

# God of the Details

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**Bible Text:** Ruth 2:1-13

**Preached on:** Sunday, December 1, 2015

## **Truth Community Church**

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It's really remarkable, isn't it, to contemplate the love of God for our souls and to realize that 2,000 years before you and I were born that Christ had already taken care of everything that was necessary to secure our eternal well-being, to secure the forgiveness of our sins and to guarantee our place in heaven. What a gracious God. What a loving God that we serve and it's just so critical for us to keep his love at the center of our contemplations of him lest we start to think wrong thoughts about God. You will never, ever think too highly about God's love. You will never think too much about his grace. You will never out think and exhaust or think too highly about how much he loves your soul. That's always measured not by what's happening in your life today because this world is filled with sorrow and disappointments and your own sins and failures, but we measure the love of God by the death of Christ on the cross and there where Christ suffered on your behalf, where Christ voluntarily laid down his life to save you from sin, where Christ gladly gave himself up and said, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing," that's where we see the love of God on perfect display and so well do we sing, "It is well with my soul," as we open up our time together here this evening.

With those thoughts in our mind and our hearts warmed by a contemplation of the love of God, let's turn to the book of Ruth 2 and continue our study in this book which we left off two weeks ago. Last week, of course, we had a Thanksgiving communion service and we always love to celebrate communion at Truth Community, but tonight we're here for Ruth 2. We come to a pivot point, really, in the book. As a matter of preparing our hearts for that, let's remember something basic, something else that makes it sure that it is well with our soul, and that is the fact that the Bible asserts that God rules over all the details of his creation; that there is not a molecule anywhere within the galaxy that is outside his direct supervision. There is no rebel Adam that is able to successfully work outside the will of God and the directing hand of God, including men. The Bible simply asserts that God rules over all the details of his creation and his hand is actively at work in everything that happens. It's really a remarkable thing to contemplate, too vast for the human mind to plumb its depths, but the Bible makes this clear. In Matthew 6, for example, Jesus says that God feeds the birds of the air and clothes the flowers of the field and uses that as a basis to say we have no legitimate basis to be anxious about our lives because God's care is over every detail of his creation, and if man is the pinnacle of his creation and if we have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, surely, it's an argument from the lesser to the greater. If he cares for the grass of the field which is here today and dried up and thrown

in the furnace tomorrow, how much more will he care for the details of your life and mine when we belong to him through faith in Christ? In Matthew 10 it says that the sparrows die at his command; it says the numbers of your hair are all numbered. So the level of detail at which God superintends his creation is absolutely unfathomable.

You know, you and I can't relate to that. We have details in our lives that we pay no attention to and we let things go and we consider things to be unimportant and so we don't pay attention to them. Understand that when you come to the doctrine of divine Providence, when you contemplate how God cares for his creation, God is not like you and me. God is a God of detail. God attends to everything, even down to the numbers of hairs on your head. I like to say that for some of us God doesn't have to count quite as long as he does for others, but that's all right, you know what I mean. God is involved in everything that happens. He is a God of the details and one of the things that our church gladly and, in a right way, proudly stands for that we are most unapologetic in standing for, is that we have a high view of the doctrine of divine Providence and we want that doctrine to shape the way that you think about everything in your life and everything that happens.

What is divine Providence? I have defined it this way in the past and I'm glad to be able to rehearse it again with you because we all need this reminder. What is divine Providence? It means this: it means that God continually upholds his entire creation and he sovereignly works in absolutely everything that happens and thus directs all creatures and events to accomplish his purposes. I'll say it again. I like the doctrine so much that I'll just belabor it and drive it into the ground if I have to. God continually upholds his entire creation and sovereignly works in absolutely everything that happens and thus directs all creatures and events to accomplish his purposes.

I remember where I was at when this doctrine really clicked firmly, finally and completely in my mind and the implications of it started to really make sense to me. I was driving on a road in canyon country in California, getting ready to turn right onto David Lane and I had been studying the doctrine for a number of weeks and months and it all just kind of came together and all of a sudden everything was answered by this doctrine. All of a sudden it didn't matter what people had done to me in the past. All of a sudden it didn't matter and I realized that even if I had made bad decisions in the past, that that was all part of the outworking of the Providence of God in my life and that means that you can let go of it all. You don't have to hold on to the bitterness of the way that someone wronged you because even when they were wronging you, somehow God was overruling and directing that to accomplish his purposes in your life because he's involved in everything that happens. If he preordained that sinners would nail Christ to the cross and bring good out of that most heinous crime on a human level, then certainly he can take the things that have happened to you, your bad mistakes, your foolish decisions, the things that have gone wrong in life, he can gather all of that and accomplish good for you in the end. Why? Because he's a God of the details. Because he's a God of power. Because he's at work in everything that happens. Because he knows the end from the beginning. Because nothing catches him by surprise. And if he loved you enough to send Christ into the world to save you from sin in order to secure your eternal blessing and to

guarantee that you would be with him in heaven forever, then surely he's able to take the lesser things that happen during our earthly lives, the things that go wrong, and somehow turn those and accomplish his purposes.

So honestly, beloved, there is no reason for us to be discouraged; there is no reason for us to be bitter about things that have happened in the past or the way that people are treating us now; there is no reason to be anxious about circumstances. Why? Because we throw ourselves back on this great doctrine of the Providence of God and know that it is all in his hands, and here it is, why can we let all of that go? Why can we be at peace and at rest? It is because we throw ourselves back on the doctrine of divine Providence and say, "God is working out his purposes. God loves me in Christ. God will work this together for good and there is no detail that comes into my life that hasn't filtered first through his purpose." This changes absolutely everything in life. Those of you who have had failed marriages in the past, somehow God is going to work that out and God is able to accomplish good through that and he was working even through that in your life. And on and on it goes, just whatever has troubled you and occupied your attention, it all fits under that. God upholds his entire creation. He sovereignly works in absolutely everything that happens and he directs all creatures and events to accomplish his purposes.

So all that we have to do is line ourselves up and say, "God, I want what you want and I trust you for everything that's happened in the past and so I can just go forward in the confidence that you are at work and that's all I need to know." It's incredible. It's true and that's why Jesus says, commands us, "Don't be anxious." Well, don't be anxious because you understand the doctrine of divine Providence and we understand that God is great in his divine purpose. And what we're going to see here in Ruth 2 is that his Providence is so perfect that it goes down to the most minute decisions that men and women make in their lives, and there is nothing outside of it and yet here's the thing about divine Providence, Sinclair Ferguson in his little book on the book of Ruth entitled, "Faithful God," has a very helpful illustration to help us think about divine Providence. He compares it to, there are kind of two perspectives in which we live as we are considering the doctrine of divine Providence and it's like watching a split screen television event where you've got split screen showing you two perspectives on the same event that happens. Those of you that watch baseball, you've got a split screen with the pitcher on the left and the runner taking his lead off first and you see the perspective together in a way that you wouldn't get the full picture if you just saw one side of it.

Well, that's the idea with divine Providence. There is this sense in which God knows everything that is happening and he is working it out according to his plan. That's his perspective. For our purposes and for us as individuals living life on a day-to-day basis, we don't see that side of the screen. We just live it out within our own little perspective and we don't know all of the consequences or implications of what happens or the decisions that we make. When we step back and see the biblical picture, we see God perfectly working everything out but us doing it with ways that we don't fully understand and God working out his intentions, watch this, working out his intentions even though men are not conscious that they're furthering God's purposes when they do.

Let's look at the book of Ruth and see how this happens. Chapter 1 foreshadows the blessing that is about to come to Ruth and Naomi. We saw this last time in verse 22, chapter 1, verse 22, "Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab." You remember what happened, they went to Moab, disaster hit them and they kind of came back to Bethlehem with their tail between their legs, realizing that things hadn't worked out there and they came back pretty destitute, and yet we see this little note of hope at the end of chapter 1, "They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest." Ah, there's food in the land. Ah, there's promise, there's hope, there's at least something to eat. There is a little bit of light in the situation as they come back and with that little bit of blessing and on that cue, now as you move into chapter 2, the story progresses and the blessing came in more than food, it came in the purpose of God when it introduces a man to us in Ruth 2:1 and there's this little bit of description that gives us some added background as the story develops.

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." Now, there is something that would be real easy for us to miss and we can understand because we pray things and then we kind of forget about it. Thank God that he remembers our prayers and acts on them even though we forget them. Look at chapter 1, verse 8 and what happens in chapter 2 and indeed in the rest of the book, at one level from one perspective, is a furtherance of a prayer that Naomi made in chapter 1. In chapter 1, verse 8, "Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.' Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept." Well, that prayer is still present before the mind of God and now it's very interesting as you read the story and watch it unfold that in chapter 2, verse 1, suddenly an eligible man appears on the scene. Well, this is interesting. There is a man named Boaz and I remember that Naomi had been praying that God would bless these daughters-in-law with a husband. Well, I wonder what's going to happen next? That's kind of the idea, this verse 1 brings us into the story. We see an unfolding of it.

Now, watch this, in keeping what I said about the split screen perspective, but remember what's happening: from Naomi's perspective and from Ruth's perspective at this point in the story, Boaz is just a man that is out there and as you're introduced to him, they're not seeking Boaz. Ruth doesn't even know Boaz at this point, and so from Ruth's perspective, she just needs to go out and get some food on the table. But what we see here in chapter 2, verse 1, is that the writer of the book of Ruth brings us into the divine perspective and says, "Be aware of this that's happening out here right now. There is a man named Boaz and he's going to become important as the story unfolds."

So from our perspective as we read the story today, we see Ruth and Naomi and the barley harvest taking place and we see Boaz here and we say, "Ah, something is going to come together here." Understand however and this is really critical for you to get tonight's message and to understand what it's like to live in light of the divine Providence: at the time of the events, Ruth was utterly oblivious to what was going on. We as the

reader of the story are introduced to Boaz but she doesn't know about this yet and so as you're listening to the unfolding of the story here this evening, keep the perspective in mind that we, as a reader of the book of Ruth, have the benefit of both perspectives. We get the split screen view of things. From Ruth's perspective she is just going about her daily life fulfilling her duty. That will become important at the end of the message as we contemplate how we live in light of the doctrine of divine Providence.

So here in verse 1, we see two critical things about Boaz. 1. He's a relative of Naomi's husband. That's interesting. He just happens, coincidentally, using those words in very sarcastic quotation marks, he just happens to be somebody who's related to the family and he also just happens to be a man of means; he's a man of great wealth. So all of a sudden there's this very eligible man on the scene as this story starts to unfold. Now, at this point, we don't know here in chapter 2, verse 1, we don't know as the story unfolds why he's important, we just see another character being introduced into the story. Two perspectives on the same action: we have a benefit that Ruth and Boaz did not have as these events happened in real time. They didn't know what was coming. You and I do as we read the story. We know what's coming. We've read the whole story. We know what's coming, but at the time they didn't.

Now watch this and think about your own life now: every one of you in here in this room today, every one of you watching on the live stream or hearing this on subsequent media, every one of you should have it firm in your mind and believe with all of your heart that God is in perfect control of everything that happens because that's the teaching of Scripture. We are not at liberty to deny a high view of the doctrine of divine Providence because it's revealed truth. We don't have the perspective and we don't have the prerogative, I should say, to argue against that and object to it and say, "Well, I'm not sure that that's really true." That kind of doubt is simply sinful in light of the clear testimony of Scripture. There is that theological understanding that we have but, and here's where this gets personal and this is where you kind of come to apply it in your life, as you're walking through your life tonight, whatever the events of the day were, whatever you're facing in the days to come, you don't know how everything is going to work out. You don't know what the next detail is. The book of James says you don't know what your life will be like tomorrow and so we hold this in two views: from a divine perspective, we're confident that God is working it all out and he knows the end from the beginning; but from a human perspective, we don't know that. So the question becomes: how then do we live in light of God's Providence? How do we live in light of the fact that God is over all of the details and he knows them but we don't? We have to keep those two things in balance and in mind.

As you read on here in Ruth 2, Ruth at this point knows nothing about Boaz. She just knows that she needs to put food on the table for herself and her mother-in-law. Look at verse 2, now the story advances now that the new character has been introduced. Verse 2, "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.' And Naomi said to her, 'Go, my daughter.'" Notice this: in a world like ours which sinfully and wrongfully sometimes has a low view of manual labor, the Bible does not endorse that view at all. What you see

here in verse 2 is Ruth gladly, cheerfully, willingly going to take on the most basic, hard, manual labor in order to provide for herself and for her family. She goes out into the field in order to do some gleaning, in order to bring back some grain that they could eat. She, as a widow, humbly undertook manual labor to provide for her family. What does she do here? How should we think about this in terms of our own society today? As a young woman of childbearing age, Ruth goes out and in the process, she rebukes the lazy sense of entitlement that is so common to our youth today. She's a widow and she just goes out and she works with her hands rather than expecting someone to bring it to her and sets a standard, sets a pattern with her character and her work ethic that is worthy of emulation.

Now, the question for us is this: why does she go to glean? Why is she going out into the fields to participate in the harvest? Well, long beforehand, centuries beforehand, before these events in the book of Ruth, God had built a very interesting system of welfare into the national life of Israel. There was a means provided for the needy in the Mosaic law and I want to show you this from a couple of passages. Look back in the book of Leviticus 19. In verse 9, you'll see that as God is giving instruction for national life just after the people had come out of Egypt and were preparing to enter into the Promised Land, although there was a 40 year detour in the meantime, God had provided for the poor, for the needy in Leviticus 19:9, and he gives instruction to the landowners, those who were reaping the harvest. He says in verse 9, "Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God." In other words, what God is doing here is he says, "Don't pick everything absolutely clean in your fields." He says, "You leave a little bit on the margins so that those who are needy, those who are strangers, can come in and they can find something to eat."

This is repeated elsewhere in the Mosaic law. Look at Leviticus 23:22. The mind of God is just so unspeakably brilliant. He is such a great and wise God. Verse 22, "When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field nor gather the gleanings of your harvest; you are to leave them for the needy and the alien. I am the LORD your God." Then one more time, this is repeated in the book of Deuteronomy 24, turn over there with me, if you would. Deuteronomy 24. You know, if you just read Ruth in isolation, it might sound kind of odd. Why is she doing this? Well, what Ruth is doing here in Ruth 2 is exactly what God had established for the needy to do. Deuteronomy 24:19 says, "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." Then it extends to other crops as well. Verse 20, "When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing."

Now, a couple of things to say about the greatness of God and the love of God which is the place where we started in this message. First of all, the wonder of God's knowledge and his understanding in order to do this. He provides in the national law, he provides for the needy and the orphan and the widow and makes provision for them by instructing landowners on how they are to do their harvest. Leave some behind so that they can come along and get something to eat. Notice in this process in contrast to the way that we do it in our society, that there is a dignity to this for the widow, for the orphan, for the needy, that they are working for their own provision. They have to go out and it's not just handed to them; it's not brought to them in their dwelling place and said, "Here's your food," and that they are fed day after day, week after week by people bringing it to them. No, they have to go out and earn it. God makes provision for them but he preserves their dignity in the process by establishing a means where they will certainly be cared for and yet they will also have to work for it.

Now, along with that, step back and take a bigger picture look at this. Scripture tells us in James 1 that true and undefiled religion is this: to visit widows and orphans in their distress and keep oneself unstained by the world. You can go into the Psalms and see places where Scripture speaks about how God cares for widows and he's a Father to the orphans. What does this say about the great compassion of God, that he orders and structures the very national life of his chosen people in a way that would guarantee care for those who are on the margins and forgotten elements of society? That God cares so much for the well-being of the needy and those who have no other means of providing for themselves that he bakes into the system a means by which they will be taken care of? Those of you that are widows, those of you that have lost parents in the past and you feel that absence and the weight of that, understand that what you see here is a picture, a practical way that God manifests the special love and care that he has for those that are alone in life, that are not able to make it on their own. This is the mark of a most gracious God, a greatly loving and compassionate God, and that God doesn't see as man sees. You know, our world is attracted to the celebrities and the rich and the famous and the wealthy and we make TV shows about them. God has his eye on those who are on the margins and alone and lonely and unable to care for themselves and God says, "I'll take care of you. I'll be a Father to the fatherless." I love him for that, don't you? Don't you just love the fact that God is not a respecter of persons? Don't you just love the fact that he cares for those that are on the margins like that? I love him for that and I know you do too.

So here we see and go back to the book of Ruth now, here we see in Ruth 2 a practical outworking of this and so Ruth is doing exactly what the law of God would have her to do as she goes out on her own, alone, just with her mother-in-law. Remember, she had left her family behind. She had left her people behind. She had left her gods behind. She is here, to her a new land with a new people, and rather than bemoaning her sad circumstances, she goes out and fulfills her duty. It's a wonderful story.

Now, as you move on in the story, there is something to keep in mind as you read this. It's human nature that not every landowner would be so magnanimous, so generous as

God himself was, that there would be landowners and those in charge of the harvest who wanted it all for themselves and were resistant and not cooperative and not gracious to those who were in need. That's just human nature. You know, yeah, I've got 99% of the field here but I want 100% and they don't extend the same kind of kindness that God would to those who come. So Ruth recognizing this says in verse 3, or she says in verse 2, I should say, "Let me go and glean after one in whose sight I may find favor." She says, "I need to find someone who will let me do this, who will cooperate and allow me to gather the food that's necessary so, Naomi, I'm on my way." And Naomi says, "Go, my daughter." And in verse 3, the pivotal verse in the book in some ways, Ruth departs.

Verse 3, look at it with me, "she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers." Human perspective here: Ruth just goes out. She's new to the area and she comes to a field and she starts her work there. And where did she end up? Did she think in her mind, "I'll go to the field of Boaz"? No, she didn't know Boaz. That's really important. So in verse 3, Scripture says, "she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech." She happened. It just so happened that she did this. That phrase in the original language could be translated "her chance chanced upon the field of Boaz." Watch this, unbeknownst to Ruth when she walked into this field and asked to do her work there, unbeknownst to her, apart from any intention, apart from any planning of her own, she came upon the very field of a relative of her deceased father-in-law. How did that happen? Was it just a matter of luck? Of blind fate? Was there some impersonal force that was at work here? Perish the thought. Perish the thought. What you have in verse 3 here is an example of God being the God of the details and God directing all of his creatures and all events to accomplish his will. Notice how this happens and this is the way that divine Providence primarily works: God works out his purposes through the actions of men even though men are completely unaware of the fact that that is happening. Without any intention on the part of men to say, "Oh, I know what God's plan is here and I'm going to go do it and further it myself," Ruth is simply fulfilling her basic human duty and saying, "Look, I've got to put food on the table here. Where can I go? I think I'll go to this field here." And she goes over there, not knowing the consequences of her action.

When the Scriptures says she happened upon the field, her chance chanced upon that particular field, understand it's an ironic statement. It's like the writer is rolling his eyes and saying, "Oh, it just so happens that she ended up in Boaz's field." It's not an endorsement that this was actually a coincidence, it's an extreme statement that says, "Recognize, reader, the hand of God in what just happened." It is crucial to remember divine Providence. From a human perspective, Ruth had no intention of ending up in Boaz's field and so from a human perspective, this did not happen by design. But remember the split screen: on the split screen, you see the other actor. You see the other perspective. You see the divine perspective on this, and God is directing Ruth to particularly that exact field, though Ruth had no idea. Ruth made a free decision of her own uncoerced by God in her own mind, and yet through her unintentional actions, God intentionally directed her to exactly the field that she needed to be at.



Look, when you truly understand that, you realize that divine Providence is much, much greater than anything we could contemplate. The doctrine of divine Providence is not that God forces everybody to do exactly what he wants and even against their will they do things that they don't want him to do and God is just a puppeteer who is directing and pulling all the strings. That's not it. That would be magnificent. That would be incredibly wonderful if God did that and he was in that kind of perfect control, but the level of God's Providence, the greatness of his power and his ability to implement his will on humanity is such that he is able to work through the actions of people who have no regard to what's happening, no regard for the will of God; they are just going about their daily business making decisions based on what they know at the time, unaware of Providence, and yet God is able to work through that to accomplish his will. It's incredible that God is able to work that out. His hand, listen to me, is working in everything that happens and here's the thing: men carry out the purpose of God without being aware that they are doing so. That's how great the Providence of God is. In Ruth's mind, she was simply choosing a field to get some food for the day. In God's mind, in God's Providence, this was the appointed day where she would most certainly meet Boaz and they would most certainly begin the next step in the line of ancestry that would lead to King David and ultimately lead to our Lord Jesus Christ. Unbelievable. That's not the right thing to say. This is absolutely believable because it's in Scripture, but this is just so far beyond human comprehension, that a seemingly random choice about the field that she would glean in becomes the necessary pivot point for the advance of redemptive history. A widow, a foreign widow in the land of Israel makes a seemingly random choice to go to her left and not to her right, and yet that is the choice that ensures the introduction to Boaz which leads to a line that leads to our Lord Jesus Christ humanly speaking. So unplanned by Ruth, perfectly planned and orchestrated by God. That's what we see. He's a God of the details.

You know, and sometimes people, this is a little diversion here, a little bit of a tangent here. Sometimes people will mock the doctrine of divine Providence and display their ignorance in silly things that they say and say, "Do you mean to tell me that God really cares about whether I take 275 or 71 home tonight?" And they try to mock it by reducing it in a purely human perspective, "You know, why would God care about that?" Well, do you know what? That decision makes a big difference, doesn't it, if suddenly there is a colossal accident on one of those freeways and not the other and you ended up taking the freeway that preserved you from the accident that you would have otherwise been in. Well, you don't even have to be smart to see that there are consequences even to those kinds of decisions and for people to mock the doctrine of divine Providence by trying to reduce it to something foolish like that, first of all, is just a denial of common sense on the one hand and it's also a denial of the Scriptures that say that God is involved in every single detail.

So we respect the doctrine of divine Providence. We say, "Yes, every decision matters because God is at work in all that happens." And say, "We freely acknowledge, you know, I'm not aware of the consequences of the decisions I make. You know, I'm not aware of the consequences of what I say from the pulpit week by week, but I'm just content to know that God silently takes it and works it to accomplish his purposes." So

you fulfill your duty and you act in a rational manner and as you do that, as you fulfill your duty, you realize that beyond the veil in a realm that you can't see, God is doing far more than what you're aware of to carry out his purposes and maybe, maybe the left turn makes a big difference than the right turn, even though it seems inconsequential at the time. Nothing could have seemed less consequential than whether Ruth went to field A or field B, but it so happened that Boaz was in field B, because Boaz starts with B, right? Yeah, you're with me. That's great.

So as the story unfolds, Ruth had started working in the field and what happens? Verse 4, "Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, 'May the LORD be with you.'" Now, just as you kind of enter into the details of the story here, and we've just seen Ruth suffer and be destitute and yet she's loyal and she's a woman of great character so obviously, yet she's alone and she's working the fields with her own hands by herself in a strange land. What a breath of relief, what a breath of relief it is and suddenly there's a man of substance, a man of wealth, a man of character who steps into the scene and you see the provision of God for Ruth in what begins to unfold here and you see in verse 4 that Boaz is a godly man from the start and the rest of the book vindicates his character.

How does he speak to his workers? He said to the reapers, "May the LORD be with you." There is a godliness in the way that he interacts with his own workers and they obviously had some manner of affection for him as well because they said in response, "May the LORD bless you." So there's this godly environment that is established by Boaz's leadership; a reflection of his own character that shows that he has care and concern for his reapers and says basically he greets them saying, "God bless you," and manifest that he has a concern for their well-being that goes beyond the work that they can do for him. He's a godly man graciously interacting with his workers and they respond in kind. He's obviously set a standard, a pattern, he had set a culture, if you will, within that workplace of godliness.

Now, this is a lovely story. Boaz comes. He's a godly man and yet he's a man, an unmarried man at that, and you can kind of get the picture Boaz calls his foreman over, said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is that?" You can kind of see, you can almost feel him raising his eyebrows. He looks out and says, "Who is that woman over there? I haven't seen her before. She has my attention. Can you tell me what's going on there?" And the foreman tells him what had happened before Boaz arrived and he speaks and describes what Ruth did and it speaks to her character. "The servant in charge of the reapers replied, 'Boaz, she is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab. And she said,'" here's what she said to us, "'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.' Thus she came and has remained from the morning until now." In other words, she's been working all day, Boaz. Now she's sitting in the house for a little while. A lot of scholars think that that's just a reference to a shelter for the workers to take a brief rest from the work of the day. Ruth is there but he says, "She's been working all day and she's the Moabite woman that came with Naomi from Moab." So he tells Boaz who she is, "She has worked all day. She's sitting in the house and now Boaz, that's who she is."

Verse 8, Boaz goes and addresses her and they meet. I'm not sentimental about romance but you've got to admit this is pretty romantic. This is pretty cool the way this works out and you just see a godly man approaching a godly woman and taking care of her and says, "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." He comes and he spreads his protection. This man of great wealth, this man of great godliness says, "I'm going to extend an umbrella of protection over you. You stay in my fields. Don't go anywhere else. I have commanded them not to touch you, not to harass you. You drink their water and you'll be safe under my care."

Ruth responds, "she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, 'Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?'" Well look, trace this all the way back in the doctrine of divine Providence and in the character of God and trace it back. It's a legitimate question for Ruth to ask. "Why am I finding favor from you? I'm just a foreigner. I'm new to this land. I'm just a dog and I don't have anything to offer to you. Why are you being so kind to me?" Well, why is he being kind? We've already seen he's a godly man, that's why, and because a godly man meaning that he reflects something of the character of the God of Israel, he reflects something of the character of Yahweh, and we've already seen that Yahweh cares for widows. Yahweh is a God who cares for the one on the margin, who is a helper to those who are in need of help. So Boaz is simply reflecting the greater character of God as he interacts with her. He's an instrument in the hands of God in the life of Ruth, so great is the compassion and the care of God on this particular widow. So as we see Boaz caring for Ruth and we enjoy the romance of it, that's cool, understand that Boaz is simply an extension of God's undeserved grace to a foreign woman in the land of the people of Israel.

So, "Why are you paying attention to me?" verse 10, "Boaz replied to her," 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." He's speaking graciously to her, isn't he? Affirming her, speaking well of her, not taking advantage of her. He says, "'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.' Then she said, 'I have found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants.'" So Ruth is just overwhelmed with gratitude at the kindness that Boaz has shown to her and Boaz, again, from his godly perspective, from his godly character, says, "Ruth, I've heard what you've done. God bless you. May God reward you for the kindness that you have shown. May God care for you. May he give you full wages because you have come to seek refuge under his wings." So here's Ruth, she set out that morning just anticipating willingly, joyfully anticipating a very hard day's work to put a little bit of food on the table and all of a sudden God has directed her path face-to-face with a godly man who shows kindness

to her, a man who has the ability to care for her, a man who is a reflection of the character of God himself.

Now, we'll see next week how this develops in verses 14 through 23. For now I just want you to notice a few things to help you live in light of divine Providence in light of this story because, in a sense, there is no difference from Ruth than there is to us. What I mean by that is that God was in perfect control of Ruth's circumstances and at the right time and with undiminished ability, just directed her to exactly where she needed to be at exactly the right time. Well, God is able to do that with us too, in fact he does that with us too. When you turn to Christ and God adopts you into his family, God undertakes this same care for you and in this way, Boaz becomes more than just a godly man to Ruth, he becomes a picture of the way that Christ deals with us as foreigners, sinners who come to him for salvation. Ruth meets Boaz and finds this gracious man dealing with her and caring for her and taking her into his family and his care.

Well, when you came to Christ as a sinner, outside, separate from God, defiled and unworthy of his presence, and you came and said, "Have mercy on me," what did he do? He took you in. He showed you favor. He established you and poured blessing on you and guaranteed your well-being against all your enemies just like he protected Ruth from those who would harass her in the fields. Christ brought you in and received you and said, "I will care for you from this moment forward." You see a picture of Christ in the way that Boaz dealt with Ruth and there's a lot more to see and unfold as we go through the rest of the text. So even as we read this story about Boaz and Ruth, we don't have to look too deeply to see, we see a picture, we see a reflection of how Christ has dealt with you and me and it humbles our hearts and it makes us grateful and it makes us love him.

Now, I want you to notice three things here to help you live in light of divine Providence yourself. These are kind of our points of application. That's the way we've been doing this study in the book of Ruth so here we go. They all start with the letter "R." First of all, remember divine Providence. Remember divine Providence and in keeping with what I said earlier, let me say it again: remember divine Providence. I'm being very emphatic as I say this right now. Each one of you as you live through life, as you go through life, as you're struggling with issues tonight, you must remember divine Providence. God has orchestrated your circumstances to accomplish his purposes. God is in the midst of them. You are not alone. Things are not random. You are not subject to hostile unrestrained forces, God's hand is over it all and is in it all. He is working through it all to accomplish his purposes.

This passage from Ruth 2 highlights a defining principle of the operation of the universe. You cannot understand life, you have a wrong worldview until you start with this fundamental premise: God, the God of the Bible, the God of the 66 books of the Bible, Yahweh in the Old Testament, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, he is over all. He rules. He's in charge of his creation. The fall of a sparrow, the hairs on your head, the choice of a field 3,000 years ago, the circumstances of your life today are all under the divine Providence. Everything that's ever happened to you in the past was an instrument of God in your life to accomplish his will. You say, "Ah, but they sinned really bad

against me. You don't know. If you knew how vile I have been treated in the past, you might say that differently." Do you know what? I won't say it any differently because what they did to the Lord Jesus Christ was supremely vile. And yes, men sin against us in vile ways but God's Providence is somehow silently, powerfully at work in that to accomplish his purposes and a view of divine Providence should be at the core of your worldview and define the way that you respond to life. God is over the details both great and small in all of creation, in the vast infinite expanses of the universe, and in the micro details of your life. He's over it all and you must start with viewing life from that lens. You must.

Now, having said that, beloved, I sympathize with you in this sense, is that I understand that you cannot connect all of the dots from your human perspective so don't even try. We can't determine, we can't predict the outcome of divine Providence. We don't know from night to night whether the left turn or the right turn is going to be significant. We can't predict it. We shouldn't even think that way. We just live life according to our duty and our responsibilities and our opportunities and we trust God to work in that divine realm of Providence to accomplish his purposes without understanding all that everything means. We can't understand that. We don't know what our life will be like tomorrow and so we shouldn't even speculate about it. But there is this fundamental rest and trust that says, "Divine Providence is at work here even though I don't see it. That means I can rest. I don't have to be anxious. I can be at peace. I don't have to be angry and bitter because God has had his hand upon my life from the beginning to care for me, to provide for me in Christ in a much greater way than Boaz ever provided for Ruth. I am secure in divine Providence."

Matthew Henry says this and I quote, "Let us always keep up good thoughts of the divine Providence and believe that while we do well, it will do well for us. God wisely orders small events and those that seem altogether random serve his own glory and the good of his people. Many a great affair is brought about by a little turn which seemed fortuitous to us, but was directed by Providence with design." The smallest of little things that seem so inconsequential to us might be the pivot point for divine Providence just like it was with Ruth.

So we recognize, we remember divine Providence as we go through life. You must do that and yet divine Providence does not make us passive or speculative in life. That brings us to point 2. You remember divine Providence and then, secondly, you respond to divine Providence. You respond to divine Providence. Here in this story in Ruth 2, Ruth did not set out to meet her husband. She didn't say, "Naomi, I'm going to go and find a man tonight so I'll be back." She said, "Naomi, we need to eat tonight. I'm going to go to the field." What was she doing? Ruth simply took up manual labor to provide for her household needs. She met the duty that was in front of her. She had a responsibility to Naomi. She said, "I need to provide for her. She brought me into this land. She's my only family. She needs to eat and I have the ability to go make that happen so I'm going to respond. I'm going to go do that." In a very seemingly small way, she responds to her circumstances in life and says, recognizes her duty and says, "Here's what I need to do in this circumstance and I'm going to go and do it." Very simple.

Now, for you here today, when you are in a time of trial or a time of uncertainty and there is a lot at stake and you don't know how it's all going to turn out, here's how you must think, here's how you must respond to those circumstances that are providentially ordered in your life: beloved, don't waste time speculating how it might work out in the end.

"Well, if I do this, maybe this will happen and then maybe that will happen." Don't do that. Don't speculate about the future that's unknown to you. No, your question is this: what's my duty for today? What is in front of me today that God would have me to do in this realm of responsibility and in these relationships? And divine Providence is not an excuse for you to be inactive, it is the principle of Scripture that makes sure that everything that you do has purpose. So it doesn't make you sit on the sidelines, you get into the game and play your part. You ask what your duty is for that day and then you go and do it, and as you do, beloved, this is where the intersection of your duty and divine Providence comes in: as you do, you pray as Jesus taught you, "Father, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Here's what I see that I need to do, I'm going to do this, I pray that your will would be done." Then when events intervene and you get interrupted and all that, you don't have to get all stressed out because you're not going to get your task list done. Understand that God brought a providential interruption into your life and you respond to that. You adjust your view of duty and what you're supposed to do as life unfolds whether it's on a day to day basis or in greater ways in the major events of life. Just remember that God worked out his purpose as Ruth did her simple duty.

Do you know what divine Providence does? It makes it so that you don't despise the small things in life. You don't despise the menial tasks that you have to do because you say, "Every menial task that I have has meaning because this is ordered by God." Furthermore, you realize and you understand that there are no inconsequential people in your life. There are no people in your life that you can treat poorly and dismissively as if they weren't important because every person in your life is someone that God in some manner or another, for one reason or another, has put in your life and you should treat them the same way Boaz treated his reapers, "God bless you." They have a divine dignity because they are created in the image of God and they have a particular dignity and place in your life because somehow God ordered your life to include them in the midst. And you respect every person that comes into your life; you view them as an object of your affection, an object of your care because, not because of who they are in themselves but because God put them there. That's what divine Providence leads you to.

On the split screen on God's side, divine Providence is infinitely complex and cannot be searched out. It is unsearchable. But on your side of the split screen, what it means for you today, what you should do today, that's usually not complicated. You can do your duty, carry it out, trusting that what happens on the other side of the split screen God will work it out to his glory. So you remember divine Providence and you respond to divine Providence with a sense of responsibility, with a responsible spirit that says, "This is what I have to do today. I'm going to do it."

Thirdly, finally, where most of us need to go. You remember divine Providence; you respond to it; and thirdly, you rest in divine Providence. You rest in divine Providence.

Those of you where life has brought you a lot of sorrow, this is where you come out. Life's been hard. I get that. The sorrow has been deep and there is nothing earthly, humanly that any of us can do to soften it for you. What divine Providence does is it gives your heart a place to go and rest. You say, "Even though this isn't what I would have chosen and even though this is difficult, I can at least have a supreme underlying rest in this, a confidence that God's hand is in this even though I can't see it. Even though I wouldn't have chosen it, I can receive this and respect it as something from the hand of God even though I don't understand." And you rest in that. That's the only place where you can find any serenity for your soul. I know. You know, these things that you can't make any sense out of.

Scripture tells us repeatedly, fellow Christian, that Christ is with us. Christ is with you. Christ is for you. Christ will never leave you nor forsake you. The nail scarred hands that bore the weight of your sin now hold you in his providential care. Beloved, he loved you. He gave himself up for you on the cross. He would never abandon you to hostile forces. He's directing life to achieve his purposes which will always be good for you in the end. You rest in divine Providence. You're supposed to rest in that rather than worry, rather than say, "What if I had done something else? What if I had married someone else?" Don't let your mind go there. Take charge of your thought life and bring it under the direction of divine Providence and say, "This is what God was working through this and therefore the past is closed and I don't need to go back and reassess it." And you should rest in divine Providence especially when the stakes of life are high and you don't see the outcome ahead.

The events in the book of Ruth were over a decade in the making. Remember that. Remember that God unfolds his Providence not on our short timeframe. He works it out over time, over years, over decades. As you continue on in the book of Ruth, he actually works it out over generations. Think about it: the significance in the context of Ruth and Boaz's life of God's Providence, that was over a decade in the making. Naomi had to come from Israel into Moab. They had to meet. Ruth had to meet her son and get married. Those guys lived for a while. Then they knocked off somehow, they died in Moab. They had to go back. Oh, that has taken years and years to unfold and day after day, a lot of sameness in the things and what's going on in life here. Well, what's going on in life here is the power of God is at work slowly, inexorably accomplishing his purpose just like it is in your life and in mine here today. God is accomplishing his purpose. But notice this: even the earthly significance of Ruth's life and meeting Boaz, even the full earthly significance of it wasn't manifest during their lifetime. Ruth and Boaz met and they got married later on and they had a baby and Ruth had to have just been full of rejoicing in that and, "God blessed me in this life." And Scripture doesn't tell us exactly when she died or under what circumstances she died, but they had a son. His life went on and he had a son. And his life went on and he had a son. Generation comes, generation goes. Generation comes, generation goes. But one day the great grandson of Ruth and Boaz, their great-grandson, four generations of time by the time David became king over Israel. Then a thousand years go by and the final King, the great King of Israel is born in human flesh in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, directly traced back in genealogy to Boaz and Ruth in Matthew 1:5.

Do you see what this means, beloved? There is absolutely no way that you and I can assess the significance of anything that's happening in our lives. We have absolutely no idea what the ultimate consequences of our decisions and our life are going to be. For Ruth and Boaz, it was great in time but it became much greater generations down the line. Then multiple generations further, Christ comes as a result of the Providence of that field meeting one day. Divine Providence is profound. You know, even if you just look at some of the Christian writers who are influential now: Charles Spurgeon, Martyn Lloyd Jones, J. C. Ryle. You look at these men who ministered over 100 years ago in some places and even more further back. I quoted Matthew Henry from 400 years ago, 300 or 400 years ago. The effect of their ministry is still multiplying and expanding and having an affect today in this room hundreds of years later.

So the point for us is: do you know what, we just need to give up trying to assess the significance of it. We don't know if small things are important or if big things are important. We have no idea and so we don't even try to live in that realm. We just say, "Lord, here's my responsibility. I'll do it to your glory. Your will be done." We rest in divine Providence and let him work out the realm that belongs to him alone. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "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." We can't understand the intricacies of Providence and so we just leave it with God and we trust him for it knowing that he will make our paths straight.

Let me say this, ask you this: does it seem to you like life is unfolding slowly and that God's timing is hard to accept? Don't lose heart if God's watch seems to be running slow from your perspective. Do you know what? His watch isn't running slow, yours is running fast. Your impatience with divine Providence is a sign that you haven't fully embraced the doctrine. Your impatience is an indication that you need to step back and rest still more, as it were, as you throw yourself back into the arms of divine Providence. Beloved, based on the authority of Scripture and all that God is and all that God has said and all that God has promised and all that God has planned, I promise you when you throw yourself back on divine Providence, you'll find that he catches you and he holds you in his arms and satisfies your soul with the simple but supreme knowledge, God is in control here. God is in charge and that's all I need to know. The Lord is in the heavens, let all the earth keep silent before him.

Let's bow together in prayer.

*God, your hand is in every detail of life. We trust you and, Father, tonight we commit ourselves individually and collectively, we trust you and commit ourselves to trusting you especially when we don't understand. Lord, it is enough for us to know that you're in control and that you love us. Everything else is a detail. The supreme things are cared for by you. The supreme things are revealed in your word and, Lord, we are supremely grateful. Help each one of us here tonight, each one that will hear on subsequent media, help each one of us, O God, to rest in your divine Providence knowing that your sovereign care is the safest place for our soul to find its repose and it's rest. We love you.*



*We honor you. We adore you. We worship you from the bottom of our hearts, grateful that you are our God and we are your people. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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