

No Such Thing as Chance

When Fairytales Come True – Part IV

Ruth 2:1-13

Introduction

In our last discussion I began by talking about the medical profession and their brutality – remember? I told of the way they say things like, “This won’t hurt,” as they pull out a needle eight inches long. They are not telling the truth!

The problem is that even if they told us the truth, we would still not like it, would we?

One lady sent me a great illustration of the reason that being a medical professional is tough, whether they hold back or come right out and tell us everything.

A man went to see his doctor for a routine physical. The nurse came in to cover the basics – you know the way they do all that. She asked the man, “How much do you weigh?”

He said, “Oh, about 165.”

The nurse asked him to step on the digital scale, and then said, “Hmmm, you weigh 197 pounds to be exact.”

She then asked him, “How tall are you?”

He said, “About 6 feet.”

She looked him over and asked him to step up to a measuring rod. She then said, “Hmmm, you’re exactly 5 feet 8 ½ inches tall.”

She moved on to take his blood pressure, and then said, “Sir, your blood pressure is extremely high.”

“High?” he said, “Whaddya expect? When I came in here I was tall and lanky, and you’ve just told me I’m short and fat.”

This is not funny, is it?!

Well, for those in the medical profession, you have a really tough job, and we are actually proud of you. Keep telling us the truth – we need to hear it.

Having finished the study of the first chapter of the book of Ruth, everything that we have studied has been one piece of bad news after another. The truth has been brutal! Apart from Ruth’s commitment to her mother-in-law Naomi, the story is a tragedy that Shakespeare would have appreciated.

At the end of this chapter, two widows return to Bethlehem – one a foreigner and the other a woman who once had standing in the community and respect throughout Bethlehem. Now, however, they are destitute, impoverished, and reduced to living on handouts.

Chapter 2 of Ruth is where it all begins to turn around. In fact, chapter 2 will cover the events on only one day – but what a day it will be in the lives of Ruth, Naomi, and a bachelor named Boaz.

Before we dive into the text, keep in mind that these are the days of the judges. There is no record of priest or prophet to provide counsel. These are not easy days for spiritually-minded men and virtuous women of character to succeed. The odds are stacked against them.

By the time we get to the end of chapter 2, most people would perhaps come to the conclusion that luck must have happened by. In fact, the world would consider Ruth and Boaz “lucky,” and the events surrounding their meeting, “amazing coincidences”.

The truth is that for a believer living in any generation in any culture, there are no coincidences. In fact, as we leave our choices to God, there is no such thing as chance.

Ruth chapter 2 will reveal the invisible hand of God in the midst of ordinary, everyday decisions.

There will be no voices from heaven; they will not get any clues from angelic visitors; they will not experience any visible signs pointing the way. It struck me as I re-entered this scene that Ruth chapter 2 is the personification of Proverbs 3:5-6.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.

In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

This is exactly what will happen in this text.

The chapter opens with the author giving us a hint that hope is on the way. Notice chapter 2, verse 1.

Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

With this brief statement, the author builds anticipation and hope by hinting to us who know about the role of Kinsman Redeemer, that we have just been introduced to the “knight in shining armor”. And we are given several glimpses into the life of Boaz, in this brief biography, that actually tell us a lot about him.

A Brief Biography of Boaz

1. First, we are told that Boaz is clearly related to Naomi.

The Hebrew word for “kinsman” in Ruth 2:1 can refer to either a friend or a relative. We discover later in chapter 2 that Boaz is actually a close relative of Naomi’s.

According to rabbinical tradition through the centuries, Boaz was believed to be a nephew of Elimelech.ⁱ

Boaz is a potential redeemer of Elimelech’s estate, which would rescue both Naomi and Ruth from destitution and poverty.

2. Secondly, we are told that Boaz is greatly respected in Bethlehem.

Ruth 2:1 refers to Boaz as,

... a man of great wealth ...

This Hebrew phrase “man of wealth” is difficult to define. It is translated “valiant warrior” in

Joshua 6:2 and “mighty man of war” in II Samuel 17:8.

When the angel of God came to Gideon, in Judges 6, he used the same phrase when he said,

... “The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior.”

The term has such a strong military context that some scholars believe Boaz was a veteran soldier.

Since Boaz would have been living in the days of Gideon as an eligible soldier, and Gideon had called for faithful volunteers from among the tribes, some scholars believe that Boaz had been one of Gideon’s three hundred valiant men.

The word means more than a valiant soldier. It is also translated in I Samuel 9:1 as,

... a ... man of influence.

The same expression actually appears again in Ruth 3:11, when Boaz tells Ruth that she is,

... a woman of excellence.

Finally, the word is clearly used to refer to a man of wealth in II Kings 15:20.ⁱⁱ

Any way we look at this, Boaz was highly respected in Bethlehem. He was a man of honor, integrity, influence, and even wealth. All of these attributes will be proven throughout the remainder of this little book.

In fact, let me point out one more quality to describe Boaz that could easily be overlooked, and yet, in my mind, it cemented my opinion of his character. Boaz was not only closely related to Naomi and greatly respected in Bethlehem, but he had another quality.

3. Thirdly, Boaz is spiritually reassuring to his employees.

Skip to Ruth 2:4 where we are told what happens when Boaz arrives at his fields.

Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, “May the Lord be with you.” And they said to him, “May the Lord bless you.”

This could be easily skipped, but do not miss it.

Boaz arrives and immediately shows concern well beyond the normal greeting of “Shalom,” or “Peace to you.”

Boaz’s words both greeted his reapers and gave them his hope for them. Look at his words again.

... “May the Lord be with you.” ...

In other words, Boaz is saying to his employees that he wants them to not only be blessed, but blessed

by the sense that Yahweh was with them – blessing their work; blessing their lives.ⁱⁱⁱ

Can you imagine your boss coming to work, passing by your desk, and saying, “I hope you sense the presence of God today as you work.”?

How about you and me – do you have anyone working under your supervision? Can you imagine making it your goal this week to say something to them that lets them know you want God’s blessing on their lives? Some of you would get a warning for being too open about your religion. Some of you would get empty stares. Some of you might see people tear up and say, “No one has ever said that to me before.”

You might say, “But this is Boaz. He knows he’s going to be in the Bible.”

No he does not. This is not religious jargon – Boaz means it. And his employees know he means it because they respond by saying,

... *“May the Lord bless you.”*

Remember the context of this time.

- Israel’s morals are at an all-time low.
- The people have lived spiritually defeated lives for nearly a decade.
- The people are raw with physical needs as well, because the famine has just lifted.

Boaz cares about more than a bumper crop. He cares about these men and women who are scraping out an existence.

On the canvas of scripture, the portrait of Boaz is painted with the brush strokes of integrity, honesty, humility, diligence, and godly character.

These may have been the very reasons he was single. He probably was not all that interesting to the local girls – they wanted his money, but he just talked about God too much.

More than likely, Boaz was not interested in settling for someone of lesser character.

These were the days of the judges in which,

... *everyone did what was right in his own eyes. (Judges 21:25)*

In a culture marked by moral and spiritual decadence, Boaz and Ruth shine with distinctive character and integrity.

Principles from the brief biography of Boaz

Let us stop for a moment, before we move on, and glean some principles from this brief biography of Boaz.

1. **Even when most people have forgotten God, it is possible to develop godliness.**

In the middle of this generation, a man named Boaz rides out to his fields and greets everyone in the name of the Lord.

His tribesmen were no longer convinced that God was worth following, and Boaz says to his employees, “Listen, God is not only worth following, but I hope you sense His presence today.”

2. **Even when the culture around us becomes self-centered, it is possible to be self-sacrificing.**

This was a time when everyone did whatever they wanted to do – it was a dog-eat-dog world – yet, Boaz was a man who cared about people, even those on a lower rung of society.

The Law of Moses dictated that farmers leave the corners of their fields for the poor. It also dictated that gleaners had the right to come along and pick up what was accidentally left behind.

These were tough times!

Throughout Israel, there were farmers who refused to obey this. They forbade gleaners access and would send their own farm hands back into the fields to gather what was left.

These were tough times – who had time to follow the laws of generosity and mercy?

Boaz did! He cared about the needy and downtrodden. In fact, by keeping the law, he would find his wife. Imagine that!

We had better move on or they will never meet.

Meeting of Boaz and Ruth

Look at Ruth 2:2-3a.

And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor.” And she said to her, “Go, my daughter.”

So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers . . .

In Bible times, the reaper would grab the stalk with his left hand and cut off the grain with a short sickle in his right. He would hang on to it and grab another stalk, eventually filling his hand until he laid

the bundle down. He would then either tie the bundle or there would be workers following along to tie the bundles and collect them.

The reapers would work carefully, so gleaning for fallen stalks or grain left behind was tantamount to eking out a living. This would be like someone today walking along the road trying to survive by recycling aluminum cans.^{iv}

Now notice verse 3b.

. . . And she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

Ruth has decided to help her mother-in-law survive. She goes to the fields of Bethlehem and just so happens to come to Boaz's field.

The Hebrew language literally reads, "She chanced to chance upon the field."^v

What looks like chance or coincidence is divine providence.

There were no lights flashing; no band playing on Boaz's field; no voice saying, "Turn left and go through that gate!"^{vi}

At the time, to Ruth, it was just an ordinary decision, "I'll go in here and glean over there."

To the world it was blind chance; coincidence.

However, the believer is immediately struck by God's direction.

This is Proverbs 3:5-6 in living color.

In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

Was this some coincidence? Not a chance.

Finding out the ways God arranged the initial meeting between husbands and wives has always been interesting to me. For those who marry, apart from receiving Christ, this is life's most critical decision.

I heard an interesting story from one couple who attended our church. Both of them were attending a Bible college and were getting ready to graduate.

Just before this young man graduated, a friend gave him the name and address of a girl her brother had dated. Things had not worked out between this girl and her brother, but she was highly commended. He put the piece of paper in his wallet and forgot about it.

Two years later, the young man was preaching in meetings around the country. One night, as he was cleaning out his wallet, he saw the piece of paper. He wondered if this girl had gotten married and, on a

whim, decided to write a letter to her. He asked her if she would be interested in meeting him sometime.

When his letter arrived, the young lady was at a conference in which she had just committed her life to full-time Christian work. She wrote back and said, "Yes, I'd be happy to meet you."

Eventually, this young man had a couple of preaching opportunities nearby. He arrived in town the day World War II ended. As a result, two national holidays were declared by the United States government which caused his meetings to be cancelled. Since he had nothing to do for a few days, the girl's father invited him to stay at their house.

Two months later, Paul and Betty Jane Freed were married.

Paul went on to serve as the president of Trans World Radio for many decades. He and Betty Jane joined our church when we were still meeting as a church in a middle school facility. He is now with the Lord and Betty Jane is living in Florida – listening to every sermon I preach. So, "Hello, Betty Jane, thanks for giving me the perfect illustration."

Guidance from the Lord is promised, but it often comes on the heels of ordinary decisions.

There are no visions or bands playing, but if our hearts say the same thing that Ruth's did; that is, "The God of Israel will be my God, no matter what," then ordinary decisions will be in line with God's pleasure and blessing.

David said it this way:

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord . . . (Psalm 37:23)

Ruth is now gleaning in the fields – and it just so happens that Boaz decides to come visiting that very morning. Look again at verse 4.

Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, "May the Lord be with you." And they said to him, "May the Lord bless you."

And is the Lord ever about to bless Boaz! At this moment, Boaz spots Ruth. Continue to verse 5.

Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?"

This is the Hebrew equivalent of a whistle!

I remember whistling to my oldest daughter when she was around four years old. She did not know what it meant, which gave me an opportunity to explain and to prepare her. I said, "Honey, one of these days some young man is going to do that in

your direction. It means he thinks you're pretty and he wants your attention. When he does that, ignore him and run home to Daddy."

Notice the servant's response in verses 6-7.

. . . "She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab.

"And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.' Thus she came and has remained from the morning until now; she has been sitting in the house for a little while."

Now slow down just a moment.

Verse 8 informs us that Boaz will go and meet Ruth. The verses that follow let us know that he has mapped out a plan. Some time elapsed while Boaz got it worked out.

This situation was no different then than now. Meeting the girl you are interested in takes some strategy, especially if you are interested in asking her out!

In fact, asking a girl out can be terrifying. Your entire self-worth is on the line. You are giving this girl the opportunity to make you feel like you are really something or like you are worth nothing, right?

One author said it is like handing the girl a loaded gun and pointing the barrel directly at your heart – then asking, "Will you go out with me?" and waiting for her to pull the trigger.

Today just so happens to be the day I handed a loaded gun to Marsha. Today, December 7th, thirty-one years ago, I asked her out on our first date. And she said, "Yes." Is that not a miracle!

I invited her to go with me to a church service. How is that for irony – she has been going to church with me ever since!

So Boaz works up his speech. Notice verses 8-9.

Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen carefully, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field; furthermore, do not go on from this one, but stay here with my maids

"Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Indeed, I have commanded the servants not to touch you. When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the servants draw."

Boaz had figured out every conceivable way to keep Ruth in his field only.

Ruth can follow freely behind the reapers; she can drink from the company water cooler – meaning she would not have to walk back into town for water. In a little while, she will be given a free meal.

Notice that Boaz had already commanded his men not to touch Ruth. This phrase can mean to injure her – they may not have wanted competition for the fallen grain, "Who is she, anyway?"

The phrase is also translated "to have sexual relations" in Genesis 20:6. This is a young woman who is without protection, alone, and vulnerable – and she is a foreigner, without legal protection in Israel. Who would care?!

Boaz has effectively told everyone, "I am now her guardian. Don't get in her way, don't lay a hand on her, give her water to drink when she wants it, and watch out for her."

It is no wonder that verse 10 tells us that Ruth,
. . . fell on her face, bowing to the ground . . .

This is the Old Testament form of a curtsy. Continue to the last part of verse 10.

. . . and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"

Now remember, Ruth does not know that Boaz is related to Naomi. Boaz knows, but Ruth only knows that this wealthy landowner is showing extreme kindness to her – an outsider.

Boaz then tells Ruth that he knows all about her, in verse 11.

. . . "All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know."

Boaz says, in effect, "Ruth, I already know everything about what you've been through – the death of your husband, your commitment to Naomi and to the God of Abraham."

In other words, "You have something special on the inside that is worth honoring."

I love what Boaz says next, in verse 12.

"May the Lord reward your work, and your wages be full from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge."

This guy walked with God. Why have we not heard more about Boaz? Why are there not books

available for men on the life and character of Boaz? This man's brief appearance in scripture is convicting to every man in this auditorium.

Boaz and Ruth have only recently met and he is talking about God. He is doing more than just dropping God's name – he is advocating for God; he is recommending God to her.

Boaz is saying, "Listen, I know you've left family, friends, and country. I know you are perhaps lonely. So you just snuggle up under the wings of almighty God and rest assured – He'll watch over you. And I'm going to pray that He will repay your deeds with kindness – He's trustworthy!"

Boaz could probably have proposed then and there!

Principles from the meeting of Boaz and Ruth

Let me give two principles from this initial encounter between Boaz and Ruth.

1. The foundation for a romantic relationship is a vital relationship with Jesus Christ.

Let me say this to every single person.

If the guy or girl you are interested in walks with God, it will not take you very long to discover it.

If after one date, or conversation before one date, their acknowledgement of God and the things of God does not come through, whether it is saying a prayer before eating or making a reference to church or the Bible – if this does not come out loud and clear, then leave them in your dust!

I have told countless individuals over the last twenty-three years, after they have told me about the person they were dating and asked what they should make of them, to go home, put on their tennis shoes and lace them up tightly, and run!

I deal with people on the other side who refused to run; who lowered their standard; who made their choices apart from prayer and obedience to scripture; who thought it would be better to marry an uncommitted Christian or a non-Christian than to remain single.

The foundation for a romantic relationship with someone else is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

2. A permanent attraction between a man and a woman goes beyond the physical dimension and involves a spiritual dimension.

Thirty-one years ago, I asked Marsha out – the young lady who sat in my college English classroom. It took me the whole semester to work up the nerve to ask her out. I had never heard her testimony! I hoped she had one, but her beautiful blue eyes turned me into jelly.

However, it would be the spiritual dimension that mattered most.

J. Vernon McGee pointed out in his commentary on Ruth something that might be easily missed. He pointed out the fact that nowhere in the book of Ruth are we told what she looked like. There is not one physical description of Ruth given.^{vii}

Boaz was smitten by her, no doubt, but what ultimately attracted this very eligible bachelor to her was her commitment to God and her character in life.

Ladies and gentlemen, this encounter in a Bethlehem field was not by chance; this was no coincidence – God had been developing two paths that in a matter of months would become one path.

Consider this – both Boaz and Ruth were acknowledging God in all their ways, and God was making their paths straight – together.

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ⁱ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume 2 (Eerdmans, 1991 ed.), p. 477.

ⁱⁱ Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Ruth (Eerdmans, 1988), p. 133.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 145.

^{iv} Ibid., p. 138.

^v Keil and Delitzsch, p. 477.

^{vi} Stanley Collins, Courage and Submission: Ruth & Esther (Regal Books, 1975), p. 19.

^{vii} J. Vernon McGee, Ruth: The Romance of Redemption (Thomas Nelson, 1981 ed.), p. 81.