

“God’s Providence Over Our Wisdom”

Living Wisely in an Unwise World

Ruth 2

Pastor Jeff Stivason

December 22, 2017

Jeff: Why don’t we pray? Don, why don’t you lead us into it? (*Music*)

Our heavenly Father, we are very thankful for the many blessings that You give. We’re thankful most of all for the blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, as we approach the day upon which we celebrate His incarnation, we can’t help that our spirits are lifted, that our minds are carried away with thoughts of majesty and splendor, as we rehearse time and time again over the days of the announcement of the birth of Christ, and how that announcement is indeed a wonderful thing, more wonderful than the world can bear, and yet we wish that they could. And Father, as we contemplate what it means for Him to come, Your Son, the second Person of the Trinity, that we might be united to Him because of His work, because of His obedience even unto death upon the cross, we marvel. We marvel and yet are left humbled. We’re dumbstruck. Yet You opened our mouth to praise You. And so we do that today, praising You for every good and blessed gift that is in Jesus Christ. And yet we also know that Your word tells us that we will follow the pattern of our Savior and that we will lived the cruciformed life, the humiliated life. Ours will be to follow the Savior until Your sovereign plan and purpose would have us exalted in Jesus Christ.

And so, Father, we pray that You will help us to experience the humiliation of Christ. But we pray, Father, that as we experience it, our eyes would be lifted up to that time in which we will be exalted in Christ Jesus. And Father, as we walk the path of humiliation, we realize that our brothers and sisters also walk that same path. We think about Dick Clouser this morning. We are so thankful that His eyes are set upon the Lord Jesus Christ and His word, and that he’s with us today. And Father, we pray that You would heal Him and bless Him for having been in the hospital. Strengthen His body through the common grace that physicians often exercise.

Father, we are in prayer this morning for Mark and ask that Your hand would be upon him as he is in this difficult situation. And certainly we pray that You would spare him from the difficulties. And yet we pray that You would teach him many things through them.

Father, we pray for John Daniels and we ask that You will bless him as well. We certainly pray, Father, that You will give him physical relief. We pray that You’ll take His ailments away. And yet again we know that because we walk and follow the Lord Jesus Christ You may choose to have him undergo these things. And so we pray that You’ll give him the strength to do so.

Father, we ask and pray as well for our brother Bruce. We were so thankful to see him last week. And Father, we are so thankful to see him up and about and to see him able to drive and walk. And yet this appears to be another setback. And Father, we pray that You’ll help us to think about it in the context of the humiliation of Christ. And Father, there is a certain sense in which our brother Bruce would long to have this ailment taken

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away from him and this setback removed from him. And yet he knows that this shapes and fashions him after the image of his Savior, and that is something he would never take away. And so we pray, Father, that You’ll help him to undergo this. And we pray that through it You’ll teach him. We pray that through it that You’ll make him to look more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. And Father, we pray that as we enter into Your presence today through Your word, You’ll do the same for us. Help us, Lord, to understand Your word too. We pray, Father, that You will cause Your Spirit to apply it to our hearts and lives. And we pray, Father, that we would be different men as a result of having been under Your word today. Father, we pray it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Jeff: Well let me have you turn to Ruth chapter 2 today. And in Ruth chapter 2 we’re going to be dealing with this. One of the things we’ll be thinking about are some main and key points as we think about what it means to live and discern the will of God. One of the things I want to tell you, though, is that we’re going to see some things here that we’re not going to pick up until the next time. And so you may see some things in this chapter and wonder why we’re not looking at them. But we’ll get to them.

I do want to say this, though. I want you to know that after I sent my outline to brother Sig here, I sent him a note along with it. And I said, “Brother Sig, I’ve prepared an outline for Ruth. But you know, it’s this one-track mind kind of thing. I remembered that it’s the Friday before Christmas.”

And he sent me an email back, saying, “It’s okay. You can change anything you want. Just don’t change the outline.” *(Laughter)* So I’m learning many things about our brother through our email exchanges, brief as they may be. *(Laughter)* But maybe next week we’ll pause for a Christmas theme, if I remember, that is. It won’t be too far past. We may have to hold onto our thoughts with what I say today about Ruth for two weeks.

Participant: Jeff, it’s not Christmas anyway.

Jeff: Okay.

Participant: That’s right. It’s Advent.

Jeff: It’s Advent. It’s Advent. It’s Advent. *(Laughter)*

Participant: a lot of churches invent their own calendars. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: I want you to know. Leave it to the Anglican to school the Presbyterian. *(Laughter)* I totally get it. *(Laughter)* And I submit to it. *(Laughter)* In all humility.

Participant: Your Presbyterian ancestors did away with it.

Jeff: I know they did.

Participant: They said it was a modern invention.

Jeff: All right. All right. *(Laughter)*

Participant: Moving right along.

Jeff: So let’s read Ruth chapter 2 together, okay? *“Now Naomi had a relative of her husband’s, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, ‘Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him, in whose sight I shall find favor.’ And she said to her, ‘Go, my daughter.’ So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz who was of the clan of Elimelech.*

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“And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, ‘The LORD be with you.’ And they answered, ‘The LORD bless you.’ Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, ‘Who’s young woman is this?’

“And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, ‘She is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather from the sheaves after the reapers.’ So she came and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest.’

“Then Boaz said to Ruth, ‘Now listen, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field or leave this one. But keep close to my young women. Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink, that which the young men have drawn.’ Then she fell on her face bowing to the ground. And she said to him, ‘Why have I found favor in your eyes that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?’

“But Boaz answered her, ‘All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land, and came to a people that you did not know before. The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.’

“Then she said, ‘I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants.’

“And at meal time Boaz said to her, ‘Come here and eat some bread, and dip your morsel into the wine.’ So she sat beside the reapers. And he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied. And she had some left over.

“When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men,. Saying, ‘Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. And also pull out some of the bundles for her, and leave it for her to glean. Do not rebuke her.’ So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. And she took it up and went into the city.

“Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also brought out and gave her the food she had left over after being satisfied. And her mother-in-law said to her, ‘Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!’ So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, ‘The man’s name with whom I have worked today is Boaz.’

“And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, ‘May he be blessed by the LORD whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead.’ Naomi also said to her, ‘The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.’

“And Ruth the Moabite said, ‘Besides, he said to me, ‘You shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.’ And Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, ‘It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted.’ So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law.”

Participant: The word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

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Jeff: One of these days I’ll remember what I’m supposed to say when that’s uttered. *(Laughter)* It seems so easy, but it’s that Presbyterian impediment, you know?
(Laughter) All right.

Participant: We’ll forgive you for that.

Jeff: I appreciate that. So today I want us to think about our outline before we go on, and I’ll mention that to you since you can’t see it. And I want to think about some introductory things pertaining to this particular text. I want to think about *Ruth’s wisdom*, and I want to think about *God’s providence*, and I want to think about *God’s wisdom for us*. So those are the things that I want us to think about today, basically those four things. And let’s think about introductory matters first.

I want us to think about *routine decisions* today because it factors into what we’re going to think about. And I want us to think about routine decisions for a couple of minutes from a couple of different angles. One of the things that I want you to think about is that I want you to think about how a routine decision has become a habit. Now I’m not going to say a whole lot about how it becomes a habit, although experts will tell you that it takes 18 months to form a good habit. But what I want to tell you is that once you form a habit, you don’t need to really think about it much in order to do it. You just do it.

For instance, think about church attendance. If you’re in the habit of going to church every Sunday morning, it’s not a game time decision. You know what I mean by that. When you get up you hit the alarm and it becomes a game time audible, whether you’re going to go or not. How do I feel, you know? Some people are like that with church attendance.

But when church attendance becomes a habit—and a habit isn’t a bad thing—when it becomes a habit, what happens is that you just get up and go. Now if there happens to be a morning that you don’t get up and go to church, you know what your kids are going to do. Your kids are going to go, “What’s going on with Dad? Why aren’t we going to church? What’s wrong?” You know, that sort of thing. They get all panicked about it because all of a sudden a deeply ingrained habit that they do not question has just been disrupted. And they want to know what catastrophic emergency has occurred that would disrupt it.

Okay. So that’s the kind of thing I mean when I’m talking about a routine decision that has become a habit. Now let’s think a little bit about this. I’m using worship as an example. But you know as well as I do that work is the same way. If every morning you get up when the alarm goes off and you call an audible about work, my guess is you’re going to get fired. *(Laughter)* So there are routine habits that we engage in frequently that we don’t even think about. They’re just habits, what we do. We wouldn’t think of not doing them. That’s the kind of thing that I’m talking about here, those routine decisions.

But let me say this to you. Those routine decisions, though they may be habits, and though they may be habits that have been deeply engrained long ago, those things had loose ends, or have loose ends even to this day. And what I mean by that is this. I mean that though you were told to worship, you were not told where you were to worship. And though the Bible says, and probably your would-be father-in-law said to you, “Where do

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you work?”, because if a man doesn’t work he doesn’t eat, and I want my daughter to eat. Where do you work? You probably had to choose where you were to work because you didn’t open the Bible and it told you exactly where to work. You had to decide. Where am I going to work, which meant that you had to decide what major to major in in college, or what trade to take up in trade school, or what job to apply for when you graduated from high school. You had to decide where you were going to work, just like you had to decide where you were going to worship. And there were other factors involved in that.

And so these are the loose ends that I’m talking about that at one point you had to decide in order for them to form into a habit. Okay, so we’re talking about routine decisions. Now let’s just keep that in the back of our minds as we move forward.

I want you to think about Naomi. Naomi has had, or been involved with, a husband who made some intentional or unintentional decisions. And it doesn’t matter what they were because they formed into a habit of being in the land. They moved from being there temporarily in this field to being there at least a decade. And so Naomi has been involved with a man who has created a habit that she has participated in even after his death.

Now this has led to some very bitter consequences for her. In fact, when she arrives home and they say to her, “Isn’t this Naomi?”, she says, “No. Call me Mara, for the LORD has dealt bitterly with me.” We don’t have to read that in an accusatory way. We can see that in terms of consequences. I have received the bitterness of the consequences of my decisions. And so Naomi is really depressed. She’s in some sense despondent. “Call me Mara.”

Now I want you to think about this. Again, I’m not going to go into a discussion about the technical attributes of depression. But I do want to say that Naomi appears to be depressed. And when I’m thinking about depression, I’m thinking about someone who is not responding the way they ought to respond. You know what I’m talking about?

For instance, I think this is one of those basic kinds of responses when a person has depression. What happens? When they have depression, they want to sit around. They don’t want to do what they are supposed to do.

So for instance, if the woman of the house gets depressed, what begins to happen? You begin to notice that laundry begins to pile up and dishes begin to pile up, and all of a sudden you say, “I wonder what’s wrong?”, right? There’s some depression that may be going on, you know? There are other reasons why it may be going on, but we’re talking about depression. And what we’re saying is that common, regular, run-of-the-mill duties get left undone. And we begin to see a passivity take hold of the woman we love.

Well I think that’s what’s going on here when we think about it. So what we have is that we have Naomi who, when she’s on the border of Moab, and she’s talking to her two daughters-in-law. She’s talking to Ruth and she’s talking to Orpah. And they’re trying to talk about not going with her, and so on.

What does she say? Repeatedly she says, “Go.” And you can imagine this, can’t you. I mean this despondent woman is saying, “Just go. Just leave me alone. Go back and leave a fruitful life and leave me to go home.”

Well one of the things that I find so interesting about that scenario is that when you go into chapter 2—and we’ve just done that!—when you go into chapter 2, one of the first

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things that you find is that you find two women now back at home. And you find that one of these women, Ruth, realizes that we’ve got to work. We’ve got to find some food. Something has to be done. And we’ll talk about what she suggests in just a minute. She suggests that she go to the field.

And notice what Naomi says to her. “Go, my daughter.” There’s that sense of “just go,” that sense of despondence, that depression, that sense of being under an incredible weight when you just don’t want to do anything else.

I don’t know if you’ve ever been in that situation. I don’t know if you’ve ever felt that kind of weight. But it’s incredible to feel.

I’ll never forget. I’ve told you before that my brother was murdered 25 years ago. And I’ll never forget sitting around the table with my parents and my wife. And we were sitting there and somebody asked, “What’s the date today?” And no one knew what the date was.

My wife went over to the calendar and she looked at the date, and she just said it out loud. And I’ll never forget how startled we all were to find that thirty days had gone by. We had all been living under an incredible weight such that we didn’t even notice the passing of the days.

And I kind of wonder if that’s the sense that Mara has as she is now in the land of the bread basket, and the bread basket may be filled. And yet she still has no bread.

So I think those are some of the introductory things that I want us to think about. The first thing I want us to think about is routine decisions. And the second thing I want us to think about is *Naomi’s response to her own situation*, okay?

Now I want you to think about that because now we’re going to kick into thinking about Ruth’s wisdom in the midst of the situation. Ruth understands. Ruth is one of those gals who understands. Let me ask you. Do you have any questions. I know you’re not afraid to ask questions, but I’m going to ask you anyway. Anything? No? Okay.

So Ruth is one of those gals that’s just an incredible woman. You know, this is what women don’t understand. They don’t understand that when I’m talking so poorly about Naomi, I am going to talk nicely about Ruth. But I’m going to talk nicely about Ruth because the narrative talks nicely about Ruth. The narrator doesn’t want us to think too highly of Naomi. I think that’s part of the problem when we think about Ruth.

And one of the things that I think, one of the reasons I would give you to substantiate that—there’s an obvious one and I’ll tell you in just a minute. But one of the reasons why I would say what I just said, that we’re not to think too highly of Naomi, but that we’re to think a little more highly, a lot more highly of Ruth, is because there’s a comparison made here. There’s a comparison made in chapter 2.

Now what do I mean by that? Well I want you to think about this. I want you to think about Naomi. I want you to think about her owning land with her husband. I want you to think about them possibly having children, likely having children at that time. I want you to think about how famine hits them.

Now they have a family. They have property. Famine hits the land. And what do they decide to do? They decide that they’re going to go to the land of Moab. They’re going to

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sojourn there temporarily. They end up staying for a decade. She loses everything—husband, children and their land.

Now hold that in your mind. Think about Ruth. Ruth has lost a husband. She apparently has been barren, or at least has no children up to this point. She has no land. She’s a foreigner, which is why she is called Ruth the Moabite at this point.

And what does she do? She decides to stay in the land of promise and abide by the law of God.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: Now that, I think, is a comparison that we have to catch. And listen. I just want you to think about it from this vantage point. Think about it again from the aspect of the will of God.

You know, when Naomi asks this—and when we’re to generate this conversation with Naomi, just know that I’m not reading this out of the text. You know that it’s an imaginary thing. But we’re going to generate this conversation. And we’re going to say, “What’s happening, Naomi?”

And Naomi says, “You know what? I just want to know the will of God for my life.”

And we say to her, “Well what do you really want to know, Naomi? When you talk about knowing the will of God for your life, what is it that you want to know?”

And she says this. This is what she says. “I want to know about tomorrow. I want to know if God has a plan for me and my daughter-in-law a week, three months, six months, a year from now. That’s what I want to know. I want to know what God is doing.”

What would we say to her? We would say to her, “Naomi, you know the Law. And we know you know the Law because we see it reflected even if you did it unintentionally, just out of reflex. We know that you taught your daughter-in-law to think according to the Law. We see it in our own language. Your God will be my God, your people my people. That’s a covenant phrase. So we know that you know the Law. Naomi, do you know Deuteronomy 29:29? Do you know that *‘the secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our children, to do them?’* Do you know that?”

“Yes, I know that. I know that full well. But I need to know.”

“No, no, no, Naomi! You don’t need to know the secret will of God for your life tomorrow. When tomorrow comes, you’ll know it.”

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: “But what you need to do today is to discover the revealed will of God for you and your children and do it.”

Now that’s the difference between somebody like Naomi and somebody like Ruth. You can see Naomi just sitting around. And she’s despondent. She’s not reacting. She’s not doing anything. And so Ruth the foreigner, the Moabitess, has to say to her, “Let me do something.”

And Naomi says, “Just go.” So there’s a comparison being made here.

Now what are her options? Well there are a number of options that we might think about. But one of the best options is the one that she engages in. She engages in gleaning.

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Now what is gleaning? Well there’s a law of gleaning. The law of gleaning is Leviticus 23:22. *“And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edges, nor shall you gather the gleanings after the harvest.”*

Now why? What comes next? Here it is, the last part of this verse. *“You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner; I am the LORD your God.”*

All right. So this row is a field. What’s God saying to you? God is saying to you, “You are to leave the edges and not reap the edges of the field. And by the way, when your harvesters go through the field, and they drop some of the gleanings, leave them. Nobody is to pick them up.” Why? So that the poor can come along and glean the edges of the field and glean the droppings.

The law of gleaning. Where in the world did Naomi pick this up? Naomi the foreigner, Naomi the Moabite. Where did she pick this up?

Participant: You mean Ruth.

Jeff: You would think—

Participant: From Boaz.

Jeff: She didn’t know Boaz yet. You know what I mean?

Participant: Did she need permission?

Jeff: Ah ,that’s a good question! The question is did she need permission? And the answer to that is not according to the law of God. However, when everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes, there may have been an imposition imposed upon this option. It may have been that a person had to ask about gleaning, which is why we get some of the language in the text. That may be a possibility.

Participant: When you were reading and referring to it, you had commented that Boaz was going to protect her, that no one would assault her.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: Was that because they were going to kick her off the field and say, “What are you doing here?”

Jeff: Well it could have been that. But it could be the fact that everybody was doing what was right in their own eyes and they see a virgin out in the field or a woman out in the field—not a virgin but a widow, somebody that’s unattended by a man. And all of a sudden they see her as prey. So it could be that.

Participant: And she’s a foreigner to boot.

Jeff: And she’s a foreigner to boot. Who’s going to care about her?

Participant: Who’s going to care?

Jeff: Think about this. These are the loose ends that I was talking about earlier. Think about what an ingrained habit this must have been in the thinking of this family. I mean, where did she get it? Likely from the family. Why? Because the family would talk about these things. You can imagine a family that has gone down to Moab during a time of famine, talking about it. “You know what? God was supposed to provide for the poor. How is He going to do that?”, says Orpah.

“Well let me tell you how. It’s called the law of gleaning.”

“Well that’s a fascinating thing!” You know, that kind of conversation.

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“Well, that can’t be done now. How are we going to do the law of gleaning when there’s a famine in the land?” You know, that sort of thing, right?

But they know it, and she knows it.

And somehow she knows it. And it seems to be reflexive. Then she gets back and she says to her mother-in-law, “Let me go and glean in the field.”

Even if it was somebody else who ran into her in the marketplace as she was staring at all the delicacies and saying, “I don’t know what we’re going to do,” somebody came up to her and said, “Why don’t you glean?” It was reflexive.

But here is the point. The point is this. The question is not what’s routine here? The question is where do I go? What field do I glean from? You see, that’s really the question. Of all the fields, where do I go to glean?

And that is a wisdom question. You see, that’s the question that we’ve been talking about that’s within, inside the boundaries. Wise talk about the woman to marry. Who are we going to marry? Well, we’ve got these boundary markers. She needs to be a Christian. I need to have my father’s approval. I need to be working. All these things are boundaries.

But inside the boundaries are my desires, right? If these women meet the criteria, then I can marry any one of them. And so the boundaries are set.

The question is, which field? Now when you choose, when she chooses the field, here’s the thing that you have to remember. She needs to trust the wisdom of God to God’s providence. That’s what she needs to trust. So let’s think about God’s providence for a minute.

First of all, let’s look. So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

Now let’s just think about this for a minute. This is great. I want you to think first of all about preliminary things.

I want you to think about *Boaz’s importance*. Verse 1 tells us why Boaz is important. He’s of the family of Elimelech.

One of the things that we need to recognize, though, is that by the time we get to the end of the chapter, we find out that he is one of the redeemers of the family. That’s going to become increasingly important as we contemplate Naomi’s situation in the story. But he’s of the family of Elimelech. And that’s important. We need to think about that.

The other thing is this. *What is providence?* We need to just ask that basic question? *Providio*, providence, what is it? It’s *to see before*. But God not only sees before. Because God is sovereign, He provides before we get there. He provides for us before we even get to that point. God has already gone before us.

Now I just want to pause here. And let me just have you reflect on this for a minute with me. Do you realize how important this is? Do you realize how important it is to have firmly fixed in our minds that God has not only gone ahead as a scout and looked at the chronological landscape ahead, and then come back and reported. No, God hasn’t done that at all. God is not a scout that goes ahead and looks and finds out what’s coming and then plans accordingly. That’s not the way it happens. God sovereignly decrees the end

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from the beginning and so knows the end from the beginning, and provides for His people along the way.

And here’s the point that I would say to you that is so absolutely important. And I don’t think this teaching could have come on a better day when we hear such hard news about our brother Bruce. *This did not take God by surprise.*

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: God knew exactly what was going to happen to our brother Bruce. And if our brother Bruce were here, he would affirm that very thing.

You know, this is the thing that makes us so weird as Christians. No, I’m serious. We go to the hospital bed of somebody that we love, and our hearts hurt. But I want to tell you how you men would feel because I know what it is to wake up in the hospital bed after you’ve been operated on. And you’re in that hospital bed and you wake up. And the first thing you say to the person who is with you is, “God is so good!” Did you ever do that?

Participant: Yes.

Jeff: No, you’re like—And I’ll never forget the look on my dad’s face. You know, he’s a believer too. But he looked at me like “I’m hurting for you here. What are you thinking?”, you know?

But the point is that’s why we’re peculiar people. We can bear the hurts that God has for us in His sovereign plan in a way that others can’t bear them and don’t want to bear them, can’t stand the thought of bearing them. But we know what God is doing in us through the burdens. And it’s good. It’s good! And we know how good it is! We don’t want to go through the difficulty; we’d rather not. We’d rather have the good bestowed upon us in another way. But we also understand that we’re not better than our Master. And if He walked the road of humiliation, then so too will we. And so providence becomes absolutely key at this point.

Now I want you to catch the providence in the text. Go ahead, Ted.

Ted: I just wanted to ask an application question, because we get our Brave Men newsletter. We hear announcements. And we often and usually hear about bad things happening.

Jeff: Yes.

Ted: And in those announcements there’s no context of the goodness or providence of God. I often puzzle over this. I mean, those of us who feel strongly and talk about the providence and oversight of God often at the same time talk about life’s situations as if they’re catastrophic and outside of the providence of God. So I know that Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus.

Jeff: Yes.

Ted: But I don’t know. It just seems like we’re almost saying two different things at the same time, and it concerns me.

Jeff: Yes. And if you think about it, that’s in our nature. It’s that part of our relationship to Adam that we’re always trying to put to death, right? It’s in the weathermen and they relish it. It’s going to be partly cloudy, right? *(Laughter)* Unless you have that magic weatherman who says, “I’m going to have a little sunshine for you later

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today.” You know what I mean? But I think the point is well taken. Sometimes, especially when we talk about the cultural implications for the church in the coming years, we talk about them in a way that forgets that God is sovereign.

You know, one of the things that is just absolutely wonderful about the Scriptures is that they teach us not only that God is good, but they teach us that God knows how absolutely evil the world is. And God has it under control. And I think it’s a struggle to be able to communicate that.

Well let me tell you how the author of Ruth does this. The author of Ruth says, *“She happened to come.”* But do you know that when you translate that literally, it’s “and her chance chanced.”

Participant: Her what?

Jeff: “And her chance chanced.” *(Laughter)* It just so happens. *(Laughter)* That sort of thing.

But not only that. And verse 4 says, “And guess what else happened? Boaz just happened to be coming from Bethlehem!”

Participant: Imagine that.

Jeff: Imagine that! What providential luck! There’s no such thing as providential luck. There’s only such a thing as providence.

Participant: That’s an oxymoron.

Jeff: It’s an oxymoron.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: Amen. So what we have to realize, I think in a very subtle way, is that though the routine decision—I’ve got to go glean—is there, the decision of where I am to glean is not made for me. I need to decide what field I am to glean. And so she goes and she happens to come to this field of Boaz, and he happens to be in the field that particular day. And I think that what we are seeing is God’s providence, His superintendence over our decisions, made as wisely as we’re able to make them.

I think that has to encourage us, because I think that so often we make decisions. This goes back to what you were saying. We make decisions as if the whole world is going to collapse because of the decision we make. And we have to say this. When we make a decision, we have to say to ourselves, “I’m going to make this decision. It’s the wisest decision I can make at this time with all the knowledge that I have in front of me. But I’m going to trust the outcome to God despite it, despite all I can do.”

So we need to think about God’s care and God’s timing in the midst of all this. It’s just absolutely wonderful. But I’m going to press on. I want us to see the wisdom of God for us in the text.

The question is Ruth who? Notice. Ruth the Moabite, Ruth the sojourner, Ruth the foreigner. All of these things are descriptive of Ruth, the young lady Ruth.

Now what are we being told? We are being told that God’s people have enough room for a daughter of Abraham who is a daughter not by genetics but by faith.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: One who believes the promises. And how do you see that in the text? Because of verse 10 and verse 11. Boaz recognizes. You see, Boaz is not like other men of his day.

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Boaz recognizes the truth of God’s word. And he says, “I recognize you as one who needs to be rewarded by God, not because of what you’ve done necessarily, but because you’ve sought shelter under the wings of the Almighty.” That becomes the super-important phrase as we move on.

But what we are to understand is this. We are to understand that this woman has sought shelter not in the land of promise, but under the wings of the Almighty who owns this land.

Now I want you to just think about this. I’m going to give you a little bit of a taste of what’s coming. What we saw was that we saw a comparison between Ruth and Naomi. What we’re going to see when we get to chapter 3 is a comparison between Ruth and Boaz. And the interesting thing is this. Ruth and Boaz are both described in this book as worthy people. Boaz is a worthy man. Ruth is a worthy woman. Naomi is not called a worthy woman. I think she is a limping believer—a believer, but limping nonetheless.

But what we see in Ruth and Boaz are people of maturity. And we see it in their conduct and in their actions. And we’re going to see that the next time we get together.

But what we see in Ruth is nothing different than what we see in ourselves. If you were to look in Matthew’s genealogy you would see the five women who are foreigners. But you also notice Ephesians 2:11-13. *“Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands,—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now.”* There’s the phrase that we were reminded of earlier. *“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”*

And that’s what we see in the life of Ruth. She’s been brought near by virtue of the promises given to Abraham. Yes?

Participant: One comment that you made a week ago was that Naomi was giving a blessing, as though the daughters were believers.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: And it just reminds me, because I pulled that same verse up. And if you go to Ephesians 3, between 1 and 13; I can’t remember where it is. But in that first paragraph in Ephesians it says, *“Although I, Paul, a prisoner to you.”* But only if you are called to believe these things, only if you’re called into these. So those blessings for Boaz the redeemer, are only for those who believe, and you made that point a while back, and I assume that’s what you’re talking about.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely. And it’s remarkable. One of the things that’s absolutely remarkable is that we’re seeing Ruth.

I want you to think about this. Naomi becomes blessed in the end. She does receive blessing. But notice how Ruth just gives herself to the providence of God after she makes a decision. We’re not going to see that with Naomi. Naomi is going to struggle to bring about the blessings of God by her own strength.

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And we’re going to see that, because the next thing she’s going to say is, “*The LORD has given us chesed. Shall I not get you rest?*” She’s going to seek in her own strength to bring these things about.

Ruth is an entirely different character. It’s almost as if Ruth is the mature one and Naomi is the one who is struggling.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: We’ll see that. Do you have any other questions? Yes?

Participant: Ruth gets herself into the providence of God. But she also gives herself to the people of God.

Jeff: Yeah.

Participant: And so early on she decides to stand in the light of providence and abide by the word of God. But she also decides to trust herself with the people of God.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: If that doesn’t happen, then it ends up being a kind of one-on-one, Jesus and me kind of thing. And therefore I’m going to trust in God’s providence. But you can see as you read about Boaz that he says that he’s been taking account of everything that’s been happening to her.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: He’s been reckoning it. And that’s a very comforting thing, to know that the church of God, the people of God, have felt that.

Jeff: Yes. Go ahead.

Participant: I just wanted to say that you probably need to read ahead to the chapter a little bit further for the Christological type.

Jeff: So thanks very much, Bill. I appreciate that, because that’s what I was going to .

. . .

Bill: You can give me the check later on.

Jeff: That’s all right. I will have it in the mail. (*Laughter*) So let me help you to think ahead. What I want you to notice is this. I want you to notice a couple of things.

First of all, I want you to notice why it is that though Ruth says, “You are wooing me. Why are you wooing me?” Why is it that Boaz seems to like this young woman, and yet they’re at the end of barley harvest and he’s not made a move? And so Naomi has to say, “I’ll get you rest.” Why is it that he makes no move?

And the answer to that is—and read the chapter in light of this—that he’s not the closest redeemer.

Participant: That’s right.

Jeff: And so he’s acting in wisdom until his hand is forced. But when he acts, you see a wonderful type of redemption in Jesus Christ.

What do you see? You see both an obedient acting according to the Law. He does not circumvent the other redeemer. He goes to the other redeemer. He obeys the Law, unlike others in his world. And he shoulders the burden, which is the active and the passive obedience of Christ. He obeys the Law. He shoulders the burden that is entailed in marrying this woman, and provides redemption.

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So that’s just a sneak peak of what’s to come. And I give you that because it may not come for two weeks. So we’ll see. *(Laughter)* Yes, Don?

Don: This is kind of a side note. But inverse 21 or 22, somewhere around there, “he’s one of our close relatives.”

Jeff: Yes.

Don: Yet Boaz marries Ruth. I’m trying to talk about it in terms of closeness of kin and marriage.

Jeff: Yes.

Don: Was it still permissible in those days to have close relatives marry each other?

Jeff: Yes.

Don: It would be forbidden today.

Jeff: Yes, it would be forbidden today. In fact, if you adhere to the old Westminster Confession, the laws of consanguinity are still in effect. If your wife dies, you can’t marry her sister. So those kinds of principles are binding for some, even today, not for others. But then you get those laws that are binding, very much so, for instance, as you find them in Leviticus, like our culture would say today, at least for now, that there are some you can’t marry. Did you want to press that a little further?

Don: No. I just wondered why it was okay then and not now.

Jeff: Well my sense, Don, is that early on, when you have Adam and Eve, you have brother and sister marrying brother and sister.

Don: Of course.

Jeff: And I think that as you move on from there, that’s when you get Israelite laws that are saying in Leviticus 18, for instance, that that’s sin. And you get this continuing proliferation of laws as to whom you are to marry and whom you are not to marry, that sort of thing. Yes?

Participant: Very quickly. Boaz the redeemer, Christ the Redeemer.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: Boaz is not the first redeemer, right?

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: Christ is not the first Redeemer, because the first redeemer is ourselves.

Jeff: The second Adam. Well think about the first Adam and the second Adam, right? He’s the second Adam. That’s good. I’m stealing that. *(Laughter)* Don’t anybody say. *(Laughter)*

Participant: I don’t know if I have the authority.

Jeff: Yes, that’s right. *(Laughter)* I like that. All right. Yes?

Participant: I don’t understand, though.

Second Participant: That’s important.

First Participant: But what do you mean?

Second Participant: I obviously mean that the first redeemer for ourselves is ourselves, because that’s what the Law says. The Law says, “If you’ll do this, I’ll do that.” And if we don’t get to that, in a sense God’s hand is forced because we can’t do it.

Jeff: Yes.

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Participant: So we need the second Adam. The first Adam doesn’t work. The first Adam is the first redeemer. He failed. Is that—

Jeff: That’s how I understood it when you said it.

Participant: That’s good.

Jeff: That’s how I understood it when you said it. So you get Adam and we are all in Adam, and our attempts at redemption fail. We need a second Adam.

Participant: And how did Boaz get designated as a redeemer? Because of what Ted just said?

Jeff: Well, no. I think he’s just the next redeemer chronologically. I think what Ted was indicating is that certainly, if we step back from the text, there’s a neat redemptive type going on there. Yes?

Participant: Just a quick update on marriage. I know that I bring this great stuff to you. Somebody, actually a millennial in Europe, married a robot that he created.

Jeff: Yes. I believe it. That’s terrible. Well, let’s pray on that note, *(laughter)*, because we need to.

All right, let’s pray. Father in heaven, we are thankful for this day and for all that you’ve given to us. Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus Christ and for redemption in Him. We ask now that You would go with us throughout this day. And Father, help us to enjoy the time of Advent as we lead up to the day of the remembrance of Christ’s incarnation. And Father, we ask and pray that You’ll do this not only for our good, but for your glory. And we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Men: Amen. *(Applause)*