

The right place at the right time.  
Coincidence? Happenstance? Good fortune?

The wrong place at the wrong time.  
Bad luck? Fate? Accidental?

When an amazing and wonderful thing happens in our life we say that the hand of God was certainly with us....does that mean that when something bad happens in our life that the hand of God is not with us?

Last week in chapter one of the book of Ruth we saw Naomi lose her livelihood and loose her homeland. We saw Naomi bury her husband and then bury her two sons. She is discouraged and outright bitter about life - and who can blame her? She is so pessimistic about the future, that she packs her bags and heads home to die. When she arrives home in Bethlehem, she is so downtrodden her friends don't even recognize her. In the eyes of Naomi, she is a cursed woman.

Naomi's daughter-in-law Ruth has come home to Bethlehem with her. Ruth could have stayed in Moab and started a new life, but instead, Ruth came home with Naomi and has pledged to stay with her, even in death. Understand, Ruth was married to one of Naomi's sons for ten years, and after ten years of marriage she has no children. Having no children would be devastating to Ruth in the culture of the day. Ruth's husband has died and left her without children. In the eyes of Ruth, she is also a cursed woman.

So together they walk the 70 miles from Moab to Bethlehem, alone. Upon their arrival in Bethlehem they set up house in Naomi's old house, Naomi had left years before. There they are, two women at the end of their rope, two women without hope, two women that society would see as cursed.

Bethlehem was a small village, and would have had a population of no more than 200 people. Being a small village, everyone would have known everyone else, and most people would be related to each other. Certainly everyone would know Naomi. Certainly everyone would know her situation - I'm sure they all talked about it. Certainly the relatives were very aware of the circumstances of these two women.

How come no one arrives to help?

Did you notice that? Life has gone from bad to worse for these two women, and no one is there for them. No one. They are all alone.

How depressing is that? Even friends and relatives ignore these women. I mean things have become worse, since they arrived in Bethlehem. You would think the change in location would bring them some kind of hope. But there is nothing.

They need to eat, so Ruth sets out to find something to eat. The barley harvest is about to begin and so Ruth heads out to the fields with the hope of gathering some grain to eat. I want us to clearly understand right up front that the best Ruth can hope for, THE BEST Ruth can hope for is to come home with about two handfuls of grain. See, the best Ruth can expect is that she is able to bring home enough grain so that each of the two women can have one small meal for the day. Isn't that incredible? Ruth is heading out to work from sun up to sundown so she can have one handful of grain to eat.

Honestly. Ruth has no future.

Let's stop right here for a moment. Where is God in all this? This woman has made one of the most powerful statements of faith in all of Scripture (we saw that last week). This woman Ruth declared that she would follow God no matter what. She would follow God if things didn't ever get better she would follow God even if it led to her death. This woman has a faith greater than any of us here today could ever expect to have.

You might expect that a faith like that would keep Ruth out of such a desperate situation. You would think that God would honor such a commitment like that. But, life doesn't get any better does it? This woman is hungry, she is so desperate that she will work all day, at difficult tedious work, for so little food. For all intents and purposes, she is on a starvation diet. How much more on the edge can you get?

I personally have seen a number of people walk away from Christianity because life has become terrible - and it is hard to blame them - like it is hard to blame Naomi. I expect that you also have seen people walk away from Christianity when bad things have happened too. Maybe you are a person here today that has walked away from God at some point in your life because of something terrible, something rotten, something inexcusable that has happened in your life, and who can blame you?

I mean here in this story, even the people who should have stepped up to help, pretend these two woman do not exist.

Perhaps the question is not where is God in all this? God is everywhere at all times, that is the nature of God.

Perhaps a better question is: What is God waiting for?

So we see in verse 3 that Ruth finds herself in the field of Boaz, who is a distant relative of Naomi. As we read this today, it doesn't sound like much of anything that Ruth finds herself in a field of Boaz - but in reality, it is absolutely incredible that she just "happens" to find herself in a field of Boaz on a day that Boaz visits that particular field.

In Israel several clans made up a tribe and the twelve tribes made up the nation of Israel. Each clan was initially given land upon the conquest of Palestine. This land could not be sold, but was to pass from family member to family member. The ownership of lands was a patchwork of fields - it would be rare that any one family would own two fields next to each other. The Israelites did not use fences to separate field ownership. Stones were used to mark delineations between the fields. Anyone not familiar with the area would have no idea where one field started and another ended.

See, the grain was planted over this very large area, and to an outsider it would look like one great big continuous field, but it was in fact a patchwork of interconnected fields owned by a variety of different people. One could walk through the fields and be unaware where one field started and another ended because it all looked like one field.

For Ruth to "happen" upon the field of Boaz is very high odds, almost an impossibility. Talk about being at the exact right place at the exact right time - this is it. There is absolutely no way she could have known what was what, and whose was whose.

Ruth appears to be completely unaware of the great "coincidence" she has fallen into. To Ruth, she is just trying to get by - She is completely unaware of the guidance of God to the location she happens upon.

Now, is this where the guidance of God begins? Right here when she steps onto that field, is this where the guidance from God begins?

Maybe it was when she had the idea to gather grain?  
Maybe it was when she walked 70 miles to Bethlehem?  
Maybe it was when she decided to stay with Naomi?  
Maybe it was when she decided to marry Naomi's son?  
How far back has the hand of God been with Ruth?

Is the hand of God with you during good times - or, maybe, God has brought you to terrible times as well.....Why would the hand of God leave us in difficult times?

So Ruth arrives at the field to glean some grain for herself and Naomi. Israel's law mandated provision for the poor and destitute by allowing them to follow the reapers in the fields to gather what was dropped or left behind. Lev 19:9–10 and Deut 24:19–22 specify that the corners of the fields be left for the poor. Today our mechanical combines are very efficient taking almost 100% of the grain from a field. In those days, though the harvest would be done by hand, still, a good field worker would rarely leave any stalks standing. Most of the grain gathered by the poor would be actual grains scattered on the ground. So someone gleaning would be picking up individual grains almost 99% of the time.

By law the poor are allowed to glean any leftovers from a field. By law the Israelites could only go through a field once - this was so that the poor would be able to gather enough to sustain themselves. Ruth appears to have been aware of the law, but perhaps since she is an ethnic outsider, she decides to ask permission. Perhaps a field hand would exclude her because she was not an Israeli. So she asks to glean and gather in the field, even though by law she could just take what she found.

Here is the sequence of events in the field: (verse 4-6) Ruth arrives at the field of Boaz and asks permission to glean. Ruth asks to glean, then gather. In Hebrew this sequence would mean that she would have worked the field, making little piles of what she had found but not taking anything until permission was given to take the grain. She would be able to glean, but not gather.

The field supervisor has not given Ruth permission to gather (why, it doesn't say) - and so Ruth waits to take the grain with her. The Hebrew indicates that he was a very young man, maybe 19 years old; Perhaps he wasn't able to make a decision because of his youth, so he waits for the boss. She could have just jumped in, but she waits. She is

revealing her character - she is a woman whose best hope for the day is to get enough grain for one meal, and yet she has the patience to wait. The Hebrew grammar indicates the passage of some time, perhaps a few hours pass, before Boaz arrives.

Let's be clear that Ruth understands that the owner could say no, and Ruth could walk away empty handed - in other words, Ruth could be wasting her time and in doing so fail to eat the one possible meal available to her that day.

Wow. This is one intense woman. Do you see why Boaz is impressed with her?

Verse seven could be best translated into our culture, "She has almost taken up residency there in the field." Ruth is such a hard worker that she doesn't take breaks like the paid workers do. Ruth hasn't eaten, Ruth's work may be all for nothing, but even so she is very polite, and even more, Ruth is working harder than the hired workers are. Those working the fields are free Israelis who are paid by the day. Now it is up to Boaz to decide if she can take the grain home with her.

Boaz. That's an odd name isn't it? It is such an odd name - that no one knows what the name Boaz means. Which is very weird, because in the Old Testament the meaning of names is a very big deal, especially for major biblical characters. Now many have speculated and have come up with various answers, but none are really satisfactory. See, in the Hebrew language, every word, every single word has a three letter root. Every single word can be traced back to a three letter root - that is how Hebrew works. But, the thing is, the name Boaz has no root word, none - and because of that, the meaning of the name Boaz is completely unknown. The only other historical reference to the name Boaz is that one of the pillars in Solomon's temple was named the Boaz pillar and is most likely in reference to this Boaz in Ruth.

We will explore this further next week, but Boaz, though he has some wealth behind him, Boaz is just a regular guy. There is not anything about Boaz that either you or I could not easily be. I think Boaz has a name without meaning because you and I can easily place ourselves into his spot in this story. You and I can go beyond what is expected, and be swept up into the great plan of God. Boaz a regular guy, has a tremendous impact on someone's life and we regular people easily can do the same.

When Boaz arrives the field he asks, who does this woman belong to? Notice, he does not ask who is this woman, rather he asks who does this woman belong to?

The community of Bethlehem is small and Boaz knows all the locals, he knows the wealthy, the workers and the poor - who is this? Does she have a right to be in his field? Boaz thinks she may be someone's servant as he does not know her. So he asks who is she? In other words, why is someone else's servant working in my fields, shouldn't the master take care of his own servant. Why should this woman be eking out a living when here master should be taking care of her?

Boaz has heard about Ruth and her dedication to Naomi, its a small town after all. He is impressed that a Moabite would treat an Israeli so well. He knows that she is under no obligation to Naomi. He knows that she could have moved on to a better life. Boaz knows that the kindness Ruth has shown Naomi is significant, in fact Ruth is now out being the sole bread winner for the family. And now as he has this conversation with this young foreman he understands to a greater depth of who this woman is - Ruth is the hardest working person in the field and she is not even getting paid.

Boaz goes over and above what he is required to do, and he does this because Ruth has shown such kindness to Naomi. We see Boaz uses the term my daughter in reference to Ruth (verse 8) as does his distant relative Naomi - this suggests that Naomi and Boaz are contemporaries and that Boaz is much closer to age with Naomi, than with Ruth. He also addresses her with proper distance, Boaz treats Ruth respectfully as an older man to a younger woman.

We could imagine that Boaz finds Ruth attractive and that he makes these exceptions for here because of attraction. But, the Hebrew gives no indication of that, and it does not say anything like that here in this chapter does it? We will see explore this more next week, next week we will see the absolute surprise of everyone, that these two even have any interest for one another. But, here, at this moment, we see that Boaz is honoring Ruth for three things, for her kindness to Naomi, her impressive character and for her obvious faith in God.

Boaz also informs the workers to back off. Normally workers would be instructed to tell those gleaning to stay far behind those harvesting. But, here Boaz creates a situation where Ruth is equal to the other workers by insisting that she work with the other women

and by asking her to join in lunch with the workers. He even instructs the workers to make sure there is extra set out before Ruth so she can gather much more.

Notice, in verse 12 “May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

Boaz firmly believes that it is not he himself who is rewarding Ruth, but God is the one who will provide. Boaz is just an agent to provide a portion of the blessing for these two women.

Boaz gives Ruth more freedom than expected. Ruth goes from outsider who has no rights to insider with extra privileges in an instant. Before, others would be able to exclude her and maybe even push her around - now, no one would dare exclude her, even more, they are instructed to serve Ruth, they are instructed to secretly provide for her - she is to go where ever they go.

You know, she is no longer their equal, Ruth is now placed above the field workers. See in verse 14 Boaz offers her the best lunch, actually a gourmet meal of the day - But also notice Ruth’s character, she doesn’t eat all she can, but instead saves some of the grain, which later she gives to Naomi. She could have eaten more, and I bet she was hungry, but instead, she overcomes her desire to eat and saves some for Naomi. This woman, gets more impressive by the minute.

Boaz knows the woman’s situation, he knows they need help, why hasn't he just given them help? He is a man of means, he could help them significantly, and it wouldn’t hurt him a bit to help them out.

Why doesn’t Boaz hire Ruth? He could just hire Ruth and then the two ladies would be taken care of and that would be that. But, see, God has greater plans, sometimes what we see as the obvious solution, is a solution that is way below what God has planned for us. Sometimes we are frustrated with God because his timing is so slow and the solution is right before our eyes - but sometimes - God has greater plans for us.

By allowing Ruth to continue to glean, Boaz is able to give Ruth and Naomi far above what he could have given as a humanitarian gesture or by hiring Ruth as an employee.

See, the wage that each hired worker would get would be about 1 pound of grain as payment for one day's work. If Boaz hires Ruth, she will walk away with 1 pound of grain, but see how much she comes home with after just one day - an ephah!

Naomi is very surprised. Ruth should have come home with about 4 ounces of grain, enough to fill two hands - if she was lucky. Instead Ruth comes home with about 30 pounds of grain. 30 pounds. See, Naomi expects Ruth to have two handfuls of grain and she arrives with a dog food size bag of grain. Ruth has collected the equivalent of one month's wages in one day - So, this is why Boaz doesn't hire her. He can be more generous if he goes about things in an unusual way. Who saw that coming?

Naomi knows something is up, what has happened is impossible.  
Ruth - she is not aware of the generosity bestowed upon her.

And there is more good news, Boaz wants Ruth to glean though the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. The barley and the wheat each took a month to harvest. That means that Ruth will bring home a dog food size bag of grain everyday for a month. Do you see what is happening here? Ruth working six day for eight weeks will bring home almost 50, 30 pounds bags of grain. That's almost 1500 pounds of grain. If Ruth was a hired worker she would have brought home only about 50 pounds of grain, total. But, Boaz has allowed Ruth to bring home the wages of the equivalent of 30 workers.

See, these women will not only have enough to eat for a year, they have become a grain warehouse and they can sell the extra grain. Over here they are on a starvation diet and over here they have a small business. Over here they hope for a handful of grain, and over here the grain is piled high to the roof.

Notice that Ruth is unaware of the significance of her haul of grain. She is unaware that what she should have brought home is so out of proportion. Oh how we are just like Ruth, how generous God has been to us and we don't see it do we?

Now wait a minute! Hold on here. Let's step back.

What if.

What if God had answered only Ruth's expectation?

What if Ruth had just gone out to any old field and picked up two handfuls of grain?

## A Series of Providential Events

Ruth 2  
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What if God had given the obvious solution and Ruth was hired on as an employee?

So...

God's timing in your life is terrible.

There sits the obvious solution to your dilemma right in front of you.

And God is silent.

Your working hard, and you know, there is no way you can get ahead.

And God is silent.

Holy Smokes.

What is God planning in your life?