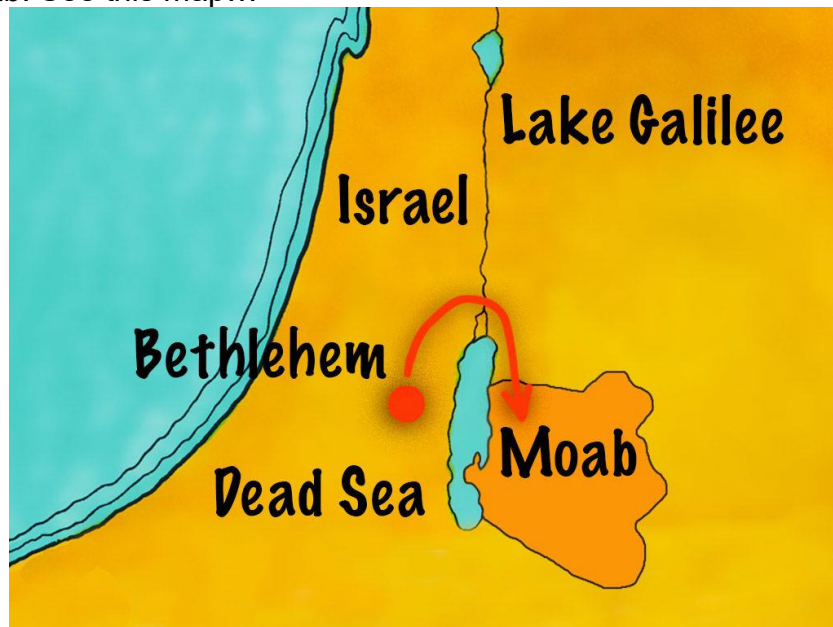


It's been a wonderful journey through this wonderful book of Ruth...and I believe the main lesson we have learned throughout our study is this: God takes care of those who trust in Him. For you see, the accounts we have studied in the book of Ruth points to this fact over and over. Let's go back and remember what we've seen.

In chapter 1 we saw how Naomi and her husband and their two sons were forced to leave their homeland in Judah on account of severe famine and they moved to the southern region, southeast of Israel called Moab. See this map...



Unfortunately, after a season of time, Naomi's husband died. Her sons married Moabite women and for ten years the women proved to be barren. (We'll talk more about this later.) And then, her sons die leaving two widows in the house of Naomi. Even though Ruth chooses to remain with Naomi, chapter 1 ends with Naomi's bitter complaint: "I went away full and the Lord has brought me back empty. The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me."

In chapter 2, we saw an older and a younger widow head out for their long journey to Bethlehem. Alone! What a dangerous journey for two women. Yet, Naomi and Ruth make it to Bethlehem...God supplying their needs along the way. You know, it reminds me of when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, and God rescued them at the hand of Moses, their deliverer, their rescuer, and brought them out of Egypt through a desert... a 40-year journey. But along the way, God sustained them and provided them...food, clothes that didn't wear out...sandals that grew with the kids...eventually delivering them to the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua.

Again, the point being this: God takes care of His people. God will take of you. Think about your life. Think about what He's done for you...He, through His Son, Jesus Christ, delivered you (not from a desert) but from the kingdom of darkness:

Colossians 1:13-14

¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus is our Rescuer...our Redeemer! Praise His name! God provides for us!

Well, Naomi and Ruth arrive to Bethlehem to Naomi's former homeland and Naomi becomes filled with new hope because Boaz appears on the scene as a possible husband for Ruth. Is this an accident? No...there are not accidents with the Lord... Nothing happens by chance to the believer. God placed Ruth in Boaz' fields. God had a plan from the moment Ruth married into Naomi's family. He saw all of this taking place. And He has a plan for your life and He knows what He's doing...even for this country...and even though we might not be able to see it all clearly, right now. Take heart Christian...whatever is going on around us...the Lord is Sovereign...in total control and He will sustain us!

Well, in chapter 2, yes, Boaz meets Ruth, but he doesn't propose to Ruth immediately. He doesn't make any moves at all. At least that's the way it seems at first. So, the chapter closes brimming with excited hope, but also with great suspense and uncertainty about what might happen. Will God supply their needs, yet again?

Yes! In chapter 3, Naomi and Ruth make a risky move in the middle of the night. Ruth goes to Boaz on the threshing floor and says in effect, "Make me your wife... spread your wing over me as my husband." But, we find out that there is another man, who according to Hebrew custom, has a potential prior claim to marry Ruth. Ugh! What we learned in chapter 3 is that the impeccably honest Boaz will not proceed without giving this man his lawful opportunity to marry Ruth. Boaz is such a good guy.

I believed he loved Ruth. He had told his men not to touch her and watch out for her and leave her extra grain. But, he did the right thing. He followed the law. It feels good to do right. Never forget that...and the Lord honors that. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." IT FEELS TO GOOD TO DO RIGHT, because that's of Jesus!

So, chapter 3 ends in suspense once again. Will God provide? And that's what we'll see tonight. The title of this evening's message is: "The Best is Yet to Come." We'll see tonight how the Lord completes the process of rescuing Ruth and Naomi.

Now, as we've seen throughout this book, the book of Ruth is a narrative...a story...an accounting of events...we've just been doing that for three chapters and so, we'll pick up in chapter 4 in verse 1 as the narrative continues:

Ruth 4:1-4

¹ Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, "Turn aside, friend; sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down. ² And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down. ³ Then he said to the redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. ⁴ So I thought I would tell you of it and say, 'Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people.' If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you^[a] will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you." And he said, "I will redeem it."

In that time, the city gate was the place where the town leaders did important business, like the courthouse in our day. So, Boaz prepared his case, (if you will), by going to the place where the town business was done. I believe Boaz knew this unnamed family member would be coming by. Boaz had likely already scoped all of this out.

Now, you'll remember, the redeemer in the Old Testament was the closest male relative to a deceased husband of a widow. And we know that this other man was closer to Naomi's deceased husband than Boaz. Maybe he was a nephew while Boaz was a more distant cousin. We don't know. But we do that this other man had first choice as to whether or not he would have Ruth.

In the Old Testament, the land was always to stay with the family's head, and in this case, that would fall to the relative who was closest to Naomi's deceased husband Elimelech. You see when Naomi and Elimelech moved to Moab, someone else was given rights to use the land. And so now that Naomi has returned, one of Elimelech's closest relatives, either this unnamed guy, or Boaz is given the opportunity to purchase the rights to the land. Whoever the "redeemer" would end up being is also, (according to the Law), to marry the widow of anyone in Elimelech's family, so as to carry on the family line and continue to occupy and use the family land.

Now this guy, (this unnamed kinsman) that Boaz is talking to, seems unaware of the situation with Ruth and Naomi...that they are basically destitute. As widows, they have no way to provide for themselves, other than being beggars and gathering grain as best they can from someone else's fields...being at the mercy of their kindness. Of course, Boaz has gone out of his way to show love and support for Ruth and Naomi by letting Ruth gather grain off his land. Nonetheless, the unnamed redeemer was a closer relative to Elimelech than Boaz, and so he had the first option to redeem the land, so he said that he would.

Well, again, all this is taking place at the city gate, in an official way; and so, all of this is taking place in front of ten elders of the city, so that they can be witnesses of this important business. Boaz, whether he realizes it or not...is actually following God's plan for providing for Ruth and Naomi, but to our dismay, (as followers of this story), the guy says: "I'll take the land." But, we don't want him to redeem it. We want Boaz to do it. So, again there seems to be another setback in the story. Isn't that how life is... There's always setbacks. The question is: How will we handle them. Will we wallow in the uncertainty or keep moving forward? (Charge)

You know, the irony of this setback is that it is being caused by righteousness. Boaz is doing his duty by being honest and saying he's not the closet relative. He could have lied or tried to deceive, but he did the right thing. Listen, do the right thing...trust the Lord with the results. Don't cheat. Don't try to game the system. Have enough confidence in the Lord that the One who put the stars in the heavens can provide the way for you!

So, on the outside looking in...it seems that Boaz might not be the Redeemer...but, there is more information... There is something else that comes with the land.

Ruth 4:5-6

⁵Then Boaz said, "The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth^[b] the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance."⁶Then the redeemer said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it."

So, Boaz has added some more details to the transaction and with this information the guy says, "Uh...no way." Now, we don't know if he is already married or what the situation is... But, he says, "You can have her."

And now they'll see the deal with a handshake...well...the handshake of their day...

Ruth 4:7-8

⁷ Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. ⁸ So when the redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself," he drew off his sandal.

Now this was the custom in Israel in those days. If you were doing a legal transaction, to confirm the transaction, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. **That's not something you do lightly...your sandal meant a lot to you. It mean you WERE SERIOUS! In essence, he was giving up** his right to the land and Ruth...just like he was his sandal. Boaz agreed and said as much...

Ruth 4:9-10

⁹ Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. ¹⁰ Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day."

Boaz was now officially the family's kinsman redeemer and he would marry Ruth to perpetuate the family line and their children would then be heirs of the land and the family's name would continue down through future generations because of Boaz and his kindness. Then the people at the gate of Bethlehem spoke...

Ruth 4:11

¹¹ Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, "We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem,"

This is beautiful...I believe the town had seen this relationship growing, and now they were witnesses to it (Hallmark love story) and they pronounced God's blessing upon them. They offered a blessing to Ruth, that she would be like Rachel and Leah, the wives of Jacob, who ultimately were responsible for the 12 sons of Jacob or Israel. Then they blessed Boaz, that he would continue to act as the kind and gracious man that he was and that he would literally become famous (renowned) because of this act. And guess what... He is! We're still reading about it today! And then a FINAL BLESSING...

Ruth 4:12-13

¹² and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the Lord will give you by this young woman." ¹³ So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son.

The final blessing was on the house of Boaz, which of course, included Ruth. The blessing was that the house of Boaz would be like the house of Perez. Perez was born to Judah and Tamar, and Perez was a direct ancestor to Boaz. You know interestingly, Tamar was similar to Ruth in that she was a widow twice over, before she conceived a child with Judah, and we all know that it was from the lineage of Judah that the Lord Jesus would come.

Now, do you remember when I said at the beginning of the message that Ruth seemed to be barren. The townspeople certainly remembered Rachel, whose womb, the Lord had opened long before. And they prayed that God would make Ruth like Rachel. And so what happened? God honored the prayers of the people, (verse 13), “the LORD GAVE HER CONCEPTION.” God blessed Ruth. But, she had waited for 10 years in being married to Mahlon and yet was childless.

You say, “Maybe they were waiting to have children.” No. They didn’t wait in their culture to have kids like we do in our culture. They had to have farmhands and workers. They had children and their family line would bring forth Jesus...from the house of David. Jesus BORN IN BETHLEHEM. David would be Ruth and Boaz’ great-grandson. You’ll see that in a moment.

Church family, God blesses those who follow His plan and obey Him. But, it doesn’t mean it’s going to be easy. Have they had to struggle? Go through pain, suffering? Yes...both Ruth and Naomi have had tremendous tragedy in their lives, the death of their husbands and Naomi’s sons, trying to get to Bethlehem, barely existing on the kindness of Boaz as Ruth gathered grain. And yet, God provided. Sometimes it takes a while... Sometimes it takes weeks...sometimes months...sometimes years...and you know...you might not want me to say this...but some things in this life we may never see come to fruition until we get to heaven. Some things in life...we may never understand...but, even in that...the Lord’s grace is sufficient to carry us through and the best is yet to come!

You know, we don’t know the whole story of Boaz, but it doesn’t appear that he was married. Was he saving himself for Ruth? We don’t know for sure, but I believe he was a man of God and I believe that was certainly a possibility. And if that was the case, God rewarded His patience...

Let me remind you young people. **Save yourself for the one God has for you. Don’t get in a hurry.** Don’t awaken love too soon. Understand that God has the exact person He has planned for you already picked out and He will bring them into your orbit in His time. Trust Him!

Are we finished? No... We can’t forget Naomi...because this is where we started...with her. Naomi!

Ruth 4:14-22

¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵ He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.”¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse.¹⁷ And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. ¹⁸ Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron,¹⁹ Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab,²⁰ Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon,²¹ Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed,²² Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

Might you wonder why such an emphasis and focus on Naomi? Think about it. **The story began with Naomi's loss and it ends with Naomi's gain. It began with death and ends with birth.**

Naomi had said all the way back in chapter one, that the Lord had brought her back empty from Moab. She was bitter... but joy had returned...and the key is to learn to wait on the Lord and His timing and NEVER stop being faithful to Him. Think about all Naomi has been through. When she lost her husband and sons, and yet, God gave her Ruth. Then God gave Ruth, Boaz; and so, when

barren Ruth married Boaz, God gave the child. The point of the story is made in the life of Naomi, where it all began. God provides! He is the Rescuer and the best is always yet to come.

I think of Naomi holding Obed. A grandmother holding a little child after such a long hard life of so much heartache, trials and pain. But, Moab was not the final destination. Bethlehem was. No, the story didn't end in Moab...it ended in a little Judean village called Bethlehem, with an old grandmother hugging a new grandson, who would one day, himself, become the grandfather of King David.

So church family, what have we seen in our study of the book of Ruth? We've seen something FAR greater than God blessing a few Jews in little town called Bethlehem. No...listen...God was preparing for something far greater...He was preparing for the coming of His Son to this earth in this same little town called Bethlehem. Oh...when Naomi was holding Obed...there was no way she could fathom that from that child would come the Messiah...the Savior of the world.

The book of Ruth teaches us that God's purposes for our lives are often WAY beyond anything we can imagine. That's Ephesians 3:20.

Ephesians 3:20

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Listen, so often God connects us to something far greater than we can see or imagine...He connects us to that which is far beyond ourselves. You see, when we follow the Lord, our lives always mean more than we think they do. For the Christian there is always a connection between the ordinary events of life and the stupendous work of God in history. And you and I may never understand that fully in this life... Just like I don't believe Naomi could have ever realized that in her life.

Dear church family, everything we do in obedience to God, no matter how small, no matter how insignificant, is part of a divine tapestry which God weaves to display the greatness of His power and His wisdom to the world and even to the principalities and powers who try to stop us! You see, there's a deep satisfaction in following Jesus and trusting His hand as we live our lives.

For Ruth: serving a widowed mother-in-law, gleaning in a field, falling in love, having a baby—that all seems pretty normal...pretty mundane...but for the Christian we understand that all these things were connected to eternity...part of something so much bigger than they seemed.

The whole story of Ruth pointed to David and David pointed to Jesus. And Jesus points forward to the resurrection of our mortal bodies, when "death will be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" Oh what a story!

So, whatever you are going through tonight...keep obeying...keep believing...keep gathering grain...having babies...going to the city gates...doing business transactions...knowing that God has a plan for you and us...that most likely goes far beyond our limited understanding. Be faithful in the little and remember, as Christians, the best is yet to come!
