE bowing (Philip. 2:10)

Boaz, the barley farmer, provided a meal and sent Ruth home with leftovers, Jesus would turn a young boys' 5 barley loaves into enough bread to

feed over 5,000 people and then his disciples would package up 12 baskets of leftovers (John 6)

Boaz showed kindness to a poor woman on the margins of his field, Jesus would proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to the captive, he'd give sight to the blind, and free the oppressed (Luke 4)

Boaz will eventually redeem the foreign Moabite woman, Ruth, and will take her as his bride, Jesus will eventually redeem people from every tribe and people, every nation, and every tongue (Rev 7,19, Eph 2) and he'll cloth this multitude in white and take her, the church, as His bride!

God's greatest act of provision was Jesus!

If we want to answer the question:

"How does God want to provide TO and THROUGH me today?"

We need not look further than Jesus! He is both God's provision TO us and the THROUGH us.

Let's pray!