

Dark Threads of Providence

by Keith Malcomson

This sermon delves into the concept of dark threads of providence, highlighting the trials and tragedies faced by Naomi in the book of Ruth. Despite the hardships, Naomi maintains her faith in God, acknowledging His hand in the midst of sorrow and loss. The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting God's plan even in the darkest times and seeking the 'house of bread,' symbolizing spiritual nourishment and revival.

Scripture: Job 1:20, Psalm 30:5, Proverbs 3:5, Romans 8:28, James 1:2

Topics: "Faith in Adversity", "Divine Providence"

Description

This sermon delves into the concept of dark threads of providence, highlighting the trials and tragedies faced by Naomi in the book of Ruth. Despite the hardships, Naomi maintains her faith in God, acknowledging His hand in the midst of sorrow and loss. The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting God's plan even in the darkest times and seeking the 'house of bread,' symbolizing spiritual nourishment and revival.

Transcript

Praise the Lord. I want you to turn with me here this evening to the little book of Ruth, an amazing book, and I want you to turn there. We're going to embark on our study in the book of Ruth.

If you want to find it, find Judges and find 1 Samuel, and you'll find this little book of Ruth sandwiched between Judges and 1 Samuel in a very important position and place. You know, it says over in the New Testament in 2 Timothy 3 and verse 16, all scripture is given by inspiration of God. In other words, the Holy Spirit has breathed out all scripture, not only the book of Romans or Ephesians or the book of Acts, but also this little book of Ruth with its family story and romance story has been breathed out.

It is much as much inspired as the book of Romans, and yet they're very different. They have a different purpose. And so the Bible says, all scripture is given by inspiration.

Every book, it may seem a bit different to you, but I want to tell you Ruth is inspired and given by the Holy Spirit. It is important. Then Paul says why every book is given.

He says, and is profitable for doctrine. Every book inspired of the Holy Spirit is profitable or useful for doctrine or teaching. This is a story about a family.

It's all different lives, a small little story, and yet it is profitable for doctrine or biblical teaching. You can teach from this little story. Also for a proof, maybe you'll get corrected as we study the book of Ruth.

For correction, maybe you just haven't been looking at life clearly in the way you should. Your emphasis has been wrong or you've lacked a certain truth. This little book of Ruth is going to correct your vision and bring you onto a clear place.

For instruction in righteousness, oh, it's all here in this little book of Ruth. So that's what we're going to find. We're going to read from the book of Ruth here tonight, just several short verses I want to read as we come to it.

We're not going to cover much of this book tonight, but we're going to deal very specifically with a theme that's important. I told you last week, don't come if you don't like a sad story. The fact that you're here, maybe you like a sad story.

If I make you sad tonight, I'll make you glad next week and in the weeks to come. But it's so, so important what we're going to deal with tonight. This is part two of our series, Providence in the book of Ruth.

My message tonight, listen to this carefully what I'm going to call this, Dark Threads of Providence. Reading from Ruth chapter one and verse one. Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled that there was a famine in the land and a certain man of Bethlehem Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons and the name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi and the name of his two sons Malon and Chilion, Ephraites of Bethlehem Judah and they came into the country of Moab and they continued there.

And Elimelech, Naomi's husband died and she was left and her two sons and they took them wives of the women of Moab. The name of the one was Orpha and the name of the other was Ruth and they dwelled there about 10 years and Malon and Chilion died also both of them and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband. And then just jump on a few verses to verse 20 here.

And she said unto them, call me not Naomi, call me Mara for the almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full and the Lord hath brought me home again empty. Why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me and the almighty hath afflicted me.

Let's pray together. Father I do thank you for your grace and your mercy on these messages. You want to encourage us and strengthen us.

You want to teach us doctrine. You want to instruct us. You want to correct us.

You want to rebuke us. Lord God you want to raise us up in the teaching of how to live righteously and godly in this world. And Father I do pray oh God anoint our eyes that we might have eyes that are open to the hidden hand of God.

Lord God show us the reality of your power that you work not only by miracles and extraordinary intervention but oh God you're working silently, invisibly, secretly in the most nominal and normal things in our life. Help us to have faith tonight. You said faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

And Father I pray as we look at providence in this little insignificant unnotable family that you would reveal your mighty hand that you love us individually and particularly and that your hand is at work on our behalf.

Will you bless your word to our hearts tonight and speak to us in Jesus mighty name. Amen.

And so my message is dark threads of providence. I wish I could just talk about the good but I can't because the Bible doesn't. The Bible actually does talk about the dark threads of providence and it's very important.

The little book of Ruth is one of the shortest books in our entire Bible. It centers around the life mostly of two ladies. It's one of two books on our entire Bible actually named after a lady which is unusual.

So I want you to listen very carefully. This is very carefully inspired of the Holy Spirit. It's a bit different than some other books but it's meant for you.

You've got to learn the lesson of this book. It has unique lessons that you may not find in another book of the Bible and it's given to you by the Holy Spirit for that reason. Make sure you understand the central truth of the book of Ruth.

Look what God does in this little book. It deals with the incidental details about an insignificant family. It is utterly focused upon what happens to them.

Four members in a family who have two other ladies join that specific family. Four people, a family, it's very small in the big scheme of things. Do you really think God is caring or interested in your little family? Do you think that God really cares about your insignificant life, going to work daily, romance, family life, whether you have or whether you lack, whether you face disaster or problems, do you really think God cares? Yes according to the Bible it is very clear that God is constantly in the life of nations and generations and eternity but he is also involved in individual lives, insignificant lives, unlikely lives.

God is watching even when you don't realize it, when you can't feel him or see him, when you can't understand him. God is actually there unseen to your eye, reaching out to you. You could walk in a meeting like tonight and yet not realize God has got a plan in that because he loves you and cares about you and he tells the truth.

Remember when Joseph is left in that prison, I want you to see there are dark threads of providence in the Bible. Not only nice things, God working to bring about nice things. Oh no, there's more.

God's hand is actually in things that you think are very bad, very dark and you think they're working against you but you can't see God's hand in it and that's okay. That's okay, you can't make yourself see this or believe this but God could have his hand in things that you think they are going to destroy me, they're against me, they're on my heels. No God's hand is in it.

Remember when Joseph is in a prison and he helps the butler and the baker and he says, just one thing, remember me, get me out of here. What does God do? God makes the man forget him for two years. You think that was the devil? It wasn't the devil.

You think that was the man's bad memory? No it wasn't. God actually removed the thought from the man's mind and Joseph is left sitting there for another two years in a dark cold prison, isolated, deserted and yet it's God's plan. This is what I mean by the dark threads of providence that we find even with the Bible in an extraordinary way, an absolute unusual way.

You see it all through the Bibles. What about when you come to the New Testament and into the book of Acts, the first history of the church, you read about James being taken as a prisoner, a great man of God, an apostle, a leader of the church in Jerusalem. What happens? He gets beheaded.

Herod has his head cut off. God doesn't intervene. Do you think they're praying? Yes they are praying.

Do you think he had faith? Yes he had faith. Do you think the church was in revival and on fire? Yes it was and yet God allows James to die and straight after it Peter gets taken as a prisoner and the same thing is going to happen to him and again the church prays and God sends an angel to deliver him. Why did God allow James to die and Peter to live? Providence.

God had a plan. Do you think there was less faith in James's situation so God couldn't answer and deliver him and let him die? Absolutely not. But God did have a very real plan.

Or what about Moses slaying an Egyptian and then having to run for his life? He thinks he has failed. He feels within him, God wants me to deliver the people. He kills one Egyptian and he has to flee out into the Midian desert and he looks after his father-in-law's sheep for 40 years and feels utterly destitute.

40 long years. These are the dark threads within a life. What would you feel if that happened? I feel I've got a call to deliver Israel and instead you end up with a bunch of second-hand sheep in the back side of the desert for 40 long years getting a suntan.

These are dark threads and they're all through our Bible. Everywhere you look, David fleeing from Saul's spear. He's anointed.

He loves God. He loves the king. He's serving God.

He's doing everything right and then King Saul brings him into the palace and then tries to kill him with his spear because he's jealous of a 17 year old and then spends years trying to pursue him and kill him. You know what King David said? Do you think he said, oh I know it's all working together for good brother. Oh I know this is a wonderful character building thing I'm going through.

Do you know David gets a point where he speaks to God, prays to God and he said I'm tired of running. There's only a breath between me and death. What's all this about? These are the great men of faith you know and you find it all through scripture.

What about John Brown amongst the Covenanters? I love John Brown. I hope you know about John Brown. He used to arrange the field meetings for the preachers.

That's what he done. He wasn't a preacher. He helped the preachers in a time of persecution and here he is.

He falls in love with the love of his life and he's going to get married and Pedan the prophet is there and as Pedan is marrying him he looks at the wife, don't know what her name was and he says keep your burial garments close to you. There's going to be a short marriage. Says I see blood on it.

A short time later he's got a couple of kids and the soldiers ride up and drag him out of the house and as she stands at the door with a baby in her arms the soldiers shoot her husband to death, several of them shooting him until he lies motionless and then he turns to the wife and he says now what do you think of your wife? And she says I think more of John Brown now in his death than I ever did in his life. Do you

know what I'm telling you about? There are dark threads within the lives of very righteous people and yet because you cannot see providence, you don't see providence at work in dark things. You cannot see it.

You don't feel it. You don't hear it. All you see is darkness.

This is against me. This is evil. This is wrong.

Is it the devil? Is it my sin? Something's gone wrong. Has it? Has it really? What about Elizabeth Elliot, that great woman of God? Her husband was 29 years old, part of a five-man team going down to South America when the Indians are trying to evangelize, spear them to death and kill them. 29 years old.

What a short marriage. That happened in 1956. He's the one that wrote he is no fool who gives his life.

Sorry, let me say that again. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. That's why he wrote dead at 29 years old.

What a remarkable life. Do you know who baptized his grandson? One of those Indians that speared his father to death in the same river where they died was back there years later, and the grandson's getting baptized by his grandfather's murder. These are the strange things that happen in life.

Or in case you think with our present circumstance with Candace, why wasn't she healed? What went wrong? What happened? We believe we prayed. Is that getting too close and personal? You know, Smith Wigglesworth, one of the great healing evangelists of the 20th century, revival had just begun. His wife, Polly, died, dropped dead on the 1st of January, 1913, New Year's Day.

She was 52 years old, one year older than Candace. Two years after that, Wigglesworth's son dies in France in the Second World War on the battlefield. That same year, his only daughter is on the mission field in South America, and her newly married husband dies on the mission field, all within Wigglesworth's family.

But at that point, he steps out. He's devastated. At first, he wants to die.

But at that point, he's so devastated. But you know what? God opens up a door of international travel, and he begins a worldwide ministry of preaching the gospel and of seeing the sick healed in extraordinary ways that have impacted the church, not only of our generation, but previous generations and the generation to come. And so with all of these, I could go on with example after example from the Bible and from church history of remarkable incidents.

But here tonight, let me give you my points. Number one, a good beginning. Let's go to the story of Ruth here for a moment.

Ruth chapter 1, and the first thing I want you to see is a good beginning. Although verse 1 immediately brings you into a sad story with things going wrong. I want you to step back, and I believe there's evidence to show there was a good beginning to this story.

Let's look at the names of this romantic couple that we begin to deal with. You have Elimelech who married Naomi. This is the couple the story begins with.

They're in Bethlehem of Judah, just not far from the city of Jerusalem. They are a fascinating couple. Listen to what Elimelech, his name means.

It means, my God is king. Our God is king. You need to realize when they lived.

They lived in the period of the judges in Israel. You remember where the book comes? It comes between the book of Judges and 1 Samuel. Either side of this book, if you look back in the Judges, you have people like Samson and Gideon and Deborah, gifted ministries, extraordinary lives, the history of nations and wars.

If you look forward into 1 Samuel, you see the end of that era of the Judges, and you see Samuel, that great prophet of God arise. You see the first king of Israel called King Saul, anointed, reigning for 40 years. Then you also see the young King David arise.

So either side of this little book, you have extraordinary gifted ministries that affect nations. But this little book is set in the time of the Judges, and it homes in on this father, this husband called Alimelech, and his name means, God is king. Our God is my king.

I believe he's rightly named. I believe this is a hint. He's a godly man.

And believe me, what I'm about to say in the next 20 minutes, most preachers, commentators say something very different. I believe they're wrong. They're very negative about this couple.

They believe they're insane. They believe they've made wrong decisions. I want to give you a bit of a different picture.

You see, in the day of the Judges, when this family actually lived, when the Book of Ruth takes place, it's in the days of the Judges. Remember, there would be apostasy, then revival. The enemy comes in and rules the nation.

Then God raises up someone who brings revival overnight. Extraordinary. Listen to what it's like during the day of Judges.

Judges chapter 17, 16. In those days, there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes. Do you see how the Judges is marked? There is no king.

Everybody does what's right in their own eyes. Or again, in Judges 21, 25. In those days, there was no king in Israel.

Every man did that which was right in his own eyes. And here you get a man called Alemelech. God is my king.

In an hour where there's no king in the nation, amongst God's people, everybody just, it's like our day. Everyone who comes in the store, everyone you meet out there in the church, nobody has direction anymore. And yet here's Alemelech, a man named denotes character.

I believe this is a man who says, God is my king. Everyone around us are drifting around. There's no king.

Everyone just does what's right. Well, I think, I believe I'm going to do this. But do you know what? This man, I believe, was rooted in scripture.

Alemelech, I believe, was a true follower of God, living in Bethlehem. You see, there's a good beginning to the story. It wasn't all sad.

It began well. It began right. You know who he married? He married a little bit of sweetness.

Naomi's name means either sweetness or pleasantness, or it can actually mean God is pleasant or God is very sweet. So here is God is my king, Marian. God is very sweet.

But I also think he thought she was very sweet. I'm utterly convinced. I believe this was a beautiful story of romance.

And so you see at the beginning, you have a marriage. You have great hope. I believe there was hope in this marriage.

All around them is apostasy, confusion, darkness. And here's this little home of pleasantness. God is pleasant.

If you walk with him, you'll have a pleasant home. You'll have a sweet home. You'll have a sweet life.

Just make sure you marry a bit of pleasantness and make sure the God of sweetness is there in your home. I believe this was a happy home. I believe it was a blessed home.

I believe it was a godly home. I believe there was a love story here. I believe there was some romance.

You know, you don't have romance outside of the gospel. I believe the greatest romantics are some of the most spiritual people that you'll ever meet. I don't believe romance is in this world.

Fornication, sexual immorality, hatred, bitterness, divorce. There's nothing sweet about that. When you come to God's order, you have wonderful, true, genuine romance.

I believe this family was distinguished, notable, noticed by God. I believe his eye was on them long before the story ever began. They were noticeable to people in their community.

And you know where they lived? They lived in Bethlehem, the little community of Bethlehem. The name Bethlehem means house of bread. See that little community of Bethlehem? It can mean granary or a place that's very fruitful.

You'll never lack something to eat when you live in Bethlehem. You'll have everything you need. There's provision in Bethlehem.

It's a fruitful place, a blessed place. It's a house of bread. You'll always get bread in the house of Bethlehem.

It's like what the church should be. There always ought to be bread in the house of God. If you find a church and there's no bread there, no preaching, no teaching, no encouragement, no correction, there's something wrong.

Imagine going to the house of bread and there's no bread. It's like going to the church and there's no preaching, no teaching, no fire, no stirring of the spirit of God, no evangelism. Something very, very terrible.

And so I believe this story begins in a good beginning in a good way. And I believe this couple thought that they started well. I believe this couple were an enterprising couple.

You know why? It says a famine came and immediately they made plans. We've got to do something to provide for our children. They have got two boys, two sons that they're raising up.

They're not marrying yet. They're not looking at a girl yet, but they soon will within a few years. And you know what? This man who I believe was a godly man, they may not have been fully mature.

They may have been immature, lacking experience, not having gone through the trials of life. I believe this was a couple without trials, without troubles, without a broken heart. They hadn't been in the fire, but they were godly.

But you know what? God's saying, I'll take you through some things, I want to assure you. They had many lessons to learn, but that did not mean they were ungodly. Remember Joseph, he was very naive at 17 years old.

He won't be by the end of the journey. And so we have this couple, they're enterprising. I believe this man Alimelech was quick thinking, caring for his family, making plans.

You may debate whether he made the right decision or not. I wouldn't argue with you. I'm just showing you what I believe the text says.

Men add and say it was a wrong decision. Who told you that? Where do you get it in the text? I don't read it. But I do read of God's hand upon this family.

When they leave Bethlehem, a famine comes. When they leave Bethlehem, you know what Naomi says? She left full. They weren't starving.

They weren't empty. They weren't desperate. You know what? They're planning ahead.

They're preparing ahead. They're saying trouble is coming. We've got to act now.

This husband is saying, act before it's a crisis hour. Move before we don't have a choice about it. And so you get to say it's a good beginning.

Point number two, a constant trail of tragedy. Look with me at verse one. It talks about this famine coming.

This broke in suddenly on this young family. Husband and wife, father and mother, two children, two boys who are growing up. They're maybe into their teens by this time.

I don't know. But do you know what? Suddenly a famine comes. Do you know why God sends famine on Bethlehem or amongst his people? Do you know why famines come to the church? Spiritual famines for the word of God.

Do you know why it comes? Because of sin. It hasn't been accidental. Why have we lost preaching in the churches right across the Western world? Why can you not find a preaching house anymore or the gospel and the pulpits? You know why sin came into houses where preaching was and we grieved out the Holy Spirit of God? Something actually happened.

And in this little story, they are there serving God, living for God, a young family being raised up, but a famine comes not because of their personal sin, the sin of the nation, the sin of the community, the sin of God's people. Remember in Judges, everyone starts doing what's right in their own eyes and God has to

chastise them, give them into the hands of the enemy or send a famine. If we walk into famine, there's a reason.

What is a famine? It brings about a food shortage, an economic crisis, a lifestyle crisis. It is a threat to life. And so we see this famine is going to drive them in a certain direction.

They're trying to be enterprising, to care for their two sons, to do what is right, to preserve their lives, to look after themselves. Do you know they've got a bit of land and they've got a house and they've got a property, but they don't care about that house. They care about life, they care about food.

I wish people in the church did, that they cared more about the bread of life to be fed, spiritually fed than they did about their house. Here's a family that's willing to move away from their country, move away from their property, move away from their family in order to be at the house or a place where they can be fed. And so we see this famine comes, it's sent because of disobedience in that hour, but it's going to drive them.

That famine is going to cause them to uproot and to move away. They left their property. Look at verse one, it says, and they went to sojourn in Moab.

The word sojourn means to act as a stranger, a foreigner, a visitor, an immigrant. It's somebody on a temporary visa. They're not moving there to live.

They're not planning there to go and marry like Hannah and others did and to stay there. Oh no. Do you know what this couple, Alemlek and Naomi, they're saying, we'll just go there for a time, short period.

We'll be looked after. We'll go where there's bread. We'll go where there's no famine.

And then we'll come straight back again. We're not leaving things. It's only a temporary move away.

They maybe got the neighbours. Make sure you look after the house. We're going to be back very, very shortly.

And so they are here. It's a temporary visa. They're going to live here for a short while or so they think.

They forsake their land, but they don't forsake God. Don't think there's an act of rebellion or rejecting God's word. They took God with them.

They believed in God. The entire story shows that. They believed in God.

They obeyed God. They desired God. They talked about God.

Natural disasters force you to a decision at times. The past two or three years forced many people to decisions that they never thought they would have to make. Decisions will make you take to set the direction of your life in a direction.

Fathers, mothers, you better be careful of your decisions. It's going to affect your children. What you decide, what you do will affect them right down to the third, fourth generation and further.

Your little decision better be made before God. You better be sure when you do something, you are spirit led and that it is careful because you may live to regret it. It's terrible to look back in life and regret decisions you make.

That's why when it's the time to make a decision, be prayerful, be careful, be slow. Make sure you're in the scripture because when you make a decision 20 years down the road, you can say, why did I do that? Too late to change anything. Too late to do it then.

And so they moved to Moab. Remember who the Moabites were? They're the descendants of Lot that come out of a moral action because of alcohol. So an entire people, they lived at the east side of Jordan and from Bethlehem, it's about 50 miles east.

You cross the Jordan and then you have to pass through rugged steep terrain to get into the land of Moab. But there's bread there. Can you imagine? God hasn't removed the bread from Moab, but he has from Bethlehem.

These are a wicked people, a pagan people, an idolatrous people, a people who don't care about God. There's no famine there. They've got all the bread that you can eat.

They're living in peace. There's no crisis. But over here in Bethlehem, God's little town with God's little people and this little godly family, there's a famine that's going to drive them and make them make decisions.

I believe this is happening all over our world in this hour in an extraordinary way. So you can be in the world and not of the world. Some people think because they went to Moab, they must have made a wrong decision or sin.

You're to be in the world but not of the world. It was not against the scripture for a Jew to move into another nation. There was no scripture against that.

It's just don't learn their habits. Neither is there any scripture to say that you can't work there or even that your son cannot marry a Moabite. There's no scripture forbidding that as you're going to see just shortly.

But do you know what it says in verse 2 of our text? It says they continued there. They come in with a temporary visa. We're just stopping over.

We'll rent a property. Then we'll go back home. Oh no, this famine is going to hit hard.

When they got there, they started to realise this has taken them in directions they never thought and they continued there. In other words, they existed. They lived.

They settled down and found a house. They said this is going to be longer than we expected. When you leave home, you don't always know where that's going to take you or for how long.

And they settled down to an extended stay in Moab. Can I ask you something here? Was God's hand in this? Some, most preachers, the best preachers, the best biblical scholars believe that they were not right before God. Some believe these decisions were wrong, a mistake.

But listen to me carefully. Without these decisions and this move into Moab, there'd be no Ruth. Do you hear me tonight? There'd be no Book of Ruth.

There'd be no story here. If they hadn't made that decision and moved into Moab, you would never have heard the name Ruth. You know how we have the name Ruth in our culture? It wouldn't even be there because Ruth was a pagan idolatrous name.

And yet it came right into the people of Israel through this little story. So those who go, it's all wrong. This family made a mistake.

Really? Are you really sure about that? You see, without this, there would be no Ruth. This sinner in Moab would not have heard the gospel. The gospel truth would not have been brought to these two ladies that we read about.

She wouldn't have been brought into a godly family. And there could be no link between Ruth and Boaz, that great man of God who stayed in Bethlehem. Notice God didn't move Boaz out to look for her.

He stayed in Bethlehem. But there's some extended family go out there. She is, and they're going to be the link to bring her right in.

God's eye is on Ruth. She's a pagan. She's an idolater.

She's grown up in a home and a house that has never heard the truth of God. And yet God's eye is upon her. You know what? He's using a famine.

God sent the famine. God knew the effect in Bethlehem. God knew how this family are going to get propelled 50 miles out into the community of Ruth.

And Ruth is going to get drawn in on this remarkable story. You know, in this family line a bit earlier, Rahab of Jericho, another idolatress, she got married into this family. They weren't all pure thoroughbred Jews.

God brought in an ex-prostitute and allowed her to be married into the royal line of David that would bring forth the Messiah. He reached out and he got her Ruth and he began to work in famines and natural family decisions to bring her in to be a part of this royal line. What about spiritual famines in this, sir? You'll say, well, we're maybe on the verge of a famine, but we're not quite there.

We are on the verge of a worldwide famine. Everything's breaking down. Certain men are causing this.

Do you not know God's plan is in this? Do you realize our entire world has changed in these three years? New world order have their agenda. But I want to tell you, God has an agenda in it because it's stirring everything up. People are thinking differently.

They're moving. We are in a time of spiritual famine. Many have been forced out of Bethlehem, the house of bread.

You know why? There's no bread there. You know, listen to us, our thousands of people who got forced out of their churches. They love God.

They want to be in a Bible teaching church, but they go to preach and won't preach it. They're not living right. There's things wrong.

And multitudes across the world who want a local church, they believe in the local church. They believe in biblical principles. They believe in being under authority.

They've been pushed out into a traveling spiritual life or sitting at home, praying, oh God, lead us to a real church. You know why? Because there's a spiritual famine in our world and people are moving

everywhere. They're online seeking and searching.

I actually believe God's going to bring his plan out of this. God has a plan and a purpose. It's terrible.

A spiritual famine is far worse than a natural physical famine. And it's forcing many people to make decisions. They never would have left the house of bread if there'd been bread, but they're being forced out of many churches because there's no preacher, there's no righteousness.

And so here they are in the land, they find themselves, they settle down. I'm talking about a tragedy. And you know what happens? Elimelech dies.

Naomi's husband. This is at the beginning of a 10 year stay in Moab. They've moved.

He's in enterprising. You know, if he's in like Candace, he builds houses in his brain. You lie down to bed with Candace and starts saying, did I tell you about my design for the room next door? No, tell me again.

Naomi has just lost her husband. He dies in Moab. You know what the first question would be in my mind? Did we make a big mistake? I'm left without a man.

I've got two boys growing up in our home. We used to talk through all these plans and we've only just got here. We settled.

Maybe he made the decision and she's going, why did he do that? Maybe it was her influence on him. And now she's going, why did I influence him? Maybe he wouldn't have died. But her husband dies at the beginning of a 10 year period.

Now they are there. It was a temporary move. Now it's a permanent stay.

Now she has to endure a foreign land without her own husband. Think of the isolation, the loneliness, separation, desertion. She's going through mourning.

She doesn't have her family around her. She doesn't have her old friends, her old school friends, her neighbours that used to mix with her, talking in her own dialect. They're not there.

She has lost her husband. Don't tell me there's not dark threads in the providence of God within life. There really is.

Then it goes further. Her two sons married two young ladies, Moabitess. I don't believe they are pagan or idolatrous then.

I believe these two young ladies came away from their idolatry and embraced the God of Israel. And we're happy to marry these two young men saying, we hear you, we believe you. We want to be joined.

We want to raise kids according to Israelite law. That's what we want to do. There was no ban on marrying Moabitess if they came to believe in the God of Israel.

None at all. And do you honestly think that God took a rebel Ruth to bring her into that royal line? Absolutely not. She was drawn by the gospel.

That marriage came about because she is drawn by the gospel. And about the end of these 10 years, we read of the death of the two sons. It gets worse.

There's a 10 year period, crisis, starts with a famine. Then her husband dies. There's a bit of happiness because there's two marriages.

Wow, I can't wait for the children, the grandchildren. Maybe God is bringing in some good things now to take away the sorrow. Maybe he's blessing me at last in the land of Moab.

Oh no, it gets worse. First of all, Mahlon dies. You know what his name means? To be weak.

Then Chile and his brother dies. His name means pining away. You pine away until you're gone.

These two sons were sickly. They were ill in a time of famine. And here they are.

They both die at the same time. Not one of them are not spread about by years. They die both at the same time.

Now, what do you have? You have three widows in Moab. Can you imagine Naomi's heart? Can you imagine what's happening in her heart, in her mind? How would you be? Disaster after disaster after disaster. Now look at it.

No family line. Oh yes, let me tell you something else. In those 10 years, no children.

Two young ladies, my two young men, 10 years later, there's no children. Something's gone wrong. There's famine back home.

We can't go there. There's plenty of bread here, but it's a foreign land. And since being in this foreign land, now I've lost my husband, and I lost my two sons, and I'm left with these two young ladies.

This keeps building and building and building. No future family line. No grandchildren.

They're in Moab. They went looking for bread, but instead they found three graves in Moab. You know, sometimes you may go looking somewhere for something, and you may get what you least expected.

My third point here, I'm going to focus on this. Naomi's view of these events. Can I take you inside Naomi for a second? Remember, this is the beginning of the story.

We're going somewhere. God's providence is going to be revealed in one of the most remarkable ways in the Bible, but they don't see it. Do you have the ability to perceive God's hand in disaster, in trouble, in hurt, in affliction, in death? My third point, Naomi's view of these events.

Look with me in chapter 1 verse 19. And it came to pass. This is when they reached Bethlehem.

When it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all of the city was moved about them. And they said, is this Naomi? It's 10 years and they can't recognise her. You know why? The stress and the pressure of life has taken its toll upon her face.

She left happy. She comes back sad. Maybe her hair has turned grey.

Maybe there's wrinkles on her face. Maybe she's stooped because of the pressures of life. And so all her old friends and neighbours, it's a small community, they're saying, is this really Naomi? And she said unto them, listen very carefully, because you're going to see, there's a lady, she's come out of 10 years of tragedy.

It started well. She was a pleasant girl. They had a wonderful marriage until that famine came.

They were in Bethlehem. Now 10 years later, they come back. What's she going to say? And she said unto them, call me not Naomi.

Don't call me pleasant. Don't call me sweet. Don't call me, your God is pleasant.

Please don't do that. That must have hurt. Naomi, you're killing me.

Naomi, please don't use that name. Oh yes, when I left here, it fitted me perfectly. I was Naomi, no longer.

Don't call me Naomi. Why? For the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full and the Lord had brought me home again empty.

Why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has afflicted me. And so she says, don't call me pleasant. Don't say my God is pleasant.

No, change my name to Mara, which means better, or my God has dealt with me bitterly. God has done this. I want you to notice something.

She still believes in God. She believes in the hand of God, the plan of God, the purpose of God. Do you notice she came back? As soon as she heard there was bread on the land, she's come back to Bethlehem.

First opportunity. She heard God visited the land. She still believes in God.

She's pursuing after God. She wants to be in the will of God. But don't call me pleasant.

Call me better. That's who I am now. She's not better at God.

I want you to see this clearly. You know, some Christians, they get better at God. Why did God do that? Why is this happening to me? Why did God allow this? Why did I lose my husband, my two children? Why is all this going on in my life? And they get better at God.

She didn't get better. How would you be if you lost the husband you died? Sorry, if you lost the husband who died and it's only like life's beginning, then you lose your two sons and it's in a foreign land and all because of a famine and you're broken. Are you going to throw the talent in God? Are you going to get better at God? She didn't get better.

She is not better against God. Oh, she's better. She is.

She's embodiment of better. She can't smile. She's not laughing.

She's not making jokes. She's not saying, hey friends, all things are working together for good. Be happy.

Jesus loves you. She's not saying that. She says, I'm terribly bitter.

You know what she could say? I don't like what's happened. I can't believe what's happened. It's almost destroyed me what's happened.

I kick against it and think about it every night. I hate that this has happened. She's utterly bitter on her soul, but she's not bitter against other people.

You see this all through this and look who she points to. Four times she mentions God in this. Twice she mentions the almighty has done this.

Oh, I don't believe God's a healer anymore because Candace died. Really? Is your God that small? Are you trying to rewrite the Bible? Do you know what she talks about God? She calls him the almighty. In other words, he has all might, all power.

His power is not diminished. He is an almighty God still. After 10 years of disaster, why didn't God answer your prayers, Naomi? Surely you've been praying.

As your son pines away to death, didn't you pray? Haven't you prayed for joy and happiness and a change and everything? You thought you got it with two girls getting married into the family and now it's ended up a disaster. Now you've got to look at their sorrow. It's not only your sorrow.

Now you've got two daughters. They have lost their husbands. It is multiplied.

Can it get any worse? These are all real things happen. She not only talks about almighty, she talks about the Lord and she actually says, you know what? The Lord testified against me. The word testified there means he's got his eye upon me.

He pays attention to me to make pronouncements against me. She didn't deny that God was watching her, with her, walking with her, nigh onto her, that he was real. It's only she couldn't see the good.

She said he is in control of all these things and you know what? He's wounded me. I've prayed that over these two months. Lord, you've wounded me sore.

I'm not better against God. I'm not angry against God. I'm not better against the people of God.

That said, I'm not going back to church. Are you that small? This lady I believe was a spiritual giant. How many could endure 10 years like this and yet they go, you know what it looks like? Bitterness from the hand of God.

He's watching me to do this. The almighty God has afflicted me. The one with all power.

You know what? The one who has power over nations. He's afflicting me. He's allowing these tragedies to happen.

He's bringing it upon me, but I still love him. I still follow him. I still worship him and I still come back to Bethlehem.

You know why? I believe that he is the real God. All she can see are the dark threads of providence. She said God is in this.

This is God in all of this and yet I can't see any good. You know, some people as soon as it's bad, they don't see God. They can't perceive God.

They don't believe God's in it. God's in the good. The devil's in the bad.

Nothing good can come out of the bad. That's what they think. Look how she returned.

She's broken. She's changed. She's aged.

She's empty. Her strength has diminished. Her health is probably gone.

She maybe had a lot of what ifs. What if we hadn't have gone out? You know, some rewrite the Bible because of events in life. They change things.

They threw out the goodness of God, the mercy of God. They threw out healing. My husband died there for we can't see the sick healed.

Thank God Wigglesworth didn't do that. Or John G. Lake. John G. Lake lost his wife, several family members before he took revival to South Africa and seen multitudes saved and healed.

But he lost his wife. You need to be very careful. Some people rewrite the Bible.

There's no place for dealings of God, bad things in the life. They go, a Christian will never suffer. They say, I don't understand why a righteous person can suffer.

So then if something bad happens, then they go, did I sin? Is something wrong? Maybe there's no God. They start to rewrite it. They can't even see there's dark periods in biblical history or the lies of the Bible.

Yet, I've given you lots of them. The greatest lies in the Bible had dark periods, including Job. Look at God saying, look, devil, look at him.

He's the most perfect man in the world. He's a righteous man. There's nobody like him in the entire generation.

And then all hell let's rip on his life. And all his spiritual godly friends go, I think there's some sin in your life. Do you know when Candice got her diagnosis of cancer, I got a phone call one night from a friend.

He said, brother Keith, it's like Job. Because of your lack of faith, you've left, let down the wall and the serpents come in and bit your wife and put cancer on her. And it's your lack of faith.

And I sat there devastated. Hearing this man say, it's you that brought cancer in Candice. Oh, I could give you lots of stories about phone calls from the past three years.

Pentecostals trying to talk Candice out of her hope for healing and try to prove to her that she can't be healed. We've had it all. Someone messaging me and saying, you need to let her go, let her die.

These are all the mature ones. Let me take you to Job for a second. Listen carefully.

This is so important. If this is what Naomi is like, at the end of 10 years when everything was against her, she's some woman. A lot of Bible commentators, most of them actually discredit her.

Say what a terrible woman. All she sees is the negative, the dark, the bad. God's against her.

I want to tell you she had faith in God. She was pursuing after God. How would you be? Let me point out about Job for a second.

Job chapter 1 verse 20. Then Job arose and rent his mantle. Remember he's lost his 10 children.

Rent his mantle, shaved his head and fell down upon the ground and worshipped. He's lost property, possessions, wealth, children, 10 children in one day. What would you do? He worshipped.

He said, naked came out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return hither. Listen to what he talks about the Lord. The Lord gave him life and the Lord has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. The prosperity preachers and the faith preachers say Job was in sin. He's in unbelief.

He believes God has done this, or God has allowed this, or God's hand is in this. They said it was the devil, nothing of God. Who allowed the devil to do it? Listen to the very next verse.

Did Job sin and sin? The Lord has done this. The Lord has taken away. The Lord giveth.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. The very next verse, verse 22. In all of this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

He said, you know what? God has blessed me. Now I've lost everything. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

I see God's hand is not only in the good. He is in the dark shadows of life, the tragedies. You don't need to like it, but you better see God in these things.

It doesn't mean he's doing it. It means he's allowing it. He's working in the midst of it.

On Job chapter two and nine, then said his wife unto him, does thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God and die. She wasn't a witch of a woman. She's lost 10 children.

And what does Job say to her? He said unto her, thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God? And shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips. And later in the book of Job at the end, it clearly shows Job didn't sin and all these things.

He wasn't lacking faith. It wasn't caused by that. God is actually holding them up as a testimony.

And so it's the same with Naomi here. She's gone through 10 years. She's come back home to Bethlehem and she's got a teaching here.

Oh, it needs to be balanced. It really does. You know, some of you, you, you need to learn what Naomi learned.

The God is even in the dark times. I hate it. I don't like it.

I'm broken. I am hurting, but I know God's hand is in this. You know, Keith Malcolmson knows God's hand is in this over the past two months.

I hate it. I'm opposed to it. I'm torn apart.

But don't try to persuade me God's not in this, that the timing, the necessity, the reality, I know God's here. He's utterly silent, but his hand of providence is in the dark threads of life in a very real way. I believe that with all my heart.

Fourthly and lastly, a changing providence. Ruth chapter 1 verse 6, then she arose. What brought the change? Here's Naomi 10 years like this and she's staying there.

Why does she suddenly arise? That she might return from the country of Moab. Was it the death of her husband? No, that didn't make her leave. The death of her two sons? No, that didn't make her leave.

Was it the loneliness? No, that didn't make her return. Listen to what it says. For she had heard in the country of Moab how the Lord had visited his people and given them bread back in Bethlehem.

As soon as she heard that, she arises, says, it's time to go back. What was the indicator? Bread, in the house of bread. That was the thing that moved them, dominated them, influenced their decisions.

You know, the old Scottish Christians used to say, camp your tent near the tabernacle. Through Israel, when they move through the wilderness, make sure your individual tent stays near that tabernacle as close as you can. Some Christians don't care about the house of God.

I've got a new job, so I'll move into this city or this other place. Okay, so what's the churches like there? Oh, I haven't checked yet. You're a fool.

That's really dangerous where you'll play with your children. You know, there's people sitting in this room. They didn't go to Australia, didn't move to Dublin, didn't go to England.

Why? There's a house of bread. And they said, I want to be where there's a house of bread. I'll forsake a pay rise, a better job, a better life.

Why would you do that? For bread in the house of God. Do you realize that a change came in providence? Because you've got a lady after 10 years of heartbreaking trials, the dark threads of providence, she hasn't lost her faith or her hope. She says, I'm still searching for bread.

I still have hope. I'm still waiting on God. I've been listening all this time.

I've been watching. I've been praying. I've been expecting.

As soon as she heard there was bread in Bethlehem, she said, I immediately rose up. It's time to go. She hadn't thrown in the towel.

She was waiting. Her eyes are open to God. Her heart is filled with hope.

I just want to hear. If I hear of a new church down the road with bread, I'm going to be there. I want to show you.

She remembers her origin and says, it's Bethlehem for me. That's my place of origin. All of you online without a church, let a house of bread open up.

The test is going to be after all these trials. When you go back to the house of bread, is it bread you're actually after or is it some other issue? Tragedy and death did not cause her to make this return. It was the news of bread in Bethlehem again.

And so Ruth arises and began to make the journey back. You know what? You'll see a change in providence. Imagine if she hadn't done this.

Imagine if she'd given up and go, I don't believe in God. I'm staying amongst the Moabites. You two girls get another man.

I don't care if they're an idolater. Make sure they're rich. We're going to build ourselves a nice family home here.

I've had it with God. Look at his hand in the bad things of life. How can I serve such a God? Imagine if she'd settled down there, but she's making the return journey.

Can I ask you to follow the bread? Not the bread money. Follow the bread, the word of life. It was so vital because Ruth's going to go with her.

She's not going to return empty, though she did return empty. She is bringing someone back who's being brought into God's eternal plan and purpose. This is remarkable.

Remember what I told you on Friday night about the hymn, What a Friend We Have in Jesus, written by Joseph Scriven, a Bambridge man. I'm a Bambridge man. He was born and bred in the town of Bambridge and County Down.

In 1844, the night before his marriage, his bride comes riding out to Bambridge on a horse, and he goes out to meet her. He is 23 years old. They grew up together.

This is the love of his life. They love the Lord. They love each other.

They're about to embark on a new life. There's been a storm and bad weather at that time. They're fixing the bridges.

As she gets to the water, she rides in, and the horse gets scared, and she gets thrown off, hits her head, and dies in front of him the day before they get married. It's a year later, he moves to Canada. He's heartbroken.

He's a spiritual man. He's a street preacher. So he moves to Canada to a place called Port Hope, and again falls in love, finds another girl 16 years later after that incident.

The year is 1860. He's engaged, about to be married. She's got pneumonia, but she wants water baptized.

She's determined to follow God. She gets baptized in water, and shortly after that, dies just before they get married. He compiles a hymn book in 1869.

What a friend isn't in it. He doesn't even bother including it. Do you know he wrote this hymn? What a friend we have in Jesus.

All our sins in Greece to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. Oh what peace we often forfeit.

Oh what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer. This man knew this.

Two fiancées dead before he marries them. He's a man who loves God, serves God, follows God. He's a poet.

He's a hymn writer, and he writes this poem, and he sends it to his mother. Only two copies, and one of them, he didn't put his name on it. The churches begin using it widely.

Sankey, who worked with Moody, began using it, and they don't know it's Jesus' scriben. He didn't even put his name to it. Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged.

Take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness. Take it to the Lord in prayer, and so on.

We learned it at school from 11 years old. You had to learn this first thing when you got to high school. You've got to learn what a friend we have in Jesus.

What a hymn. What a powerful hymn. This was a man who could see God's hand of providence.

After losing his second fiancée, he'd preach on the streets. He got thrown in prison once. They said, this guy, he'll drive you not standing there.

Preaching with his white hair and white bushy beard, and he goes around helping all the poor people, giving away all his money, living in poverty, and he preaches Christ and tells sinners they need to be born again. This man lived this out until the day he died. What a remarkable story.

What a friend we have in Jesus. Oh, you must have had much bad happen to you. Are you kidding? Or what about William Cooper? He got saved in a mental asylum in England, born again.

Those places were horrendous in those days. In 1774, he wrote a hymn called Behind a Frowning Providence. In other words, behind a frowning providence, God seems to be frowning in providence, but there's something behind that.

Listen carefully, we're going to close. William Cooper was a friend of John Newton, who wrote Amazing Grace. Very close friends.

In 1774, William Cooper wrote this hymn. Listen to it carefully. I'm telling you, it's what we preach tonight.

The first verses of Ruth. It's what Naomi has gone through. All you have around you is darkness and providence.

I know God's hands with me. I know I'm serving the living God. I know he's in control, but it's also bad.

It's devastating. It's hurtful. God, are you there? Listen to this great hymn.

God moves in a mysterious way. His wonders too perform. That's not a verse in the Bible.

That was a verse in the hymn. His wonders too perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable minds of never failing skill, he treasures up his brightest designs, where? In the deepest minds, and works his sovereign will. Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take. The clouds, ye so much dread, are big and mercy shall break, and blessings upon your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble senses, but trust him for his grace. Behind the frowning providence, he hides a smiling face. His purpose will ripen fast, unfolding every hour.

The buds may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan his work in vain. Can't say anything on it.

God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain. Here tonight in this message, this opening of Expound in the book of Ruth, we've just looked at dark threads of providence. And very often those dark threads of providence are the gateway, the doorway into remarkable acts of God's providence in things that you may not see.

Naomi could see God's hand, but she said, it's all dark, all against me, afflictions. It's not nice, but I'm still going to pursue after God. If she had not done that, if she had thrown in the towel, she would miss the most remarkable story.

Like the friend, like the brother who wrote, what a friend we have in Jesus. What if he said, I'm never going to write another hymn. And yet that hymn become Canada's most notable hymn in the entire nation, spread across the world.

People sing it everywhere, but it came out of a broken heart and a tear stained cheek. You pray with me. Father, we love you.

We bless you. Oh God, we don't like the dark shades of providence. We don't like the trials, the better things.

Lord God, we don't understand you always. We cannot see your hand. We cannot see that in the darkest things.

You're actually working out a plan and a purpose. That's going to be beautiful. That's going to be dynamic.

That's going to be necessary while we're watching a husband die and two sons die. Yet you're raising up a Ruth through God. Who's going to be brought right into the family of God.

Who's going to play her part in an extraordinary way. And Lord God, we are praying right now as a church. Lord God, as we pass through this time of mourning, of grief, of loss, Lord God, of questions, of not understanding, of not liking, of kicking against the providence of God.

Lord God, I pray open our eyes. Even when all we can see is darkness and sorrow and bitterness and hardness. Lord God, yet we grasp your hand all the harder.

My God, we keep our eyes upon you because we know that you're a good God and a kind God. And Lord God, there's an hour and a day when we're going to understand the necessity, the importance. Lord God, the impact on many other lives.

And Lord God, we trust you implicitly. We put our faith in you. And my God, we're looking for the house of bread to revive again.

Lord God, lead us into your plan. Lead us into your purpose. And oh God, for all of our friends online in many different countries.

My God, that are seeking, searching for a house of bread. Will you lead them? Will you guide them? Will you raise up many houses of bread? Will you visit out of this dark hour we've walked through? Will you raise up many houses of bread? Will you visit Bethlehem again and provide bread, teaching, preaching,

nourishment, protection, fellowship? Lord God, thank you that you're a gracious and a merciful God and help us to trust you in Jesus mighty name. Amen.

Thank you, Lord Jesus.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/kwEPMpD5jj4.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/keith-malcomson/dark-threads-of-providence/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net