

Copyright © Two Journeys Ministry

Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

www.twojourneys.org

Please use in accordance with the copyright policy found at twojourneys.org

A Hidden Life, A Glorious Life

Ruth 1-4

As I have meditated on heaven, I've been consumed by the concept of God reviewing his mighty works in history that we might know his glory better and better throughout all eternity. God has sovereignly orchestrated the rise and fall of mighty nations and vast empires to achieve his awesome plans:

Isaiah 40:15 Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

God sits on a throne of glory and pulls the levers and flips the switches and mighty Babylon falls, replaced by Persia; then Persia falls, replaced by Alexander the Great's awesome Greeks; then the Greeks fall under the awesome power of Rome... history rolls on, the earth trembles under such mighty events as these.

But as impressive as all this is, I became even more captivated by God's sovereign orchestrating of seemingly insignificant events in the lives of obscure people leading ultimately to the most glorious empire of all – the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Obscure people, like Naomi, a Jewish refugee – a widow, grieving and empty, becomes the hub of the wheel of a tender family drama of how her daughter-in-law met a Jewish man, settled down and had a sweet little family. The Book of Ruth is such a tale, obscure people doing seemingly insignificant things – having conversations, gleaning the droppings behind the harvesters,

man meets woman, promises made and kept, a baby born. How did such a tiny story make it into the mighty Bible?

Obscure people, seemingly insignificant events.

As I was pondering God's use of obscure people, I came across a quote from George Elliot's classic, *Middlemarch*:

"For the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts: and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life and rest in unvisited tombs."

What I want to do today in one sermon is to sweep across this beautiful little four-chapter short story and give you a sampler of its tender themes.

But I also am determined to preach the gospel from this Old Testament narrative. I want to get to Christ from the Book of Ruth.

Why do I want to get to Christ from the Book of Ruth? Because all scripture is written to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

A story from Charles Spurgeon:

A young preacher was preaching a sermon, and a veteran pastor happened to be in the congregation listening. When he got done, the young preacher asked the old pastor what he thought of the sermon. The man answered, "It was a very poor sermon indeed!" The young preacher was dumbfounded. He asked the older man about this or that aspect, and the pastor agreed that those features were strong enough... "But it was still a very poor sermon." "WHY?" "Because there was no Christ in it!" The young preacher said, "But Christ was not in the text!" Whereupon the old preacher said, "Young man, do you not know that there is a road from every village and hamlet in England to London? In the same way there is a way from every text of scripture to the great metropolis of scripture, which is

CHRIST. And if I have to I will go over a hedge or through a ditch to get there.”

Two central principles:

- 1) The best way to read the Bible is from back to front... from the New Testament back to the Old. Like the best way to understand the entirety of the mighty Mississippi River is to see it at its most awesome, a mile wide at its end... then trace it back to a tiny trickle flowing from Lake Itasca in northern Minnesota, 2348 miles from the Gulf of Mexico. If you stood at that trickle and looked at it, you would have no chance in the universe of understanding its significance. So we read the Book of Hebrews in order to look back on Leviticus; we read the Gospel of Luke in order to stand with the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus and hear Jesus tell us that all the Law, the Prophets, the histories and the writings were about him.
CHRIST IS THE INTERPRETIVE KEY TO THE WHOLE BIBLE
- 2) We take the genres of scripture as they are written and absorb them as God intended. Old Testament narrative transports us into the daily lives of the people... there are sights, sounds, smells we are meant to experience vicariously through the words on the page... the dust of the road back to Bethlehem, the smell of the threshed barley grain, the cool darkness of the night on the threshing floor, the coo of a baby on an old woman's lap

My approach... a few shining moments focused on five individuals

A Widow Made Empty, Then Full: Naomi

A Foreigner at the Fork in the Road: Ruth

A Man of Standing at the Threshing Floor: Boaz

A Baby Cooing in the Lap

A Coming King... the Reason for It All

I. A Widow Made Empty then Full

Ruth 1:21 I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.

A. The Dark Context

1. Dark cloth on which a glittering diamond is displayed
2. The verse right before Ruth 1:1

Judges 21:25 In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.

A kind of spiritual anarchy... the Book of Judges testifies to how deeply corrupt the nation of Israel had become.

3. The judgment of God on wicked Israel... famine

Ruth 1:1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land

Famine: one of the many judgments God had threatened Israel with if they went into sin

Leviticus 26:18-20 ... I will punish you for your sins seven times over. ¹⁹ I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. ²⁰ Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of the land yield their fruit.

4. Bad choices by Elimelech... and his sons
 - a. His name means “My God is my king.”; but he didn’t live like it
 - b. He abandoned the Promised Land and went to the land of the accursed enemies of God, the Moabites
 - c. Other Israelites stayed in Bethlehem and were there when Naomi returned; so his choice was not essential to survival
 - d. Furthermore, his unmarried sons saw no alternative but to take wives from among the Moabite people... Ruth and Orpah

- e. Generally, this had only devastating consequences... usually “Bad company corrupts good morals” and the foreign wives lead astray the hearts of Israelite sons
 - f. Amazingly, in Ruth’s case, it went the opposite direction!
5. But... a light in the darkness: God restores some blessing to Israel by the barley harvest

Ruth 1:6 [When they] heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.

B. Naomi: Sorrow Upon Sorrow

1. First, she was uprooted from her home and extended family
2. Next, she lost her husband... she became a widow
3. Then, she lost both her sons as well... three times bereaved

C. Her Self-Pity: “Call me Mara”

1. Naomi was swimming in these griefs when she tried to persuade her daughters-in-law not to make the trip back with her

Ruth 1:11-13 "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? ¹² Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me-- even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons-- ¹³ would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has gone out against me!"

2. When she came back to Bethlehem, she exposed the depression of her heart by giving herself a new name... her name Naomi means “pleasant”; she wanted to be called “Mara” which means bitter, because God’s hand had gone out against her... she felt that God was against her

D. Naomi: The Focal Point of the Narrative

1. None of what follows would have happened without her
2. The story keeps coming back to her; though Ruth's marriage to Boaz is the main point, the author keeps bringing the story back to her
3. Despite her sorrow and depression, God used Naomi powerfully
 - a. Her decision to go back to Bethlehem started everything
 - b. Her faith in the God of Israel saved Ruth as well
 - c. Her counsel throughout the story... do this, do that; her appraisal of Boaz's character, her advice to Ruth
 - d. Her family connection to Boaz, the kinsman redeemer
4. God can use even the weakest people to accomplish great ends

E. God's Care for Helpless Widows

Psalm 68:5-6 A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. ⁶ God sets the lonely in families

II. A Foreigner at the Fork in the Road

A. Ruth, the Moabitess, stood at an eternal fork in the road

1. Her soul hung in the balance
2. The choice:
 - a. Yahweh and nothing in Bethlehem... Ruth knew no one there
 - b. Everything minus Yahweh in Moab... family connections, prosperity, and Chemosh the evil god of Moab
3. Naomi in her depressing was testing her resolve... forcing her to count the cost
4. Orpah's bad choice... going back to her people and her gods

B. Ruth's Timeless Statement...

Ruth 1:16-17 But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."

C. Ruth is in heaven right now because of that decision!

D. Ruth's Marvelous Character

1. Beyond that decision, we see in Ruth the quintessential godly woman
2. She plays the feminine role wonderfully and makes it so attractive
3. Pious, submissive, diligent,
 - a. Pious: we've already seen that... her faith in the God of Israel is deep and powerful; she knows the gods of Moab, especially Chemosh, are detestable and wicked; the God of Israel is pure light... she yearns for that; she follows God and his laws with zeal
 - b. Submissive: Her best decisions come in submission to the leadership of her mother-in-law... she does what Naomi tells her to do; she does what Boaz tells her to do; her beauty is described perfectly by Peter... a gentle and quiet spirit submissive to the godly leadership of a husband
 - c. Diligent: we see that in her labors gleaning in the field

Ruth 2:7 She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.

d. Humble

Ruth 2:10 At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me-- a foreigner?"

Ruth 2:13 "You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant-- though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls."

- e. Self-controlled, not greedy: she eats only what she needs, and she shares all she has gleaned with Naomi

Thus, Ruth is a portrait of the godly submissive woman as Boaz is of a godly protective man

Headship and submission in beautiful display in these two individuals!

E. A Picture of Christ's Vast Harvest of Souls

1. Ruth's eternal decision at the fork in the road is a picture of the vast and final harvest of Gentiles around the world at the end of the age
2. Listen to it again

Ruth 1:16-17 Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried.

3. The Moabites were a cursed, rejected people

Deuteronomy 23:3 No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation.

4. But her conversion is a foretaste of Gentiles coming to Christ

Ephesians 2:12-13 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

5. Also a picture of Christ's final harvest

Revelation 7:9-10 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

III. A Man of Standing at the Threshing Floor

Ruth 2:1 Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz.

A. Boaz: A Man of Standing

1. Boaz is the paradigm of a godly husband... a man who is pious, powerful, who protects, provides, is kind and humble
2. In all this, he is a picture of Christ, the Bridegroom; he is what all men should be

B. God's Sovereignty in Getting them Together

Ruth 2:2-3 Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter." ³ So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech.

This was NO ACCIDENT! God planned it before time began!

C. The Character of Boaz

1. Power

- a. Man of standing = a man with influence and authority, a man of property, who is well-respected in the community
- b. In charge of his estate... men report to him
- c. Well able to provide for a wife and children

2. Piety

- a. Boaz's first words

Ruth 2:4 Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, "The LORD be with you!" "The LORD bless you!" they called back.

b. Boaz's sense of God's care

[Boaz to Ruth] *Ruth 2:12 May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.*

3. Kindness; Provision; Protection

a. He speaks kindly to Ruth and is gentle with her

b. He makes sure she is protected and cared for...

Ruth 2:8-9 So Boaz said to Ruth, "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. ⁹ Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled."

Ruth is especially captured by his uncommon kindness to her

Ruth 2:13 "You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant-- though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls."

c. He invites her to dip her bread in the vinegar and to sit in the shade

d. He is especially zealous that no one harm her either physically or with insults or rebukes

Ruth 2:15-16 As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, "Even if she gathers among the sheaves, don't embarrass her. ¹⁶ Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don't rebuke her."

4. Esteems Ruth highly

Ruth 2:11-12 Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband-- how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. ¹² May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

Ruth 3:11 All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character.

Godly men esteem the worth of godly women... they don't denigrate them or put them down

5. Humility

He is not full of himself; he is humble toward Ruth when she makes the proposition toward him... he is amazed she would choose him rather than a younger man

He is not full of himself toward the other kinsman redeemer... but allows that man to make his choice

6. Responsibility

- a. What he says he will do, he follows through on
- b. The promise made... we just heard it

Ruth 3:11 And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask.

Ruth 3:13 But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning."

- c. Naomi knows he'll see it through

D. Kinsman-Redeemer

1. This is essential to the story
2. It is part of the way that God provided for poor people in Jewish society

3. A widow with no children was especially vulnerable
4. God set up a system whereby the next of kin, a man, could marry the widow and have children in the name of the deceased man; also the widow and her children would then be provided for and have a place in society
5. The kinsman-redeemer would take on the burdens, sorrows, pains, and needs of the widow and care for them all
6. It is a beautiful picture of Christ as our Savior... he calls us KIN and he redeems us
7. Ruth's Proposal... at Naomi's Advice
 - a. The harvest is completed; it's time for the celebratory feast
 - b. Naomi sees an opportunity... and understands the Jewish law of the kinsman redeemer
 - c. She tells Ruth to bathe and get all prettied up in her nicest dress and go wait at the threshing floor
 - d. Boaz comes happy to the threshing floor... his heart lifted up by the successful harvest and a little sweet wine
 - e. He lays down at the threshing floor to sleep
 - f. Ruth moves out

Ruth 3:7-13 Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. ⁸ In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet. ⁹ "Who are you?" he asked. "I am your servant Ruth," she said. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer." ¹⁰ "The LORD bless you, my daughter," he replied. "This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. ¹¹ And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character. ¹² Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I. ¹³ Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to

redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning."

The image... **spread the corner of your garment over me for you are my kinsman-redeemer**... is exactly parallel to what he says about God's protection of her

Ruth 2:12 May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

Again, it is that masculine image of protection and provision

Under God's wings you find safety and all you need

So also a godly husband can provide for a wife and children, keeping them safe and well-fed

- g. I love how he is also concerned about her reputation... and his... making sure she leaves the threshing floor while it's still dark so that tongues won't wag
- h. Nothing immoral happened... they are both pure people; no sexual encounter before marriage
- i. But reputations are important too
- j. He also makes sure she does not go back to Naomi empty-handed
- k. I also love how she knows that Boaz will take care of everything... he is a man of his word!

Ruth 3:18 Then Naomi said, "Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today."

- 8. The negotiation occurs in Chapter 4
 - a. Though Boaz was a kinsman-redeemer, there was one closer than him
 - b. He summoned the man, sat down with him at the city gate in front of ten witnesses and brought the man to a decision

- c. That unnamed man made a similarly bad choice to Orpah
- d. He walked away from a godly wife and the heritage and fame that would come... perhaps he would have been in Jesus' genealogy instead of Boaz!!
- e. The man acted in fear and selfishness... afraid of what marrying a Moabite widow would do to his reputation and his estate in the future
- f. But Boaz kept his promise! He took on the responsibilities of kinsman-redeemer; he married Ruth, cared for her, and gave her children... as she gave him children

E. Boaz is the MODEL MAN!!

F. Addendum

1. Why was Boaz so willing to marry an outsider... a widow from such a hated and cursed and outcast people as the Moabites?
2. Possibly because of who his mother was... Boaz's mother was the famous Rahab, the harlot of Jericho, whose faith is celebrated in Hebrews 11 and James 2
3. Her powerful story... a reject reclaimed by grace... is the backdrop to her son marrying a Moabite woman

IV. A Baby Cooing in the Lap

Ruth 4:13 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.

A. Babies are a Blessing from God! Look How the Women Celebrated Him

Ruth 4:14-17 The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! ¹⁵ He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."

B. Naomi's Sweet End

Ruth 4:16-17 Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. ¹⁷ The women living there said, "Naomi has a son."

The woman who returned empty was finally made full by the grace of God

V. A Coming King... the Reason for It All

A. This is a Family Heritage Story!

B. David's lineage, how he came to be

Ruth 4:17-22 they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. ¹⁸ This, then, is the family line of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron, ¹⁹ Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, ²⁰ Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, ²¹ Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed, ²² Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.

C. The Grace of God is All Over This Story

1. "Favor" in Chapter 2

Ruth 2:2 And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor."

Ruth 2:10 At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me-- a foreigner?"

Ruth 2:13 "May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord," she said.

2. God's grace is on Israel... giving them grain despite their sin

3. God's ultimate grace is through Christ alone

D. That Grace Comes to Rest in Christ

1. Of course, generations of Jews reading this story think the point is David, the greatest King of Israel

2. But we know the real end of the story
3. The point is not David, but David's infinitely greater Son, Jesus Christ

E. Jesus the Fulfillment of All the Images

1. Jesus is the Bread of Life
 - a. Bethlehem = "house of bread"
 - b. Food is a major part of this story
 - c. Ruth gleaned a full ephah... that's like six gallons of barley... about ten days' worth of food!
 - d. Jesus is the Bread of Life...

John 6:48-51 I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

2. Jesus is the Kinsman-Redeemer

Hebrews 2:11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.

1 Peter 1:18-19 you were redeemed... with the precious blood of Christ

3. Jesus is the Bridegroom...
 - a. John the Baptist called Jesus the Bridegroom, saying the bride belongs to him (Jn. 3:29)
 - b. Jesus called himself the Bridegroom in Mark 2:19
 - c. Paul says all Christian marriages picture the eternal marriage between Christ and the church (Eph. 5)
4. Jesus is the Harvest Feast

- a. Again and again, Jesus likens heaven to a vast feast spread for people from all over the world
- b. Jesus IS the feast in heaven... a feast of love, truth, and glory

5. Jesus is the Child Born to Lead

Isaiah 9:6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:7 He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

6. Jesus is the Wings of Refuge

Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

7. Jesus is the Coming King

VI. Applications

A. Faith in Christ... Like Ruth

- 1. Can you say to Jesus what Ruth said to Naomi?

Ruth 1:16 Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.

B. Hidden Lives Matter

- 1. This story celebrates how a man and woman met each other, married, and raised a family
- 2. There are no miracles in this story... no fireworks
- 3. Just two high-quality people living ordinary lives with dignity and faith

4. Obscure people doing ordinary things... this is how God builds his kingdom one soul at a time

C. What a Woman and a Man Should Be Like

1. Secular feminism would hate this story
2. Most offensive word in the whole account you probably didn't even notice

Ruth 2:5 Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, "Whose young woman is that?"

- a. "Whose"???
- b. Like ownership? This is patriarchy to the max, the 21st century would say
- c. But the essence of biblical manhood is that of men taking responsibility to care for women... first and foremost his wife, secondly their children; to be the wings under which women like Naomi and Ruth can flourish and do their beautiful works
3. If every man treated women and work and responsibilities like Boaz, patriarchy would not be so hated as it is today
4. If you are a man, strive to be like Boaz
5. If you are a woman, strive to be like Ruth

D. Delight in Christ and put your FAITH in him... the Fulfillment of this Little Story! He is our Kinsman-Redeemer

Hebrews 2:11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.

Hebrews 2:14-15 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil-- ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.