

OUR PROVIDER

Ruth 2:13-23

Bob Bonner

December 18, 2016

If you and I were to spend much time together, one-on-one or other than in this setting, it wouldn't be long before you discovered how much I appreciate God's sharing with us several of His names. Each of them tells us something of His marvelous character and how He works. The more we get to know Him, the greater our confidence grows as we are called to live for Him in a world that is harsh and often deals hard blows.

One of those special names for God is only found in one place, **Genesis 22:14**. Abraham gives us the name, "**Jehovah Jireh**." The occasion for its use was when God had kept Abraham from obeying His command to sacrifice his son Isaac. At the last moment, when Abraham proved that he would obey God and put to death his beloved son, God stopped him and provided a lamb to sacrifice instead of Isaac. Because of that, Abraham named the place of that sacrifice "**Jehovah Jireh**," the Lord provides.

The word "**Jireh**" has two different meanings in Hebrew. One is "to see," and the other is "to provide." Hence, the idea behind the name is that what God sees beforehand, He also makes provision for. Or to put it another way, through His "prevision," God makes "provision." Hence, Abraham's point is that God never asks us to do anything that He will not have made a provision for ahead of time. God, being omniscient, knows and sees the future and has already provided all we need to face and fulfill the future He has for us.

Maybe you know someone this morning that is facing a difficult set of circumstances that appear so overwhelming that they aren't sure they can make it. Maybe they feel God has forgotten them and they are alone. If so, our passage for this morning would be excellent to encourage them that God never forgets or overlooks our need. He is always at work, even behind the scenes of distress and hardship, to do His good and perfect will. And in the midst of hardship, He will provide what you need to face the future.

If you have your Bible with you, please join me in our study of **Ruth 2**. Thus far in this drama, we have covered the first of a four-Act play. In the first Act,

Naomi returned home an older woman, beyond child bearing age, widowed, childless, and destitute. With her was her daughter-in-law, Ruth, who has committed her remaining days to look after Naomi.

In **chapter two**, we find ourselves in a barley field ready to be harvested. Ruth, an alien beggar, has come here, hoping to be allowed to glean after the harvesters have made their way down the field. As she waited off to the side with the other gleaners for the signal to glean, the owner of the field came on the scene. She had no idea who he was. But he noticed her and discovered that she was the young widow who came home with his relative, Naomi. Everyone in the town was talking about her, and from what Boaz had heard, she was a woman to be admired. Although a Moabite, she was a woman of character who had blessed Naomi. Hence, he graciously offered her to glean in his field with his servants. She was stunned by his graciousness and her good fortune. She went into the field and got to work. This ended the first scene with **verse 13**.

This morning, we begin with scene two at **verse 14**. It covers just one verse, but this one verse is packed with drama. Between **verse 13** and **verse 14**, a few hours had passed. It was now lunch time. All the workers stopped, and Ruth headed to a spot where the gleaners sat down to eat their lunch, while the servants went to a different place to eat with their boss, Boaz.

Boaz quickly picked up where he left off in the last scene. He produced his next random act of kindness to Ruth. He stopped Ruth as she ventured over to eat with the other gleaners and invited her to dine with him. We read, ¹⁴**At mealtime Boaz said to her, ‘Come here, that you may eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.’**” So instead of sitting with the other gleaners, she sat beside the reapers, and he served her roasted grain. She ate and was satisfied and had some left.

Boaz’s invitation to Ruth to join him and his other servants for lunch was done in a manner which was socially very personal and affirming to Ruth. Let me explain this scene for you, to show you why this was so.

It would be easy for us westerners to read more into the story than is meant to be there, such as something of a romantic nature. But romance was not yet in the air. His invitation to eat with his workers was a simple demonstration that

as he had said earlier, she was to be treated as one of his own servants. He meant it. Although not his servant, she was to be treated with the same privileges as if she were one.

Boaz's action tells us much about him. He was a great boss, a shepherd of his employees. He was so personal with his people that rather than eat back at home and send caterers out with a banquet, he came to be with them. In this action, Boaz reminds me of Jesus. Like Jesus, our Savior left heaven to be with his people. I see a principle here: If you desire to be like Jesus, if you desire to be a person of influence in the lives of others, then you need to make time to be with the people you deem important. Whether a spouse, a grandchild, or those in your small group, to have an impact on their lives you need to be with them. Be available to them to serve, teach, listen, and love on them. Nothing says you value people more than setting aside time to be with them.

As my children were growing up, I spent a lot of time with them. But still, I wish I had worked harder at investing time in their lives. As I look back over forty-three years of a very good marriage, and especially these past ten with the kids married and out of the house, I realize it has been a challenge for me to make sure I set aside good quantities of time to be alone with Becky. I have missed a lot of opportunities of being with and doing things just with her. This really came home to me during our six-month sabbatical. We had a lot of time together, and it dawned on me that I married this girl because I like her. And she is even a neater person now than when I first knew her. Since that sabbatical, I have worked harder at investing more discretionary time in the one human relationship that means most to me. I haven't arrived, but I'm moving in the right direction.

Boaz was an effective leader, an influencer of people in his village, and was highly respected because he made time for people. Boaz's gesture toward Ruth was typical of this considerate man of influence. He was simply making a genuine, no-strings-attached kind of gesture to someone he deemed worthy of honor, even though she was a Moabite.

Ruth accepted Boaz's invitation and sat with his other servants. But then, after Ruth had taken her seat beside Boaz's harvesters, he served her roasted grain himself. He didn't pass the bowl and say, "Help yourself," which

would have been a good thing. No, he did something special. The Hebrew word used here for “**serve**” is used nowhere else in the Old Testament. It comes from a root word that means “to give with the hand.” It highlights his action of service as one of utmost caring. It was a personal humble act of kindness. He literally put a heap of food before her.

Boaz’s personal assistance to Ruth would be like Jesus coming up and wiping the sweat off your brow while you work. His act was a Jesus-like physical touch, a non-sexual touch, but one that reaches down into the person’s soul and communicates the message, “Regardless of what you may think of your position in this world, I say you have value, and I am Boaz, a type of Jesus!”

I’m blessed to be surrounded by team members who model Boaz’s kind of leadership toward me. I’m learning from Victor, Dan, Maureen, and others. These saints are just as busy as I am, yet when I find myself a bit squeezed, they are right there. In stereo, I hear words like, “What can I do to help?” When I hear those words, I am humbled and realize I have a lot to learn from them.

The writer goes one step further to highlight another act of random kindness of Boaz toward Ruth. He tells us at the end of the scene that Boaz had served so much food to Ruth that she had “**some left over.**” Boaz deliberately gave her more than he knew she could eat in one sitting. He wanted her to go home to Naomi with leftovers for both of them to enjoy.

Boaz is the consummate illustration of generosity. Obviously, the writer of Ruth is using this scene as a glorious demonstration of God’s hesed, His faithful love, and His steadfast commitment to meet the needs of our lives. Here, God’s love is being lived out through one of his choice vessels, Boaz.

By the way, keep in mind that there is still no indication that Ruth had any knowledge at this point that Boaz was related to Naomi. All she knew was that Boaz was a Hebrew man of influence who loved Yahweh and was one of the most gracious gentlemen she had ever met in her life. Men, whether you are single and looking to attract the right kind of woman or are married to the right kind of woman, chivalry never goes out of style. I’m grateful to God that His Word reminds us what a godly man is like.

In **verse 15**, the scene changes. Lunch was over, and we read:

¹⁵When she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her. ¹⁶Also you shall purposely pull out for her some grain from the bundles and leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.”

In other words, they were to do everything they could to make her work as easy as possible, short of picking up and threshing the grain for her. Another obvious principle here is that when trying to help the destitute, give them more opportunity to work than gifts, which can lead to their ruin. Don't just give them everything. Give them the opportunity to work and to receive the pleasure of being rewarded for hard work. Ruth took advantage of the opportunity that God had afforded her. She worked hard to get what she did.

In **verses 15-16**, Boaz issued two warnings to the men and women in the field who were harvesting the barley. First he warned them not to “**insult**” Ruth. This term carries the idea of humiliating someone by action or demeanor. Boaz was quite aware of the immoral male culture in which Ruth found herself. He was putting the men on notice, “Don't you dare treat her in any way dishonoring, or you will answer to me!”

The second warning, not to “**rebuke**,” refers to verbal snipes, mockings, and verbal stabs. Boaz let his workers know that they were to have no part in such action toward Ruth. There was to be no racial slurs and no demeaning or degrading comments about her. She was to be treated with honor. Or else!

One can well imagine the abuse that some outsider like Ruth would receive, having arrived at the field uninvited and unengaged, and then to have received so much attention from the boss. Again, this is the period of the judges, a time when things like jealousy and power struggles ran rampant among the upstanding citizens, both men and women, who had been properly hired by the land owner to harvest the crops. Ruth had not deliberately orchestrated anything to invite such positive attention from Boaz. So, we read on in verse 17, “**She gleaned in the field until evening.**” She minded her own business,

kept her head down, and worked hard. **“Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.”**

After scavenging all day for her barley, Ruth then had to thresh it, or beat the heads off the barley stalks, so she could take it home for food. And she did this threshing as the light of day faded. This was no easy job. I want you to watch this instructional YouTube on threshing wheat, which is the same way one can thresh barley. (See Youtube Threshing by hand, William Alexander, 1:14 min.)

Imagine having to do this during the last moments of daylight, when the sun has just dropped below the horizon. Do you know how much an ephah of barley grain is?” It’s 92.9 cups of grain. It weighs 30-50 pounds. Imagine how many stalks of barley it would take to thresh that much grain. That’s a lot of barley to thresh after you had been gleaning all day. And then, according to **verse 18**, at the very end of the day, she had to carry it all the way home in the dark! And home could easily have been ¼ - ½ mile away from the field, uphill! That is an extraordinary feat.

That much grain, if that was all these two women lived on, would last them several weeks. So, Ruth’s work had only begun if she were going to get enough barley to make it through the year.

With **verse 18** through the end of the chapter, we come to the final scene in this Act. At the end of a long day, Ruth headed home at last, weary, but excited to share with her mother-in-law all that had happened to her. We read, **“¹⁸She took [her barley grain] up [as in up a hill] and went into the city and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took out [the roasted grain left over from lunch] and gave it to Naomi.”**

Seeing all this barley evoked a response of incredulity from Naomi. She said in **verse 19**, **“Where did you glean today and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be blessed. So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, ‘The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.’”**

Here is an observation: Boaz’s name was never mentioned in the preceding dialogue between himself and Ruth. So we assume that Ruth had heard his

name bantered about in conversations among his workers. Again, let's remember that up to this point, even though Ruth knew the man's name, she had no idea who he was! She was simply being overwhelmed by a foreigner, an Israelite blessing her life like no other, and she couldn't figure out why. But she was about to find out!

Realizing the significance of Ruth's "chance" encounter with Boaz, Naomi spontaneously erupted with a second blessing for Boaz.¹

²⁰Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead." Again Naomi said to her, "The man is our relative; he is one of our closest relatives." ²¹**Then Ruth the Moabitess [notice once again, the author stresses the racial tension between the Hebrews and the Moabites] said, "Furthermore, he said to me, 'You should stay close to my servants until they have finished all my harvest.'"**

Can't you picture the expression on Naomi's face? She must have been so excited and amazed, she could hardly contain herself. As my mother once said, "She looks like she is about to bust her girdle!" Naomi couldn't believe it! She exclaimed:

It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maids, so that others do not fall upon you in another field. ²³So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley

¹ Block, D. I. (1999). *Judges, Ruth* (Vol. 6, pp. 671–672). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Look closely at Naomi's second blessing of Boaz, in **verse 20**. Naomi began her blessing with a word of praise to Yahweh. Naomi finally saw that the crisis of her own loss had not been a sign that God had abandoned or rejected her. But instead, God had used this crisis in her life to bless her, and soon, she would see, to bless her nation and the nations of the world to come.

She used a word to describe God's steadfast love, his loving kindness expressed to her amidst her tragedy--the Hebrew word "hesed." For sure, Naomi's thoughts about God had changed. She repented and embraced with praise God's working in her life through tragedy to bring his ultimately perfect good and better purposes to bear.

Naomi was very specific about God's blessing toward her. In her reference to God's hesed toward "**the living and the dead**," she used a Hebraism called "merism." It's a literary device that points to two ends of a spectrum as a way of referring to the whole. The first half of the merism, "**the living**," in this context refers to Naomi and Ruth, who survived the family tragedy. The second half of the merism, "**the dead**," points to her deceased family members. In this case, the merism is a device used to mean that God has shown His hesed, loving kindness, to her whole family. For even though God had taken her men home to be with Him, they were in a better place. And in the meantime, God was at work providing for her, protecting her, and filling her new life with fresh meaning, purpose, and influence. She saw that indeed, God has our best, all of our bests, in mind even in the midst of tragedy. This is one of the major themes of the book. When life gets crazy, painful, and confusing, God is showing us through someone else's loss that He is at work in the midst of that tragedy, so that we can trust Him. Our loss is not for naught.

This speech is a biographical lesson that demonstrates a total turnaround, a total repentance, in Naomi's perspective on life. She has gone from declaring despairing and accusatory words against Yahweh in **1:20-21** to adoring and praising the One at work behind the scenes that brings ultimate blessing to more people in **2:20-21**.

Sometimes, God takes away one or two special people in our lives to reach out and touch many more for generations to come. He uses events like this to raise up mighty men and women of God--future kings and future mothers of spiritual giants and a Savior.

Having said this, Naomi still grieved the loss of her man and sons. If it were up to Naomi, would she want her men back? I think so. Who wouldn't? But, knowing that she couldn't, she was now able to release them to God, because she saw that God was in this tragedy, and He had stepped up to fill her life with goodness, a new purpose, and a fresh new meaning. Her life still counted. God was not finished with her. And within a year, as she became a grandmother to Obed, she would find rest in God's perfect plan.

Another observation from the end of **verse 20** is worth noting. Naomi stated that Boaz was "**one of,**" not "**the closest relative.**" The expression "**closest relative**" is the Hebrew reference to a "**kinsman redeemer.**" The kinsman redeemer was the first relative in line who was responsible for the economic well-being of another relative. This redeemer functions as a rescuer or savior in a time of distress or crisis. If the first-in-line kinsman redeemer chooses not to accept his responsibility, then another close kinsman redeemer can take his place. Next time, we will see more of what the scriptures teach as to the role of this kinsman redeemer. But for now, just understand that by bringing this up, Naomi is letting Ruth know that Boaz might be of help to them in the future.

One more key point is hinted at in **verse 22**. In this verse, we are reminded once again that our scene took place during the morally and spiritually dark days of the judges. Naomi reminded Ruth that, as a woman and as a foreigner, it was not safe for her to be alone with other men in a field. She was a vulnerable target in a reprobate culture in which rape was a common occurrence. The Hebrew verb translated in English "**fall upon you**" is elsewhere translated "to attack." From our study in **Judges 19**, we remember that in a village just a couple miles away from Bethlehem, just such an evil attack occurred against a woman.

In the last verse of our passage, **verse 23**, we see an additional sign of God's loving provision for Naomi and Ruth. We read that just after the barley harvest was completed, Ruth was invited to join in on the wheat harvest.

Based on the information provided by the Gezer agricultural calendar, Ruth must have been out in the fields for six to seven weeks, from late April till early June.² If one figures that Ruth, being highly motivated to provide for herself and Naomi, worked six days a week and produced the same amount of barley each day (two weeks' worth of barley for herself and Naomi per day), that would be twenty-four weeks of food upon which Ruth and Naomi could survive. That's almost half a year's worth of food!

And then, she got to work again in Boaz's wheat fields! Again, if she only worked another two to three weeks, she would have gleaned and threshed enough barley and wheat to feed themselves for an entire year, with much left over to sell or barter for other goods. Hence, within ten weeks of their arrival, God had provided these two destitute widows with almost an entire year's worth of food.

Truly, Yahweh displays his name, Jehovah Jireh, the Lord provides. It didn't come free to Ruth and Naomi. God expects us to work for our keep. But when we are willing to look to the Lord, in easy times and in difficult times, He promises to provide what we need. He is faithful. And sometimes, on special occasions, we may not work for something, and He may surprise us with a special provision, a little extra, like Boaz did for Ruth with her leftovers.

This Christmas, we have an opportunity to do the same: To praise Him and to thank Mary and Joseph for accepting the harsh days that came with their calling to be the earthly parents of Jesus. It was not an easy time for them, but God used them and blessed them for their efforts.

² Block, D. I. (1999). *Judges, Ruth* (Vol. 6, p. 677). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

