

**Joke:** Two brothers argue on which of the two donkeys is theirs, so the older one says, " I'll cut an ear off of my donkey and the donkey with only one ear will be mine you take the other one".

The other brother agrees.

But that evening the donkey with one ear looks at the other donkey with two ears in jealousy, and he ends up biting the donkeys ear off.

The next morning the brothers noticing what had happened once again start arguing, now how can we tell them apart.

Again, one of the brothers says," alright I'll cut off a donkeys second ear and the donkey with no ears is mine and you take the other one."

Again they agree.

Once again that night the donkey gets jealous and bites the other donkeys last ear off.

Morning comes the brothers notice what happened and are mad and arguing once again.

One of the brothers says, "this is what we'll do, I am cutting off my donkeys tail and the other one with a tail will be yours."

Sounds alright with me the other brother says, but again that night the same thing happens the donkey with no tail gets jealous and bites the other donkeys tail off.

In the morning both brothers notice once again what took place. After arguing for close to 15 minutes one brother finally yells," Alright fine how about you take the black donkey and I take the brown one"

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How many of you have ever seen someone and you've thought, I wish I had a life like that?

You see their life on Facebook or Instagram and they've got like 40 million friends and they're always out having fun or they're, at a restaurant together and you're looking at that going, I wish I had friends like that.

Or maybe it's someone that has a career that they actually studied for and now they're working in the field they studied for and you're not doing that and you look on and you go, you know, they're making good money and they're doing something that they enjoy. I wish I had a career like they have.

It could even be a ministry. You look at someone and say, "Wow, they're really making a difference." And your wondering if you are doing the same because your not teaching as many as they are.

Or it might be their family. They all come into church together and it even looks like they like each other. Their Christmas cards are just perfect. And you struggled to get your family to church because somebody was mad at someone.

It could even be a mindset, like you just look at them and they just seem contented, and so at peace.

You look on and you think, I wish I had that. I wish I had what they have.

But the problem is when you look at somebody where they are, you're just seeing their current chapter. You don't know the full story. You're not seeing the previous chapters that led up to the chapter that they're in.

You may look at their current chapter and say, "I want a story like that."

But you haven't read the previous chapter called The sacrifices I've made. Or you don't know about the chapter called My Heartbreaking Loss. Or the chapter called Overcoming all my Insecurities. There may have even been a chapter called My Spiritual Doubts.

But all you see is their current chapter.

Today, what I want to do is I want to show you from the last chapter of Ruth a principle, and the principle is this: the decisions that you make today will determine the story that you tell tomorrow.

The decisions that you're making in your life today, what you do, what you don't do, who you're with, who you're not with, the decisions you're making today can actually determine the chapter that you will live out tomorrow.

And so for those of you that may not be happy with the chapter that you're currently in and you want a better chapter, I want to talk about Choosing Your Next Chapter.

Let's get back into Ruth. The context of Ruth, if you haven't been with us, let me give you a quick summary. Ruth was a Moabite widow who left Moab to turn to the God of Bethlehem and came back without much hope, and without any resources.

And she got to work. Instead of doing what a lot of women would have been forced to do when they were widowed, she didn't sell her body, she didn't beg for money, she didn't play the victim, she started gleaning in the field of a guy named Boaz.

She just so happened, that's what the text told us, to glean in the field of a guy named Boaz, a man of standing. And Boaz met Ruth and he admired her character and her integrity and her work ethic.

And they had what looked like a little bit of a date over lunch, he asked her to sit down. They had a date and it seemed like things were going well.

And then Boaz, this business owner, appeared to have gotten distracted and stopped paying attention to her. He never followed her on Facebook, he never followed up on Instant messenger, no texts, nothing. Harvest is nearing an end. And so she, with the encouragement of her mother-in-law, gave Boaz a little bit of encouragement to show her interest.

And by encouragement, as we looked at last week she lied down at the foot of his bed and said, "Remember me?"

And she kind of almost like proposed to him and in do so was hinting to him that she would love if he would become something that Ruth calls a kinsman redeemer?

A kinsman redeemer if you remember is someone who would protect and provide for a widow. It's a family member who would step into the role to help make sure that she was cared for after her loss.

Now, according to the law, there was a problem because Boaz wanted to be her kinsman redeemer but he discovered there was another dude that was actually more closely related than he was.

And so he wanted to step into that role but since there was someone else, he had a problem. Somehow he had to find this guy.

We don't know where he is, we don't know what he's doing. And he had to find this guy and work out a deal so he could pursue the woman that he had on his heart.

And for Boaz to make this deal, he needed three things.

And church he needed the same three things that you'll need to write a better chapter. What did he need? He needed providence, planning and prayer.

He needed the providence of God, a strategic plan, and faithful spirit-filled prayers.

So, let's talk about those. First, he needed the providence of God.

What is the providence of God? We've defined it this way, the providence of God is whenever God uses natural circumstances to bring about his supernatural will.

And here's the thing when you look in the Book of Ruth, you don't see any physical miracles. There's no parting of the Red Sea, there's no opening blind eyes, no one being healed or raised from the dead. No physical miracles of any sort mentioned in this book.

But you will see the miraculous providence of God where he uses natural circumstances to bring about his supernatural will.

We've noticed it several times over the last few weeks, but it's also here in the last chapter of Ruth as well.

Boaz, has this problem, he's gotta find this guy. This kinsman redeemer.

And Ruth chapter 4 verse 1 says this. . .

Ruth 4:1 (NLT) - Boaz went to the town gate and took a seat there. Just then the family redeemer he had mentioned came by, so Boaz called out to him, "Come over here and sit down, friend. I want to talk to you." So they sat down together.

Now let me pause for a moment. What is the town gate?

The town gate was the place where they would do business deals. You would negotiate a deal, you would close on land. This was kind of like going to City Council or going to court.

And so he goes to the town gate, takes a seat, and what are the next two words? "Just then." Say that with me, just then.

Just then it just so happens the family redeemer he had mentioned came by.

It just so happens by the providence of God that God was working through natural circumstances to bring about his supernatural will.

Just then! The family redeemer he had mentioned came by.

So Boaz called out to him, "Hey bro! Come over here. I got a deal for you sit down I want to talk to you." The word he used was friend.

Now the word friend is a very generous translation of the real words in the Hebrew language. Boaz calls this guy baloney alimony.

He says, "Hey, baloney alimony."

And in Hebrew, this was an idiom that's only used two other times in the Bible, baloney alimony.

What this literally means is it means a muted name. A very literal translation could be Mr. No Name. That's what it is. "Hey, Mr. No Name," that's what we see in the text, "Come over here."

And we're gonna discover that the author of the Book of Ruth, Samuel, doesn't include this guy's name.

And I'll tell you probably why he didn't include it in a few minutes.

So, when did Mr. No Name show up? The text says just then he showed up. He just so happened to show up.

Did Boaz get lucky? Surely it must have been some sort of coincidence, right?

No, this is when God uses natural circumstances to bring about his supernatural will. It was the providence of God.

So Mr. No Name just happens to show up by the providence of God at the exact right time, and in the right circumstances.

What do you need for a better chapter? You need the providence of God.

And I'll show you how this is spelled in the Hebrew language.

This is Hashgochah Protis. Hashgacha! And in the Hebrew language, if you'll notice the word on the top, Hebrew, you actually read it from right to left.

In English we read from left to right. But this is the providence of God.

And I will say this about the providence of God. The providence of God is like reading Hebrew. It's best understood when read it backwards.

If you wanna see the providential power of God, it's best when you look where you are and you look backwards to see how God used natural circumstances that you didn't realize to bring about his supernatural will in your life.

Let me share with you a personal example of reading backwards the providential power and the will of God in my life.

(Tell story of conversion. . .meeting Joy. . .going to conference and being called out by Shawn Bolz)

And if you look at Ruth, what we're going to find is, in chapter 4, she gets really blessed. But you have to remember that this was not like some of the previous chapters.

If we were to title some of her previous chapters, you might have called one of them, Suddenly Widowed. Another one may have been called The Faith to Leave Moab. Another chapter could have been called Broke and Hopeless in Bethlehem.

And so if you find yourself hoping for a better chapter, you might want to look for the providence of God.

You are not in your final chapter right now. God is still writing your story and there is more story for him to tell.

Eric Lucy in his book, When God writes your life story says this, "When we leave the pen in His hands we will never be disappointed with the story of our lives."

Someone once else has said, "God is still writing your story, quit trying to steal the pen. Trust the author."

It's the providential will of a very good God. The first thing you need for a better chapter is the providence of God. The second thing that you're going to need is strategic plans.

Strategic plans. Yes, planning is spiritual. In fact, I'm going to show you what Boaz did, it's pretty interesting. I like Boaz. He wasn't a pastor, he was not a prophet, nor was he a priest.

He was a business leader. And where was he going, he wasn't going to a Bible study, he wasn't going on a mission trip, he was going to a business deal.



And God was all over this deal. Here's a truth for you church you can be in business and honor God.

And so he goes to the city gate with his plan and he calls 10 business leaders together to be his witnesses.

And he says, "Mr. No Name, I'm going to make you an offer that you can't refuse."

And he's working his plan. He tells him, "Hey, you remember Elimelech, he was married to Naomi? Well, you know, Naomi's widowed and so if you want his land, here's what you need to do."

Let's look at it beginning in verse 2. . .

Ruth 4:2-4 (NLT) - Then Boaz called ten leaders from the town and asked them to sit as witnesses. And Boaz said to the family redeemer, "You know Naomi, who came back from Moab. She is selling the land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. I thought I should speak to you about it so that you can redeem it if you wish. If you want the land, then buy it here in the presence of these witnesses. But if you don't want it, let me know right away, because I am next in line to redeem it after you." The man replied, "All right, I'll redeem it."

And the guy said, "All right, I'll do it."

And Boaz is thinking bummer I was hoping that he wasn't interested.

No that's not what actually happened Boaz says, "Oh yeah, there's one more thing I forgot to mention." And he's working his strategic plan. He says, "I forgot to tell you,"

And then I love this watch what the next verse tells us:

Ruth 4:5 (NLT) - Then Boaz told him, "Of course, your purchase of the land from Naomi also requires that you marry Ruth, the Moabite widow. That way she can have children who will carry on her husband's name and keep the land in the family."

In other words, you going to have to raise some kiddos and then your going to give the land that you spend your money on back to their family so they can keep, the land in the family and so you don't even get to keep it after you've invested in it.

And Mr. No Name pumps on the brakes. "Hey, hang on, this wasn't the deal that I agreed to. You're telling me this deal comes with a couple of widows?"

And one is a Moabite woman and the other one is her grumpy mother-in-law? And if I do it I have to provide for both of them and I'm going to have pay for the land and then give them the land back?

What kind of deal is this for me?" And so Mr. No Name says this, in verse 6. . .

Ruth 4:6 (NLT) - "Then I can't redeem it," the family redeemer replied, "because this might endanger my own estate. You redeem the land; I cannot do it."

Mr. No Name thought this chapter was getting the title, "A Bad Investment." Boaz on the other hand, he was calling this chapter, "My wish comes true."

And the author looks on and says, "I'm not even going to dignify that selfish guy who was more concerned with his money than any type of ministry. Taking care of his own.

We'll just call that guy Mr. No Name."

Boaz, he's working his plan. And when you look through this story, you see most people didn't have any kind of plan. Go all the way back to chapter one. You remember Naomi's husband, Elimelech? Remember what his name means? My God is king. He didn't have a plan in Moab. There was no will, he left his wife high and dry. There was no plan.

You may remember Ruth's husband, Mahlon? You remember the two others named Sick and Tired.

They didn't have a plan at all either.

Mr. No Name didn't have a plan. He couldn't see past today, he had no plan. And that's why I want to remind somebody here that it is not anti Biblical, you can make a plan.

In fact, Proverbs 21:5 tells us. . .

Proverbs 21:5 (NLT) - Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty.

Good planning and what else? And hard work. Lead to what? Prosperity. But hasty shortcuts lead to poverty. That's why I put money in my 401K and not the Michigan lottery. I'm investing in the future not gambling for a win.

Let me stay here for just a moment. It's not unspiritual to have a plan. God had a plan, it was to send His son.

1 Peter 1:19-21 (NLT) - It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days he has been revealed for your sake. Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory.

And God has a plan for your life as well.

Psalm 139:16 (NLT) - You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.

I would ask you this, what's your plan? If you want a better chapter, have a better plan.

What's your plan?

Some of you may say, well my marriage is struggling right now.

What's your plan? Get a plan. We're going to open up God's Word together and we're going to let other people pour into our marriage, go into counseling. We haven't been able to figure this out on our own so we're going to go and get some help and godly wisdom to create a plan to help strengthen our marriage.

Or financially, what's your plan? Some of you your plan is just to spend more than you make. That's your plan. And in case your wondering that's not a good one.

But you might look on and say, this boat won't float. So instead you create a plan and you start doing a debt snowball, to work a plan and to get out of trouble.

What's your health plan?

Relationship plans? Let me just say this if all of your friends are stoned 80% of the time and they're all broke and they're all far from God, you just might need a different plan when it comes to your inside friends.

Because the decisions that you make today will determine the story that you tell tomorrow.

The decisions that you are making right now is writing the chapter that will be published tomorrow.

What do you need? The providence of God. And you want a good plan.

So Boaz, he works his plan. And he goes and he buys the land and he becomes the kinsman redeemer.

And verse 10 tells us this,

Ruth 4:10 (NLT) - And with the land I have acquired Ruth, the Moabite widow of Mahlon, to be my wife. This way she can have a son to carry on the family name of her dead husband and to inherit the family property here in his hometown. You are all witnesses today.”

He says to everybody, "You are witnesses of this today."

What is he doing? Boaz is joining his chapter with her chapter to create God's chapter.

We're together through the providence of God, through strategic planning, and we're going to find through powerful faith-filled prayer, that God is entering this story and bringing out something more powerful than you can ever imagine.

What do you need for a better chapter? You need the providence of God. You need some strategic plans. And the third thing is you'll want to be praying some faith-filled prayers.

In fact, as we've gone through this Book of Ruth, you may or may not have noticed that prayer is all over the Book of Ruth.

Almost every prayer is a short prayer.

And hear this church, I for one don't pray long drawn out prayers, I'm not praying 4 to 5 hours straight. If you can do that great but I don't. However, there are very few long periods of time that I don't go without praying.

There are very few long periods of time where I'm not talking to God in short bursts of prayer. And that's what you see all through the Book of Ruth.

Let me show you some of the prayers in Ruth:

Naomi prays, "May the Lord give you a husband."

Ruth prays, "May the Lord deal with me if I leave you."

Boaz prays, "May the Lord be with you."

The workers pray, "May the Lord bless you."

Boaz says, "May the Lord repay and bless you."

Ruth says, "May I continue to find favor."

Naomi says, "May the Lord bless the man who bless you."

And Boaz says to Ruth, "May the Lord bless you."

And we see prayer, after prayer, after prayer.

And we also see the elders here pray a generous prayer of blessings in Ruth chapter 4 verses 11 and 12.

Ruth 4:11-12 (NLT) - Then the elders and all the people standing in the gate replied, "We are witnesses! May the Lord make this woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, from whom all the nation of Israel descended! May you prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. And may the Lord give you descendants by this young woman who will be like those of our ancestor Perez, the son of Tamar and Judah."

And I don't know about you, but I just happen to know someone else who's pretty famous from Bethlehem.

His name is Jesus and he is all over this story. If you will see the providential power of God and if you'll see the strategic planning and the faithful prayers of the people, the providence of God is like reading Hebrew.

It's best understood when you read it backwards. Let me in closing today look at the story of Jesus backwards.

What is the story of the gospel? The story of the gospel is this, that God so loved the world, God so loved you, you, that he gave his one and only son, Jesus, who was perfect, the lamb of God without sin, and was slain for the forgiveness of our sins. He died on the third day. But he didn't stay dead. The stone was rolled away and he was not there. The tomb was empty. So that anyone, and this includes you, anyone who calls on the name that is above every name, the name of Jesus, would be saved.

That's the gospel. It doesn't matter who you are, your sins can be forgiven.

But reading backwards, before Jesus died and rose again, he actually prayed.

And on the cross, he declared, "It is finished"

And he prayed, "Into your hands, I commit my spirit."

But before he died and before he rose again and before he prayed, Jesus was actually fulfilling God's strategic plan. God had a plan the whole time. And scripture tells us His plan:

For God saved us and called us to a holy life. He did this not because we deserved it but because that was God's plan from before the beginning of time to show us his grace and his love and his mercy through Christ Jesus.

And reading backwards, we know that Jesus was born without sin. He came from a Virgin called Mary. And the providence of God is just like reading Hebrew, is best when you read it backwards.

Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah. Mary was engaged to Joseph, whose father was Jacob.

And If you look in Matthew chapter 1, you see the lineage of Jesus. And if you look at things backwards, you say Jesus came from Mary and Joseph, who came from Jacob and Matthew, who came from Eleazar, from Eliud, from Akim, from Zadok, who came from Azor, from Eliakim, from Abiud, from Zerubbabel, from Shealtiel, from Jehoiachin, from Josh to Josiah, from Amon, from Manasseh, from Hezekiah, who came from Ahaz, from Jotham, from Uzziah, from Jehoram, who came from Jehoshaphat, who came from Asa, who came from Abijah, who came from Rehoboam, who came from Solomon, who came from David, who came from Jesse, who came from a guy named Obed, who was born from Boaz and from Ruth.

And so, when you look backwards, you see the providential will, the power, the plan of a good God who is working the whole time, who is working in the good chapters and working in the dark chapters.

Who is working in every single moment pointing toward the grace and glory and goodness of his son.

So whatever chapter you're in, God is in it with you. He's still working and he's there. Even when you don't see it He's working.

In God's providence and through God's plan and through the prayers of the saints for a savior, God offered salvation.

Not because we deserved it but because that was his plan.



So if you think about your next chapter, what do you need?

The providential power of God, which is easiest to see if you're looking backwards.

Oh that's how He used it and that's what He was doing. I didn't see it then. But he was there all the time.

And strategic planning. Good planning and hard work leads to blessings and prosperity. And a life of dependence on God. I'm with you, God, I need you, God, direct my steps. I'm praying God. I'm depending on you, God. I'm not walking by sight, I'm walking by faith. God direct my steps, I need your guidance. I need your power, I need your wisdom.

And all that together, God will help write your next chapter. It will be a chapter where He's glorified because He is with you and for you and He is always good.

Prayer

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