

# The Devil's Plaything

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A.K.A. JAPOC

Just Another Piece of Clay

Isaiah 64:8

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## Act One, Chapter 3

I pulled the Ligustrum bush back to center, lashed it to five stakes that I mounted in the ground and watered it thoroughly to resettle the soil. Some of the branches were damaged so I cut some of the lower ones on the other side to balance it out.

“I’ve been meaning to trim you a bit anyway,” I said aloud talking myself out of being angry with Stacey.

My mailbox had been nestled into a clutch of colorful perennials which were trashed but would be easily replaced. The mailbox was going to require some repair work, but I had the tools for the work. I would get more flowers from the hardware store on the way back from work tomorrow.

It occurred to me to check on Danielle, so I stopped what I was doing and called her from my garage.

She answered the call.

“Hello?” I asked uncertainly.

There was a deep sigh, “I can’t even believe I answered the phone for you!” Danielle’s voice was erratic.

“Wow. Well, I ...I wasn’t sure if I should have called yesterday but this morning. I just felt like...like I should see if you are ok. I’m really sorry about how our date –“

Danielle cut me off, “Look, Malcolm. Like I said, I think you’re a good guy but that baggage you got...it is REAL!”

I was confused, “I wouldn’t take her threats seriously!”

“What?” Danielle was really agitated now. “Man, do you even KNOW who you got in your life right now? Did you know she followed me to my car...with her big, sloppy looking man...that heifer slashed my tires WHILE I was STANDING there! What kinda crazy person does that? She told me if she ever saw me around you again, she was gonna slash a whole lot more than my tires...TWO Tires Malcolm.”

She was huffing now, “I should have made you replace my tires but thank the Lord I have great roadside assistance and I don’t want anything...nothing... to do with you if that crazy ex of your is gonna be involved! That b-, that woman is crazy. Good luck with her Malcolm.”

The phone went silent.

“Wow,” I said aloud. I shook my head. “Stacey?” I pondered aloud again. I was troubled but there was nothing else I could do. I found myself picturing the event Danielle experienced and could do nothing but shake my head in total surprise. Stacey had changed even more than I realized.

I carried the dislodged mailbox into my garage that Stacey had just run down and set it down onto my small boat parked corner to corner in that garage bay. It was now close to 9:00 am and I was due at the church by 10:30 for the late service. I was one of the ushers at my church and I liked feeling useful there.

I arrived at the church in time to get updates about special guests coming to service today. I was stationed near where our guests were to be seated so I needed to pay attention. We roped off a section near the front for our guests. One of our prominent members was a related to a woman running for a circuit court judge position and their whole local, and some not local, family members were expected to be in attendance.

It was good to have something specific to pay attention to today. The whole fiasco around Stacey yesterday and then her popping into my life...my bed last night was just confusing.

She was not the same person I dated in high school; she used to be shy, innocent and almost excessively polite. I don’t know what happened to her in Hollywood. Without our shared past and fond memories, I’d never approach someone like her. She would likely never approach someone like me.

I wondered what her interest was in the guy following her in the mall. He seemed docile despite his size. She was

surely using him for something, but I didn't know him to tell what.

I had missed the Sunday school session today. Stacey's visit and destruction of my property... and my sudden impulse to cook breakfast...perhaps unconsciously in celebration...threw my Sunday morning schedule off.

I had the blues though before Stacey materialized back into my world. Now that she dematerialized out of view, I was back where she found me...in an odd state of disappointment and discomfort that I could not understand. I felt an unhappiness that I could not point to or label – it simply was. I felt just as guilty about having the feeling in the first place.

So much had been going right for me yet I felt so unsteady. It was like I was shuffling along in the dark knowing there was a great chasm up ahead without knowing how far. Not moving forward would not change that fact. I didn't want to think about it any further.

I opened the doors for the next group of attendees, including a young woman and her small baby. She was attractive and wore a classy, yet snug fitting colorful dress. She had a very nice, athletic shape. I caught myself staring and forced myself to look away. Deacon Billy Hardaway caught my eye and giggled at me. He nodded as if to say, "I see you...I see you."

She sat in the center aisle a few rows behind the reserved section. It wasn't long before many of the folks who would be seated in the reserved section came. We, the ushers, were instructed to hold the group and walk them in together. The bulk of the group arrived soon and Deacon Hardaway took the lead in getting them walked in using both entrances to the sanctuary and giving hand signals to another usher on the other side. I followed Deacon Hardaway and handed bulletins to the group as they filed into the pews.

As I walked back up towards the vestibule, I caught the another look at the young lady with the baby. I noticed she

wasn't wearing a wedding ring. I also noticed her bright cheery smile with the young baby. Her joy with the baby made me chuckle inside. I guess it showed on my face as the young woman caught me watching and she gave me a soft grin in acknowledgement of my observation.

After some announcements were made and a presentation by the group of guests was done the choir sang and then we passed the collection plates through the crowded assembly. I was not one of the senior ushers, so I didn't go back with the collected funds.

After the choir sang, our pastor made some other last-minute announcements and acknowledgements and then he instructed the ushers to be seated.

As a matter of procedure, we sat in the very back so that we could observe the crowd and attend to anyone in need. Deacon Hardaway, who was something of a friend though he was much older than me, sat down beside me.

"Cassie...that's her name," he said.

"What?" I was caught off guard.

The deacon leaned toward me and whispered, "The young lady in that *tight* dress you were looking at." He giggled and slapped me on the thigh. "She seems very intelligent, not married. I think you should meet her."

I took a deep breath thinking through my next words. Someone called his attention and he tapped me, "Catch you later." With that he was up and turned around to speak with another usher behind us. Then he excused himself, stepped carefully over me and exited the pew to follow the other usher quietly across the back of the church.

I gazed down at the young woman who was splitting her focus between the baby and pulpit.

The pastor finished some other guidance and then he prayed and asked for God's guidance and presence in his message delivery. Then he began.

“Our text for discussion today comes from Ruth chapter two and I’m going to...my preparations focus on verses one through eleven.  
Let us read together in t.”

The verses were brought on the large video screens and we read all eleven verses.

Then the pastor continued, “Church, there are lot of little lessons in this text but to set the context appropriately, there was a famine in the land. Word went out to the land of Moab where Ruth was staying with her mother-in-law...after her husband died, her brother-in-law died and her father-in-law died. So, they didn’t have any men to provide for them and in those days, women couldn’t own property. So, they were poor...they were broke.”

He looked around the sanctuary, reading the crowd as he typically does.

“Brother Weekly,” he restarted, calling the attention of one of the church deacons, “So, what did they do? They left home...they were in a place of desolation, so they left it. They heard that God was busy providing for people somewhere else and so they relocated to this new place of provision. There’s a life lesson right there!

So, my discussion today has the message Jehovah Jireh provides. Jehovah Jireh provides,” he said emphatically.

The words came up on the screen in bold letters and Pastor Brewer repeated. “Jehovah. Jireh. Provides.”

He studied the room and continued, “And I’m going to structure this discussion around six points on receiving God’s provision. I want to break this down into three points on what we have to do and then three points on what we hope to see as a result.



Point one A, is that... we have to follow God's positioning. Again, follow – God's positioning. That means, we need to pay attention to what God is doing and follow his direction.

Point two A, is that we must ask him to Favor us with provision. He already knows what you need but he wants you to ask. In the text, we see that Ruth put herself in a position to receive God's favor. If your life is full of trouble that you chose, that's not a good place to receive from God.

Point three A. Point three is that we must have Faith in God's plan. Again, the points are:

Follow God's positioning, ask for the favor of provision, and then have faith in his plan.

Now, what do we hope for in our faith? I'm glad you asked.

Point one B, we hope for ...protection from circumstance. Again, Protection. From. Circumstance." He paused to let his words sink in before continuing. "Let the church say, *Protection from Circumstances.*"

The entire assembly repeated his words as commanded and he continued.

"Point two B, we hope for his provision during the crisis." He paused again to let his words sink in before continuing. "Let the church say, *provision during the crisis.*"

The entire assembly again repeated his words as commanded and he continued.

"Lastly, we look to the Lord for Peace in the Calamity. Let the church say, *peace in the calamity.*"

We all did as we were instructed and he resumed his monologue.

“Walk with me through the lesson of Ruth on these six points.

Ruth and her mother-in-law left a place of despair to get to where God was already busy blessing people. So, my bothers in my sisters, if you are in a place of desolation...then it's time for you to heed good advice and leave it. I'm not necessarily talking about a physical or geographic location but I'm speaking to a condition in your heart.

You cannot expect the Lord to help you with your situation unless you are willing to follow him. This means you need to accept that what you've been doing hasn't been working and you have to choose to be obedient to the Holy Spirit.

Do you remember the story of Jesus telling Simon before he called him to be a disciple to go back out and go fishing again?

In Luke chapter 5, verse 4 the Lord says...Go out to the deep. Go out to where it's dangerous. Go out to where there is risk. Simon said, we've already tried what you are asking me to try but ok I'll do it...I'll be obedient.

You see, they tried it under their own power. They hadn't tried it with HIS power. You may be trying to solve your problems using you OWN understanding. But Proverbs 3:5 declares, that we must 'Trust in the Lord and Lean not unto our own understanding'. You need to follow God's positioning and be willing to be obedient to His will and abandon your own. So, Ruth and her mother-in-law left their place of despair to go where God had chosen to be active.”

The pastor walked away from his podium and began to speak off-script it seemed.

“It’s ok that you already worked the field. It’s ok that you studied your books. It’s ok that you went to see the experts. It’s ok that you counted up the cost. It’s ok that you did your part. Sometimes, you still come up short. Sometimes, there was something else you hadn’t considered or something else you couldn’t know about. You didn’t know the market was gonna crash. You didn’t know some political official was gonna make a ruling on Monday morning that made your stock worthless by Monday after the market closed.

You didn’t know that on 911 the trade towers were going to burn down. You didn’t know that a tornado was coming to hit your house.”

Our pastor’s demeanor became very excited now as he continued, “I didn’t know that after 12 years of running a successful business and never getting sued that after selling that business, I would get sued even though I didn’t do anything wrong. I didn’t know I would win the case but lose all my money doing it. I had planned it all out and my plans were ruined by events I could not have foreseen! I was ready to leave my position to go where I felt the Lord leading me and more things went wrong that I ever expected...but I had my faith and the Lord showed me how he could provide for me.”

He trotted back to his podium, “Ok, let me get back to my points. I’m all worked up...God has been GOOD to me y’all.

Alright, point two A was...was what? Bring my points back on the screen AV team.”

The large screen flashed and first point one showed and then point two A. The pastor read it aloud.

“Ask the Lord to favor you with provision. Right? Ok. So, let’s look at the text in verse seven of chapter four. Bring

that back up if you would please.” The verse flickered onto the screen.

“This is the overseer speaking to Boaz,” the pastor explained.

<sup>7</sup> She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.

“She had asked for an opportunity. She didn’t ask for a handout. She asked for an opportunity... to work for what she wanted.

Now, let’s skip down to verse ten to see more of what she does. What does she do? According to the text, she bows down...she humbles herself and says what? Let’s read verse ten together.”

The text for verse ten was now on screen and we all read it together.

*Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?*

“So, she doesn’t do this unless she believes what she’s now been told by Boaz. She doesn’t just talk like she believes; she ACTS like she believes. THIS IS FAITH!

When someone says, meet me at the corner at 5:00 pm and you BELIEVE they will be there at 5:00 sharp...you’re gonna be there at 5:00 sharp...or some of you will try to be and apologize for being late or send ‘em a text at 5:05 and say I’m on my way. My point is that, you ACT like you believe they will be there at 5:00. You don’t even have to have access to a camera pointing at the corner to believe it because you have what? You have faith.”

Pastor Brewer nodded as he looked around the audience. "Brother Mackey...Ruth had faith!" He paused again for effect and walked away from the podium to gaze into our faces.

"So, my brothers and my sisters...if you say you have faith in God you gotta go where he says for you to go or get out of the place you're in that prevents you from being obedient to Him. You gotta ASK for him to help you do his will...not yours...then you GOT TO have FAITH! Without faith, you cannot please God. It says that very thing in Hebrews 11:6. If you read your Bible, you'll know that knowledge of what God can do and who God is was never enough. All he did for the Israelites, you saw how they behaved ALL through the old testament. So, God doesn't care what knowledge you have...he cares that you will have FAITH...in Him. That you believe he will do what he says he will do even when it takes him a while to do it."

The pastor hopped energetically back to the podium, "Ok. So, now let's look at how Boaz responded to Ruth. Let's remember what we're hoping for:

Number one, protection from circumstance, number two, we hope for provision during the crisis and number three we hope for peace during the calamity. Let's look at the text. Bring up verse eight and uh...eight and nine. Let's see what it says:"

Verses eight and nine came up on screen. He held up a laser pointer. "Let's read till here." He pointed to the end of the second sentence in verse nine.

*My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. <sup>9</sup>Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.*

“You see...I didn’t make this stuff up. They didn’t have 911 back in those days. You think women get raped and abused a lot these days; don’t think it was any better back in Ruth’s days. If the Lord is directing you to take a certain action, if the spirit is leading you in a certain direction in your life...don’t you believe the Lord is gonna watch over you as you take that path ...even if it’s a scary or dark and dreary?”

He rapped his knuckles on the podium and took a napkin to wipe sweat from his forehead and face.

“Let’s continue. So, number two is provision during the crisis. So, look...the same men that were a danger to her...Boaz told her to go in the MIDST of them...and get what she needed.

What does the rest of verse nine say? It says, go get water whenever you need it...the same water the men who are a threat to you...are drinking from. I don’t see anything about the men’s water or the women’s water. I only see one mention of water. So, she’s got provision in the middle of a dangerous situation.

Now, they get to talking a lil bit. Boaz is sweet talking in here a lil bit maybe...I don’t know. You can use your imagination but skip down to verse thirteen. Bring that up. This is her response to all Boaz has said and done.”

Pastor Brewer used his laser pointer again to the second sentence in the verse. “Let’s read it together. What does she say back to Boaz?”

*You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant – though I do not have the standing of one of your servants.*

“Church, I’m not making this up. Did I make it up? No! It’s right there in the Bible.”

But, my brothers and my sisters, this text is so full of so many lessons. So, if you keep reading, Boaz provided for her to the degree that she was now able to provide for someone else. You see, God blesses you not just to bless you but so that you can BE a blessing. Keep obeying God and see not only what he will do IN your life, but you will see what he does THROUGH your life.

I believe that God went to all the trouble of preserving this story because this whole life experience...it's not just the history of people's lives that came before Jesus. He could have just listed them in a genealogy like what you see in Numbers. No, the Lord went to all the trouble to tell the actual tale...the tale matters because if any of what we just read today had happened differently we may not have seen the prophecy fulfilled. We may not have the whole new testament.

The story of Ruth's relocation ...or for us a repentance or a change in direction towards God, an act of dependence on God or asking for his favor in expectation of his provision and then the act of FAITH...faith that he will see her through...we would not be reading any of this!"

The pastor wiped his face again and continued, "When you are in a place of desolation in your life, you cannot stay there. You have to get up. You can't get to a new place in your life if you still dragging around old habits. You'll never see the new YOU if you carry the OLD you with you when you get to the new place.

If you got a habit of cussin folk out, you gotta break that habit. If you got a habit of holding grudges, you gotta drop that habit. If you got a habit of spending money before you even get it, you gotta stop that habit. If you got a habit of not taking responsibility for your own choices, you gotta stop that habit.

When you follow God for your position in life instead of your pride, your ego, your insecurity...you give the Lord something HE can work with. But that's just the beginning. Praise the Lord.

The Lord...WANTS...He WANTS you to come to him. Lemme say that again, some people think that we just have a UNIVERSE out there...an impersonal creative energy that threw some life on the wall and whatever stuck just stuck. NO! We have a God that WANTS...he has DESIRES...and his DESIRE...is to be wanted by US. He created us to love us but he wants us to Love him in return. He wants us to come to him...to cry ABBA ...Daddy provide for me.”

The church assembly became restless. Some began clapping and many were nodding.

“Ruth served her mother in law, she had a track record of obedience. She continued to be obedient. She was humble. She was hard-working. But the Lord provided for her and he had a plan for her life. Did you know that she was David’s grandmother?

Did you know that she worked the fields?

Did you know that Ruth served her mother-in-law AFTER her husband died?

Did you know that she humbled herself before Boaz?

You can’t go to God in arrogance looking for his provision. You can’t put your limitations on God’s capacity and expect him Not to give you the very lack you envisioned.

Expect God to bless you...but keep on working in faith, keep on serving...in faith. Keep on praying...in faith. Continue to humble yourself before the Lord ...in faith! Keep on expecting the Lord to provide for you according to HIS riches and not yours, according to HIS imagination and not yours according to HIS plan and not yours.

I’m a living witness! He can bless you during your valley days. That’s when you prove your faith...In the valley. That’s when you get to see how God works miracles...when you have nothing, when you have no way ahead, when you’ve tried it all



and you've done it all and still came up short. God wants to blow your mind. God wants to show you that HIS way is better than your way. Sometimes, you can't see anybody else's way until you've tried something all the way through. Sometimes you need to fail in order to appreciate how much God can do for you.

I know what you're thinking... why does God allow some ppl to have everything and others seem to start out with nothing.

Well... man always has free will to choose what his life will be about. And you can make that choice no matter how much money you have.

The Bible says according to His riches and according to his purpose! He already died on the cross and raised his Son from the dead. He's already provided a path of restoration for US back into his Love. Anything else the MOST HOLY does is favor ...favor that he grants to us the Unholy. We are unholy in our carnal nature which wrestles against the spirit.

One important lesson that you learn by studying the life of Jesus Christ is that God wants us to know him. He wants us to be amazed by him. He wants us to be in awe of him. He wants us to be close to him. But He often let's you see how difficult things can be. It's not black and white. I don't see God following any recipe.

My point is that things are often more complex than we are willing to admit or able to understand and we NEED God's protection from circumstance, we need his provision during the crisis and his peace in the calamity. Circumstance can be too much for us. You WILL need protection from things you cannot see or are powerless to do anything about and you WILL need peace because calamity is coming. I don't know if you will ever get to calm but peace you can have right now! The Lord can give you peace right now... in this very hour...if you'll trust Him. You still gotta do your part but will you Trust the Lord to do His...to do that which is beyond you...to enable you to do the very thing he put you here on this earth to do."

Now, the program transitioned into the invitation portion. The senior ushers stood and took their places at the front of the church to welcome any that took the offer to join the church or ask for prayer.

I checked out a bit at this point until I saw the young lady with the colorful, snug fitting dress and the baby stand. She came forward and eventually it was made clear that she came to join the church.

Deacon Hardaway looked back at me from his place at the front of the church with a huge grin. He and his wife had been trying to set me up with different young ladies they knew just as my mother and sister had been at their church. Church finally ended and I just wanted to get out my suit and sit in silence.

Deacon Hardaway seemed to materialize in front of me as I was making my way to the outer doors of the church. “Hey, if you’re gonna be at the Wednesday night service she might be there.” His eyebrows bounced as his bright eyes radiated joy and his teeth shone in the vestibule lighting.

“She was here last Sunday when you were at your parents’ church and then she came this past Wednesday night. She just told me she’d be there this Wednesday night!” he said slapping my chest with the back of his hand and a huge grin.

“I gotta run. Hope to see you on Wednesday night!”

With that my friend fizzled away into the crowd again which had migrated to where I was standing. After a seemingly endless number of handshakes and hugs I finally managed to exit the church, slide into my car and drive peacefully home. I threw my suit onto the bed and put on some gym shorts. I had an urge to eat ice cream and so I went to the freezer in the utility room. There was a half-gallon of strawberry and a half-gallon of chocolate. Chocolate made my skin break out in pimples, but this is what I wanted.

I turned on the television to a football game that was about half-way into the first quarter while I ate a large bowl of

chocolate ice cream and thought about the girl in the tight, colorful dress. Deacon Hardaway knew something about her, but he was holding out on me. All he said today was, "You need to meet her. I think you'll like her." And that's all I knew but I wanted to know more. I guess I'll have to be at church on Wednesday night.