

It Just So Happened

(Ruth 2:1-23)

(preached 10/22/14; Pine Grove BC Wed PM)

Introduction

I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it. **Thomas Jefferson**

The best luck of all is the luck you make for yourself. **Douglas MacArthur**

Then we have the world's greatest philosopher, Loretta Lynn, who said...

In the long run, you make your own luck.

The dictionary defines luck as...

“success or failure apparently brought by chance rather than through one's own actions:”

How should we as believers view the idea of luck?

Does luck exist?

Do we believe in it?

If a doctor diagnoses a person with cancer and gives them 6 weeks to live....

And they live 6 more years.

Was that just luck?

Were they simply fortunate?

Christians throw around phrases like...

“I’ve been very lucky in life.”

Or they wish others good luck when they head to a job interview...

What are we as believers saying when we do that?

My hope is that we use phrases like that, but we as Christians are the first to know that there is no such thing as luck.

If you know the story of Job...

You will know that the Bible describes him as a righteous man.

Who had a great family and lots of possessions.

But then a wind storm kills all his children and then he loses all his possessions.

The world we see these tragic events as “bad luck.”

But we as believers would know that God allowed all these events to happen.

Job's kids simply weren't at the wrong place at the wrong time...

Instead, God granted Satan permission to afflict Job.

We would know that what happened to Naomi when she lost a husband and two sons...

Wasn't simply another case of bad luck, but that those events were under the direction of the Lord.

And the truth of the world is that nothing is beyond the sovereignty of God.

The Lord rules as He pleases from the heavens.

Nothing that happens in this world is simply a matter of chance.

There are no coincidences in the world.

God is at the center of it all.

That is the God of the Bible.

He is a Sovereign Lord with perfect knowledge of the past, present, and future.

And Ruth chapter 2 is going to give us some good insight into the sovereignty of God.

If we believe that God is absolutely in control of all things at all times....

How does that affect how we live?

What does the truth of God's sovereignty mean to you?

So, let's look at our text tonight in Ruth 2....

In verses 1-3, we will see Reacting to Sovereignty...

In verses 4-17, we will see Responding to Sovereignty...

And then in 18-23, we will see Resting in Sovereignty....

Let's begin in verse 1 with

I. Reacting to Sovereignty (1-3)

2 Now Naomi had ^[a]a kinsman of her husband, a ^[b]man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

To catch you up to speed if you weren't here last week...

We met Naomi and Ruth in chapter 1...

Naomi and her husband were Israelites who left Bethlehem to live in Moab because of a food shortage in Israel.

While in Moab, Naomi's husband, Elimelech died.

Her two sons married Moabite women named Ruth and Orpah, but the sons also died in Moab as well.

And then Naomi and Ruth decided to return to Israel since the famine was over.

And the last verse of chapter 1 says that they returned during the beginning of the barley harvest.

Which was a great blessing since that was a signal that meant food would be available.

And then chapter 2 opens with a verse that is setting up the events of chapter 2, by making mention of the name Boaz.

The verse simply makes mention of the fact that Naomi had a close relative, possibly even a brother to her husband named Boaz.

Though we cannot be sure that Boaz was a brother to Elimilech, he was a close relative, at worst a cousin to Elimilech.

Now, Jewish law said that in the event that a man dies without a child, the man's brother should marry the widow to carry on the family name.

Obviously, he would need to be unmarried to do this.

And if that was the case, he was strongly encouraged to do this to honor his dead brother.

Though we will examine this more in chapters 3 & 4, you simply need to know that Boaz was not some random man...

For now, we simply need to see Boaz as a very important man in these widows' futures.

And one other important note about Boaz...

Do you know who his mother was?

Rahab the harlot.

A prostitute in Jericho who had prevented Israel's spies from being captured.

She professed faith in the Lord and eventually had a son that she named Boaz.

And we will see that he is a very kind, wonderful and generous.

Do you think that a prostitute can raise a son who loves and honors the Lord?

Well, Rahab did after she met the Lord.

And then verses 2 and 3...

2 And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." 3 So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after

the reapers; and ¹⁴she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

A poll revealed that 75% of American Christians affirm the phrase “God helps those that help themselves.”

Yet, that phrase is found nowhere in the Bible.

If you have told someone that the “Bible says that God helps those that help themselves.”

You need to call them up tonight and correct that error.

Because if you search the Scriptures, you will never find that instruction.

It most often is attributed to Ben Franklin, who printed it in poor Richard’s Almanac...

As he retold an Aesop’s fable from around 600 BC, where a man got his wagon stuck and called on the god of Hercules to help.

Hercules responded with, “Put your shoulder into that wagon. The gods only help those who help themselves.”

Yet, that pagan phrase is now affirmed by not most of the world, but is even attributed to the Bible.

However, the Scriptures teach just the opposite..

Listen to Isaiah 25:4,

***“For You have been a defense for the helpless,
A defense for the needy in his distress,
A refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat;”***

Romans 5:6...

***6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time
Christ died for the ungodly.***

The truth about men is that they are helpless creatures...

That is why we are often called sheep in the Scriptures, animals that really can't help themselves but are completely dependent upon the shepherd.

So, does God help those that help themselves?

I would say yes and no.

On one hand, God helps the helpless.

He helps the down and out.

On the other hand, God does help those who act in faith.

And why do I bring this up?

The situation facing Ruth and Naomi was this.

They are back in the land of Israel as believers in the God of Israel.

Though the famine has ended, they still need to eat.

Ruth decided to head to the field and try to get the leftovers of the harvest.

God had made a provision in the law that the corners of field were not reaped but saved for the poor....

As well as the parts of a field that weren't cut during the first pass.

You know how that is...

You jump on the lawn mower and cut the whole yard.

Then you look over the yard after you are done and see a few tall blades still standing.

Well, those remaining stalks would be reserved for the poor as well.

So, Ruth asks Naomi if she can head to the field and grab some leftovers...

And Naomi says, Go, my daughter.

And I think we learn something about sovereignty here that is worth mentioning...

I think it is safe to say that both Naomi and Ruth embraced God's sovereignty.

They had both experienced the hand of the Lord in their life.

Ruth had watched a marriage lead her to the true God.

Naomi had watched God turned tragedy into blessing in her own life.

But notice the two reactions to sovereignty...

Ruth jumps up and heads to work.

Naomi stays behind.

Was Naomi too old to work? Or unable to work?

We don't know, we just simply know that she stayed behind.

But we also know this.

She was not condemned for not going, and she still ate the same barely that Ruth went and picked.

I say that to say this...

We see two different reactions to sovereignty here and both end up with the same result.

Ruth works and eats.

Naomi stays and eats.

Most of the world would applaud Ruth and attack Naomi.

And that is sad.

Naomi may have been a woman of incredible faith at this point in her life.

And Ruth may have had little faith.

We really don't know;

We only know that these women had two different reactions to the fact that the Lord will provide.

And He provided for both of them.

For us, we need to remember that God's sovereignty sometimes means that we work and sometimes means that we trust.

Let me balance this with the wrong view of God's sovereignty.

If you are a Ruth who sees work as an opportunity from the Lord to provide for your needs...

I would agree with Naomi and say work and enjoy the Lord's provision.

If you are a Ruth who thinks that your job is a reflection of your accomplishment and who would be filled with worry if you lost your job...

You may need to reevaluate who really provides for your needs.

If you are a Naomi who trusts the Lord to provide for your needs out of faith...

Trust on and enjoy the Lord's blessing.

If you are a Naomi who simply sits at home because you are lazy...

You need to reevaluate your heart before the Lord.

It is like the man who lived by the river that was slowly rising and surrounding his house.

He climbed on the roof, and the police came by in a large truck to drive him to higher ground.

He refused their help and simply said “The Lord will rescue me.”

Then as the waters rose to the edge of the roof, a boat came by and he refused to get in, simply saying “The Lord will rescue me.”

Finally when only a few feet of roof was left, a helicopter arrived offering an escape.

The man refused to get in and simply said, “The Lord will rescue me.”

The waters soon swept him away and he drowned.

Then when he arrived in heaven, he went up to God and said, “I had great faith that you would rescue me, but I drowned.”

God simply replied, “I did try to rescue you. I sent a truck, boat and helicopter.”

And that is it.

Sometimes, reacting to God's sovereignty is a call to do something.

But I want to balance that with the story of George Mueller.

Mueller started orphanages in England in the 1830s.

Which was a time of much poverty.

If you have ever read Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens,....

It is a play about the story of starving children in England at this time.

Well, Mueller, a man of little means was convicted that he would start an orphanage for these kids.

All the other orphanages charged for their service, but Mueller wanted one that did not charge the children to stay.

He saw it as a great way to bring the gospel to these kids.

And let me be clear, most of us would have shaken our heads at this idea.

We would have thought it to be almost evil.

Here is a poor man starting an orphanage for poor kids.

Yet, Mueller insisted and he took to praying for such an opportunity.

The Lord heard his prayers and sent the money and the kids.

And Mueller cared for these with very little means.

The famous story is of Mueller and his wife and a great number of kids sitting down to eat bread for lunch....

And knowing that there would not be any for supper.

Mueller simply prayed for the Lord to provide.

Now, most of the church would say....

George go get a job.

You decided to take care of all these kids.

Now, see what you have done...

All these kids are going to starve.

Go to work.

Yet, Mueller simply called upon the Lord and as he prayed, a knock came at the door.

A local baker came offering some day old bread.

Then the milk man arrived with milk that had not sold that day.

And I think we learn that sometimes we need to work as a reaction to God's sovereignty in providing for our needs.

And sometimes we need to pray that the Lord would provide and simply trust him to meet our needs.

And not to add to the confusion but I want to offer a third reaction which is a mixture of both.

Looking back over 3 ½ years of seminary life in California, we added it all up and determined that it cost us about 200,000 to make it there.

That is rent, tuition, food, gas....All the necessary household expenses that we all pay.

The seminary prepares you for that.

The send you a worksheet of these expenses that you are to consider before moving there.

Tonya and I looked at it with amusement.

Humanly speaking, it wasn't possible.

There was no way.

So, what we do?

We sold the house, packed up the car and moved out there.

And here is the principle that I tries to honor.

In one hand, the Scriptures are clear, you don't work you don't eat.

But also equally true is that the Lord provides for His children.

That meant that I needed to work, but I also needed to trust the Lord.

So, when a work opportunity came my way, I took it as a provision from the Lord.

I ripped up carpet, I put down floors.

I painted.

I tutored. I interned at the church.

My aim was to take what the Lord provided and trust him to keep us there as long as He willed.

And this is not a testimony to our great faith.

We would be lying to say that we never doubted or were anxious at times.

We were both, but at the end of 3 ½ years, the Lord met our needs through our savings that we used, the work he provided and the money he sent to us...

From hundreds of people.

And that story is not about us.

It is about the Lord's faithfulness.

But I see our reaction to God's Sovereignty as simply a mix of taking advantage of His Provision while at the same time trusting his Provision.

Ruth and Naomi believed in God's sovereignty.

And the Lord provided for both though each reacted differently to His provision.

And I apologize for beating a dead horse there.

I just see people have such a misunderstanding about the sovereignty of God.

And that is just verse 2...

But not only does Ruth's decision to work lead to food, it also leads to more blessing...

Look back at the end of verse 3...

I love the way the author of Ruth words this....

and ^{1c}she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

It just so happened that she up in Boaz's field.

Now, this is what I call a sovereign act of God.

Praise God for just so happened moments in our life.

It just so happened that I was listening to the radio and a man starting talking about God.

It just so happened that the accident made me lay on my back and all I had to read was a Bible.

It just so happened.

How many testimonies and stories of God's salvation start with these words...

It just so happened.

Proverbs 16:9...

The mind of man plans his ways, but the Lord directs his steps....

Here is where all the pieces of the story come together.

It just so happened that Ruth married Naomi's son.

It just so happened that Ruth returned with Naomi to Israel.

It just so happened that she decided to reap.

It just so happened that she went to Boaz's field.

It just so happened that Boaz was a relative of Naomi's dead husband.

Our lives are a series of just so happened.

It just so happened that you showed up tonight to hear Ruth chapter 2 preached.

It just so happened that you are struggling with how God should provide for you.

It just so happened that you were wondering today is God really in control of everything?

It just so happened that.....fill in the blank.

And the truth of what the author writes here is this.

Ruth went to Boaz field because that is where the Lord directed her.

We serve a sovereign God.

And now Ruth finds herself in the field of man who will change her life.

But beyond that, she finds herself in the field of man that she will marry and give birth to a son will be the grandfather of King David...

Who will eventually father others will that will bring Jesus into the world in a manger hundreds of years later.

Here is a Moabite woman who had grown up in a godless land to godless parents.

Who had attached herself to an Israelite man who died.

And though a widow now with only her mother in law her.

She walks into a field and with that simple act of obedience paves way for the Savior of the World.

That is the work of God's providence.

Conclusion

Listen to what Spurgeon says about God's sovereignty...

There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God's Sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that Sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children ought more earnestly to contend than the doctrine of their Master over all creation—the Kingship of God over all the works of His own hands—the Throne of God and His right to sit upon that Throne. On the other hand, there is no doctrine more hated by worldings, no truth of which they have made such a football, as the great, stupendous, but yet most certain doctrine of the Sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah. Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne. They will allow Him to be in His workshop to fashion

worlds and make stars. They will allow Him to be in His almonry to dispense His alms and bestow His bounties. They will allow Him to sustain the earth and bear up the pillars thereof, or light the lamps of heaven, or rule the waves of the ever-moving ocean; but when God ascends His throne, His creatures then gnash their teeth. And we proclaim an enthroned God, and His right to do as He wills with His own, to dispose of His creatures as He thinks well, without consulting them in the matter; then it is that we are hissed and execrated, and then it is that men turn a deaf ear to us, for God on His throne is not the God they love. But it is God upon the throne that we love to preach. It is God upon His throne whom we trust.

And he hits the nail on the head.

Believers love the doctrine of God's sovereignty.

We are comforted that God works all things out for His glory and our good.

Yet, this is also the most offensive idea to the world.

They hate the idea of a sovereign God.

They refuse to see God upon his throne ruling the world.

And you know why?

They want that throne.

They want to call the shots in their own life.

They love their sin.

They despise authority.

That is the nature of the human heart.

That is why only a heart transformed by the work of God can embrace such an idea of God being in control.

But the truth of the Scriptures is that HE is.

God has directed Ruth to a field that will change the world.

And praise God that he directed us to the truth of the gospel that changed our eternal destiny.

And praise God that he caused us to respond in faith and repentance.

Let us pray.