

March 2, 2008

“Seeing His Providential Care”  
Ruth 2:1-23

FCF: Confusion/uncertainty as to God’s providential care

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) The LORD’s providential care of His people is real and good.  
(magnet) And it is solid ground on which to rest our faith and hope.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

The Exxon *Valdez* is back in the news. You may recall in 1989, the oil tanker *Valdez* ran aground off the coast of Alaska, spilling 10 million gallons into Prince William Sound, the worst oil spill in U.S. history, killing thousands of birds and sea mammals, bringing fines of over \$1 billion. Those fines are being appealed. That’s now. Then the question was, “*What was the captain doing? Was he asleep at the wheel?*”

Many are asking that question of God. Is He asleep at the wheel? It’s a question of His care. Does He care? Is He able to care? Where is He? Questions worth hearing, worth taking seriously. And questions worth taking to Him and to His Word.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Ruth 2:1-23](#)

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

When it comes to life in Narnia, Aslan “*seems to be at the back of all the stories.*” There is no luck or fate, only his care and foresight. Prince Caspian, the next of the stories to hit the theatres, makes this point. For the children, a year has passed since their last adventure. But in Narnia, hundreds have gone by and all they knew has changed. There’s been an invasion. And Aslan has not been seen for ages. But he is not absent. Early in the story, the children are recovering their long-lost gifts ([READ PC quote](#)):

*Susan’s gift had been a bow and arrows and a horn. The bow was still there, and the ivory quiver, full of well-feathered arrows, but – “oh, Susan,” said Lucy. “Where’s the horn?” “Oh, bother, bother, bother,” said Susan after she had thought for a moment. “I remember now. I took it with me the last day of all, the day we went hunting the White Stag. It must have got lost when we blundered our way back into that other place – England, I mean.” Edmund whistled. It was indeed a most shattering loss; for this was an enchanted horn and, whenever you blew it, help was certain to come to you, wherever you were.*

But this is providential – planned by Aslan. The horn has been regarded as one of the old Narnian treasures and through it help did come just in time. Aslan, this wonderful picture of Jesus Christ, really is at the back of all the stories. The back of theirs. And ours.

Such is what we see in our text – the fact and wonder of the LORD’s providential care. Totally “hands on,” in charge. His hand may be hidden but His rule is absolute. With Him there is no “shadow of turning.” And by Him all things will work ultimately for good, even our good. All affliction, misery, injustice – all evils – He works for our good. Which is why William Cowper was able to write, “*Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.*” Which gives solid ground on which to rest our faith and hope.

Which brings us to Naomi. She’d had hit rock bottom. She’d left “full” and come back “empty.” The hand of the LORD against her. Or so she thought. But then we read ([READ Ruth 2:2-3](#)). Literally, “*her chance chanced to hit upon the field.*” We’re meant to see there was no chance at all. This was the LORD and His providential care – a care so rich and so real it forms the solid ground on which to rest our faith and hope.

What, after all, are we being encouraged to see here? What sort of response?

**I. TO WONDER AT HIS WAYS**

Two things. First, seeing His providential care, we should wonder at His ways.

A) *Extraordinary Things*

The LORD is doing extraordinary things here. Just taking a bird's eye view.

### 1. The advancement of His plan

I've alluded to this before. Part of what we see here is the advancement of the LORD's plan. Through Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, a Savior will come. Through these little things.

### 2. The restoration of her faith

Getting a little closer to the immediate scene, these same seemingly little things are also what the LORD will take and use to bring the restoration of dear Naomi's bruised faith.

#### *B) Through Ordinary Means*

This is a wonder when you consider it – these extraordinary things through these ordinary means. Look at the pivotal verse. After Ruth returns from the fields and Naomi assesses her news (**READ Ruth 2:20a**). Who is the "he"? The vagueness is intentional. Whose HESED, whose kindness and care is Naomi speaking of – Boaz or the LORD? Both! Boaz was the means the LORD used to show Naomi His kindness and His care.

### 1. Ordinary times

Now these were but ordinary times. It was harvest season. This is the context of the "gleaning laws" alluded to here. (**READ Deuteronomy 24:19-22**). Landowners could harvest their crops by passing through their field or orchard once. Any produce missed or dropped was to be left for others to gather. This was the LORD's mercy fleshed out.

### 2. Ordinary people

This is the context – these ordinary means. And these ordinary people. You won't find Naomi or Ruth or Boaz mentioned anywhere else in ancient writings. They were not royalty or known throughout the land for great accomplishments. Just ordinary people.

The point being that God's grace is very real. And it often has a very human face.

#### *Application:*

He delights to do extraordinary things through ordinary means – then and now. So take the time to think about how you've seen this yourself. Recall when "chance chanced" that was too well-timed and too perfectly suited to be anything but the gracious hand of the LORD. Recall the incidents, the faces, the means of His care for you.

Let me push further. God's grace has a human face. In Naomi's life, she saw His grace in the faces of Ruth and Boaz. How much more so in our lives through the face of Jesus! In Jesus, the One whom this story is ultimately about, we see the overwhelming evidence of the LORD's good intentions towards us. His providential care of His people is that real and that good. And it is the solid ground on which to rest our faith and hope.

## **II. TO WALK IN HIS WAYS**

Surely then, in terms of responses, the first thing we see is the need to wonder in His ways. And the second flows from it – not just to wonder but to walk in His ways as well.

#### *A) What They Did*

Think with me as to what Ruth and Boaz did. They were people of HESED – people who lived out kindness, compassion, loyalty, and faithfulness to others.

### 1. Ruth

Think of Ruth towards Naomi. She clings both in word and deed to her mother-in-law. She takes both the initiative and the risk of gleaning in the field of an unknown stranger.

### 2. Boaz

Such was the HESED of Ruth towards Naomi. Think of Boaz towards Ruth. Words of blessing, prayer, and inclusion. Giving her a place at the table. Giving instructions to his men. His permission, protection, and provision overwhelms her. And the reader.

## B) *How They Did It*

But why? And how? How did they do this? What brought forth such HESED, such care and loving-kindness from such people in such times? The LORD. They knew and delighted in the HESED of the LORD and delighted to live that out towards others.

### 1. Ruth

Think of Ruth – her beautiful humility that shines through, her reliance and utter dependence not just upon others but ultimately upon the LORD Himself. As Boaz noted of her (**READ Ruth 2:12**). The LORD was her safety, stillness, rest, help, and hope.

### 2. Boaz

Then there is Boaz. We get a hint of his character in v.1 (**READ Ruth 2:1**). The idea is that he was a man of standing, of influence, and integrity. Then there are his own words. In Hebrew narrative, we get insight into people not by “reading between the lines” but through dialogue. Look at the first thing we hear from Boaz (**READ Ruth 2:4**). Boaz is a man entranced with a vision of God in, over, and through all things – including his fields.

The point? What caused such HESED to pour forth through their lives was an understanding of the HESED that the LORD had poured into their lives. And this freed them, this impelled them to do so for others. His faithfulness to them shaped their own.

#### *Application:*

Back to what we saw before. The LORD’s grace is real and it often has a human face. Which means we ought to think about how we’ve seen Him show that in our own lives through others. And also how He is calling us to show that in others’ lives now.

Like Ruth and Boaz, we should be people of HESED. This should make a difference in us. Our gratitude and trust should bring forth unconventional conduct and choices. Our security in Christ should cause radical displays of kindness. His promises to provide should embolden daring acts of service. “*What? Who is he talking to? To me?*” Remember what we saw earlier. Ordinary people in ordinary circumstances.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Let me just say this again. Aslan is behind all the stories. Now that statement should put some steel in your spine. It’s supposed to – just as it does for the children in the Narnia stories. Read them and notice the confidence and courage that comes, how they are freed and impelled to then take great risks – risks they would never have taken otherwise, steps of faith and boldness unimaginable if it wasn’t true. But it is. It is true.

We see the same in the book of Ruth. The HESED, the care, the loving-kindness of the LORD towards His people freeing and impelling HESED, care, and loving-kindness in His people towards one another. Think of it this way. We become like the God we worship. The God we worship is the God we serve. For good or for bad. Which means we have to ask, “*Who are we serving?*” Think of Jesus’ words in the Gospels. We become like the treasure we seek. When we live for material things, we become materialistic people. When we live for the treasures of control, we become a power-obsessed, controlling people. When we get our identity and meaning from relationships, we become driven by what people think of us. The connection is just that simple.

We become like the God we worship. There is an invitation here to trust in the LORD’s care – His promises, His protection, and His provision – a care so real and so rich it can be trusted. May He free and impel us to serve and worship Him, trusting in His HESED that we might then become people of HESED before the watching world.

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