

Title: **God's Hidden Providence**

Passage: **Ruth 2:1-7**

Theme: **God at work in unseen ways**

Number: **1012Ru2.1-7(5)**

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{Read Passage}

The book of Ruth - a 4 Act Drama. Theme revolves around t/Royal Line.

T/BOR answers t/? -- how did t/family line of King David of Israel survive extinction? That's in t/foreground. Beyond that, in t/background & stretching out to eternity is THE Royal Line of David's human ancestor, JC.

I. Act One: The Royal Line with Hope in Ruin (1:1-22)

II. Act Two: The Royal Line with Hope Renewed (2:1-23)

III. Act Three: The Royal Line with Hope at Risk (3:1-18)

IV. Act Four: The Royal Line with Hope Restored (4:1-17)

Through all of this we see an unfolding drama that speaks of God's hidden (and not so) hand of Providence.

Last week t/curtain came down on Act 1

I. Act One: The Royal Line with Hope in Ruin (1:1-22)

A. Scene One: Retreat from Bethlehem (vv. 1-2)

B. Scene Two: Ruin in Moab (vv. 3-5)

C. Scene Three: Returning to Bethlehem (vv. 6-22)

Ch 1 covers a period of 10 yrs. Difficult decade to say t/least. A family looking for hope that found instead: pain; hardship; suffering.

Pain, hardship, suffering are common to man -- common to families.

If I could move t/clock forward to our own day - I'd like to tell you a story of another family whose experience has a few similarities.

Almost 40 yrs ago this family, consisting of a husband, wife, and a young boy, moved across t/country. Neither t/man or his wife had a job waiting for them. They were moving away from family and friends to an unfamiliar area.

While they hoped to escape a bad economy in t/Northeast for greener pastures out west, t/hope quickly dimmed. The mother was bitter about t/move. Both of her parents had died w/i t/past year; she was still reeling from t/loss. She had a sister whom she dearly loved who lived nearby and now she was being taken away from her.

On t/road in t/midwest t/family hit a raging snow storm that nearly stopped them in their tracks. Then their car broke down leaving them temporarily stranded.

The week-long journey was filled w/stress, contentions, and difficulty.

When they arrived at their new home t/young mother began to drink away her sorrows. Her marriage, already under duress began to crumble. Their son, now 12 years old began to experiment w/drugs. Husband and wife were headed for divorce.

Where does a story like that go? Sounds pretty bleak doesn't it?

Stories like this are a dime a dozen - stories that end with crushed hopes, broken marriages, dysfunctional children who go on to repeat t/process in their own lives.

Who would have thought that there could ever be a rainbow behind such threatening clouds? There was.

Hadn't guessed by now, t/family was Bartolucci & t/child was me.

God's hidden hand of Prov. during t/darkest of times // that promises future joy & blessing for those who are #d among His children.

10 yrs. seems like a long time, but a lot can happen in a decade.

10 years for Naomi and Ruth in Moab.

Back in Beth. they were now standing on t/shore of great hope.

For my childhood family - It was during t/span of 10 years (1974-84) that God's hidden hand was revealed as he saved not only a marriage (my parents - who recently celebrated 50 yrs together) & a child (me) but 3 lost souls as well. A family that lived in spiritual darkness was transferred to t/light of JC.

Also at t/end of those 10 years that I met w/young woman who would later be my wife.

T/curtain falls on Act 1. Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth are back in Bethlehem. With that t/curtain rises for ==>

II. Act Two: The Royal Line with Hope Renewed (2:1-23)

A. Scene One: Ruth Reaping (vv. 1-7)

I. Verse 1 - A new character is introduced

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

a. Writer gives us 4 details about him in this verse

(1) First, he is a "relative" of Naomi's husband

Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband . . .

(a) "Kinsman" = Hebrew word used only one other time in the OT

In Prov 7:4 where it's used opposite t/word "sister."

i. It can mean *acquaintance* but there's more here than that

Not just an acquaintance, a relative. He may have been a cousin (Jewish trad. - Elimelech's nephew - speculation). Fact is, we don't know.

ii. Develop later

2:20 Naomi calls him "our relative." Also in 2:20, as well as 3:9,12 he is referred to as a *gō'ēl*, "kinsman redeemer."

The way chap. 2 (Act II) opens would raise t/interest of a Jewish reader familiar w/Israelite family laws and customs ==>

Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband . . . (hope)

(2) Second, he is described as a "man of great wealth"

(a) This Hebrew phrase *'iš gibbôr ḥayil* has a range of meanings

"man of great wealth" is only one of them (probably not the best).

May be that t/writer is drawing our attention to Gideon in Judges 6:12 where t/same expression is used of him.

May be that t/writer wants to compare or contrast Boaz & Gideon.

Here's where t/phrase is capable of different meanings. In context of Judges 6:12 t/phrase 'îš gibbôr ḥayil means "mighty man, a warrior, a military hero." True of Gideon.

Boaz is nothing like Gideon in that regard. He doesn't engage in battles // lead an army. Be said of him, "He's a lover not a fighter."

In this context, wealth aside, it probably would be better interpreted as one good English translation does ==>

... a prominent man of noble character ...

Boaz is a special man. He knows t/LORD. He's a man of great spiritual integrity.

The feminine equiv. of this phrase is found in Prov. 31:10 => 'îšah ḥayil (excellent woman/wife). Noble or excellent character.

Boaz is a "man of high standing / good reputation." We'll see how that unfolds -- Boaz cares for Ruth but doesn't take advantage of her. He's a man of such faith that he even trusts God to providentially work through t/legal system (we'll see in chapter 3).

(3) Third, we're told that he is from the "family" or "clan" of Elimelech

This point complements the first one ==>

Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband . . . of the family of Elimelech . . .

(4) Fourth, we see his name: Boaz "in Him is strength"

Name "Boaz" would later adorn t/pillar at t/left side of t/entrance to Solomon's Temple acc. to 2 Chron. 3:17 (Boaz would be Solomon's great-great-grandfather).

2. Brings us to verse 2 - Ruth Takes Charge

And Ruth the Moabitess 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." . . .

a. "Gleaning" was a practice outlined in the Law of Israel as a way to provide for the poor and the foreigner

Deuteronomy 24:19 "When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

(talk about gleaning Margie's eyes light up).

The reaper (grim job) would grab a handful of standing grain w/one hand and cut it with a sickle using t/other. He'd leave t/stalks on t/ground behind him for t/bundlers (gen women) to gather them together.

Gleaners would come through picking up the sheaves and stalks that had been left behind. That is 1 way that t/poor could care for themselves.

The genius of the system was that you still had to work. Was govt. assistance if you will, but it wasn't mailed to you in an envelope!

Problem w/our modern-day welfare system - it robs men of their inherent dignity & promotes laziness. Based on an overly optimistic humanism that has little appreciation for t/inherent depravity of man.

b. Note 2 things

(1) First - Ruth is proactive, not reactive

We have two widows (Naomi and Ruth) and a foreigner (Ruth - emphasized again by t/writer). This isn't going to be easy for them. But Ruth wasn't going to stand around - she was going to do all she could to provide for them both.

I take a lesson from my own father in that regard when we moved across t/country when I was 11. He didn't have a job waiting for him. He didn't go on unemployment. He was in his late 30s, had been a pretty successful business man, & he got a job as a cashier in a gas station. It was a block away from our house and I remember during our first winter walking to where he sat in a little booth to bring him hot tea. When a better job came along he took it. He eventually established another small business.

When you are in need are you going to be passive or active? Are you going to wait until a perfect job comes along, or are you going to work? Are you going to sit back and wait until things get better, or are you going to do something radical - like trust JC as you move forward!

(2) Second, Ruth asks permission

There was a basic respect that was paid to parents as well as to those older than you.

Something so lost on us today. Our culture is one of disrespect.

Respect and assertiveness.

... And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."

3. God's Hidden Hand of Providence (v. 3)

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

a. "The field" is singular (not separate fields but a single field)

That was t/practice - there would be a large field that was farmed by sev. different families. There would be markers but not fences (markers would indicate where your particular plot of land was - hence t/warnings in t/OT against moving one that wasn't yours).

This is still done in some parts of Europe.

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

b. This is the key / central to all of chapter 2 if not the entire book

(1) Literally in the Hebrew text ==>

... and she happened to chance upon ... OR

... her chance chanced upon the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

(2) How does this fit together?

We're talking about God's sovereignty - His providence. That He's in complete control of everything, big and small.

1:6 (God visited His people by removing t/famine).

2:13 (Naomi - "the hand of t/LORD is against me"); 20b-21 {cite}

Now ==>

. . . and she happened to chance upon the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

(a) A weak link in a chain of God's sovereignty?

A "coincidence" here in chapt. 2 that comes between t/strong affirmations of God's providential care on either side.

The Jews knew nothing of "coincidence" - Their God was bigger than that (so should ours be).

This is no inconsistency, but an affirmation that Ruth's coming into the portion of the field owned by Boaz was not a humanly contrived event. It was ordained by God.

(b) It's another way of affirming that God is sovereign over things that may seem "coincidental"

Matthew 10:29 "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father."

He's as sovereign over t/fall of a bird as He is over t/movements of mighty nations.

What we have here in v. 3 ==>

. . . and she happened to chance upon the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

Is what is theologically described in Proverbs 16:9, 20:24 ==>

16:9 **The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.**

20:24 **Man's steps are ordained by the LORD . . .**

(c) This is God's "hidden hand of Providence"

-- little things that impact and lead to big things (showing that little things aren't so little after all).

"Coincidence is when God chooses to remain anonymous."

(3) How sovereign is your God?

How you live your life will speak volumes as to what you really believe. Few doctrines that will more greatly affect how you live your life as a Xn. How you trust Him in all things.

John Piper's book, "A Sweet and Bitter Providence" he shares a story under the sub-heading of "A Sovereign Bullet" ==>

. . . on April 20, 2001, the Peruvian Air Force shot down a missionary plane, mistaking it for a drug courier. In the plane were the pilot Kevin Donaldson and a missionary family, Jim and Veronica Bowers and their two children, seven-month-old Charity and six-year-old Cory. Veronica had Charity in her lap sitting in the back of the Cessna 185. As the bullets sprayed the plane, one of them entered Veronica's back and passed through her md into her daughter. Both died. The pilot, with shattered knees, crash-landed the plane in a river, and the other three survived.

Seven days later at the memorial service in Fruitport, Michigan, Jim Bowers gave his testimony and explained why the sovereignty of God in the deaths of his wife and daughter was the rock under his feet.

Most of all I want to thank God. He's a sovereign God. I'm finding that out more now. . . . Some of you might ask, "Why thank God?" . . . Could this really be God's plan for Roni and Charity; God's plan for Cory and me and our family? I'd like to tell you why I believe so.

He goes on to give fifteen reasons. In that context, he says, "Roni and Charity were instantly killed by the same bullet (Would you say that's a stray bullet?) And it didn't reach Kevin [the pilot], who was right in front of Charity; it stayed in Charity. That was a sovereign bullet."

But what about the Peruvian fighter pilots? Didn't they have wills? Didn't they make mistakes or, perhaps, even sin against an innocent missionary family? Jim Bowers said, "Those people who did that simply were used by God. Whether you want to believe it or not. I believe it. They were used by Him, by God, to accomplish His purpose in this, maybe similar to the Roman soldiers whom God used to put Christ on the cross." [27-29]

Piper concludes (such things) ". . . may be hard to embrace when the pain is great, but far worse would be the weakness of God and his inability to stop the blowing of the wind and the flight of a bullet." [29]

4. Boaz enters the scene (vv. 4-7)

a. Verse 4 ==>

Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem . . .

וַיֵּבֶן בִּיעֹז – a string of imperfects with the waw consecutive. Look! This makes it "graphic and vivid, and enable[s] the reader to enter in the surprise or satisfaction of the speaker or actor concerned." Immediately your attention is brought from Ruth to Boaz (who was introduced in v. 1).

. . . and said to the reapers, “May the LORD be with you.” . . .

Here is a man who makes God central to everything in His life, even his business.

. . . And they said to him, “May the LORD bless you.”

b. Boaz sees Ruth and asks about her (v. 5)

Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, (i.e. the foreman) “Whose young woman is this?”

Remember, Bethlehem is a small village. Boaz would have recognized all of the workers. He would know all t/families in Beth. Here's a young woman he doesn't recognize. She's a stranger. He would assume that she wasn't alone - in her mid-20s she would be married.

“Whose young woman is this?”

c. The foreman replies to Boaz' question (v. 6)

And the servant in charge of the reapers answered and said, “She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab.

(1) Indefinite (a Moabitess")

He also does not give her name, something socially significant in that culture. Not something he is particularly concerned about. *“Just a young Moabite woman, the one who came with Naomi from Maob.”*

d. Her request? - verse 7

This is t/one v. in t/entire book that has difficulties as far as t/original Hebrew text is concerned.

“And she said, ‘Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.’ . . .

1. To glean among the sheaves was not practiced unless it by special permission.

2:15 **When she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her.**

2. With v. 15 in mind - Why would Boaz give later her permission for something she was already doing?

Scholars have offered sev. solutions.

Some suggest that she hadn't started gleaning at all. The foreman was waiting for t/land owner to arrive (Boaz) to get his permission.

V. 3 then functions as a summary statement of what happened later.

Other solutions hinge on how you translate this verse ==>

"let me gather ears of grain into bundles" (behind the reapers).

“to glean” means “to gather in bundles” behind the harvesters those ears of grain they missed.

. . . Thus she came and has remained from the morning until now; she has been sitting in the house for a little while.”

"house" was not a home, per se, but a temporary shelter with a straw roof on poles for shade and rest.

Let's pull back to the big picture . . .

Cyril J. Barber, in his Expository Commentary offers these concluding thoughts (72-74) ==>

The young foreman's description of the way Ruth approached him, as well as her conduct in the field, enlarges our understanding and appreciation of her. Her "Please let me glean" was phrased delicately and anticipated an affirmative answer. She was gracious and positive in her attitude. She had suffered much, but she was not depressed (2:11b). The setbacks of the past few weeks had not left her in despair. She may have been beaten down by the sheer weight of her trials, but she still had confidence in herself and in the One under whose wings she had taken refuge (2:12b). And because of her love for her mother-in-law she was determined to persevere.

Under such circumstances one's insecurities, apprehension over the future, and concern over where the next meal will come from might lead to frenetic activity. Was this true of Ruth? Let us read between the lines. Boaz's servant described her activity (2:7b). She had started early, worked diligently, and when she was tired, She had rested. Ruth was evidently sufficiently secure in herself and confident enough in the Lord not to allow her anxieties to goad her into unwarranted activity. There is no evidence in the story that fear of impoverishment drove her to the border of panic. She worked hard, and when she felt the need, she relaxed.

All of this points to Ruth's well-rounded personality. It also provides a good model for our own efforts. . . .

I may add it's also an example of our need to trust in God's loving hand of providential care over us, even when (esp. when) it's hidden.

We began talking about how much can happen in 10 years. Even when much or all of those yrs. are filled w/bitterness. Yet God's hand is there, if we will but trust that which we may not see in t/difficulty of t/moment.

A decade ago it was Oct. of 2002.

The month and year that this most recent incarnation of t/Bartolucci family agreed to move in t/other direction -- from AZ to NY -- so that we could serve alongside you here.

That wasn't (and isn't) bitter. But it did come at t/heals of a time of trial and suffering for this church and for us.

1998 -- began a difficult time here. . . .

On t/other side of t/country we were also suffering. I was mistreated at t/hands of some men I thought were friends (something God meant for good). I left full time ministry, & went through a time of dark depression.

Out of that God blessed us with a daughter (now 11).

God's hidden hand of providence was preparing us and this church to come together.

Few of you are prob. fam. w/the name Arthur Tappan Pierson, or A.T. Pierson. He was an American Presbyterian pastor who preached over 13,000 sermons, wrote over 50 books.

When C.H. Spurgeon in London fell ill, he requested that Pierson fill in for him. Spurgeon rather unexpectedly died on January 31, 1892. The people of the Metropolitan Tabernacle invited Pierson to stay on, which he did for the next 2 years.

Side note - Spurgeon, a Baptist, asked a Presbyterian occupy the pulpit in his place. And t/MT, a Baptist CH asked him to stay.

Pierson later became convinced that believer baptism was correct and on February 1, 1896 was baptized by Spurgeon's brother, James A. Spurgeon (at age 58).

Pierson and Spurgeon were agreed on t/matter of God's providence.

Back of all that foes have plotted, or that friends have wisely planned,
Human schemes or work of demons, moves a hidden higher Hand.

Man's horizon is but finite; present mysteries ensnare;
Wrongs in vain cry for avenging, Hope is tempted to despair.
But when God unveils the future, His exact and full reward
Will reveal an even balance in the judgements of the Lord.

Through the mystic fabric, woven on the great historic loom,
Runs the golden thread of purpose, not the iron threads of doom.
Warp and woof are heaven's making, pattern beautiful and wise,
Pattern hidden on the earth-side, perfect to celestial eyes.

Every action, every actor, great or little, foe or friend,
Like converging paths of empire to one golden milestone tend,
All minutest threads inwoven into God's complete design,
Perfecting its colour pattern, filling out its grand outline.

Yet God's agents act with freedom, choosing whether love or hate,
Close alliance—bold defiance—slaves to no relentless fate.

True the hand Divine is hidden—moving secret and unseen
Through the acts of life's long drama, managing each shifting scene.

Nothing happens accidental. All that man ascribes to chance
Choice of God has first determined—nothing can escape His glance,
Men may cast their lots and gamble with their deeds as with their dice,

Count capricious Fortune mother of their virtue or their vice;
Man proposes, God disposes; all things His design fulfill;
Every human wrath unconscious serves to execute His will.

This the goal of all the ages—highways, by-ways, higher bend,
And despite all foes and factions, God is Victor in the end.
So man's festival of Purim, read in Faith's illumined sense,
Shall be seen in realms eternal as the Feast of Providence.

—Dr. A. T. Pierson

On Pierson's gravestone is a picture of an open Bible.

On the Bible were engraved two verses. I John 5:11

“God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.”

Matthew 28:19 “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

Prep. for the Lord's Table.

Galatians 4:4–7 4 But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,⁵ in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.