

Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet

Ruth | The Story of Redemption

North Center | October 24, 2021

Pastor Jeremiah Knoop

Judges 12:25–Ruth 1:1

The New Testament begins by listing a genealogy of the family of Jesus.

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ,
the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.

~ *Matthew 1:1*

In this culture, genealogies usually listed just the names of the men, but Matthew decided to mention five women who were part of Jesus's earthly family:

- Tamar (**1:3**) whose story is recorded in **Genesis 38**.
- Rahab (**1:5**) whose story is recorded in **Joshua 2 & 6**.
- Bathsheba (**1:6**) whose story is recorded in **2 Samuel 11**.
- Mary (**1:16**) whose story is recorded **Matthew 1**.
- ...and Ruth (**1:5**) whose story is told in the book that bears her name, *the book of Ruth*.

All of these women have amazing stories of how God brought them into the family line of Jesus, and the story of Ruth is certainly no exception.

One commentator suggested that Ruth might be “*the most beautiful short story ever written.*”¹

- It's just four chapters, but it's profoundly beautiful!

CONTEXT

If you have your Bible opened, lets look at verse 1 together:

*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 dwell in the country of Moab,
he and his wife and his two sons.*

~ *Ruth 1:1*

1. The first thing we notice in the story of Ruth is that it takes place “*in the days when the judges ruled*” (**1:1**).

And if you remember anything about the book of Judges, you remember that it was a time of moral and spiritual collapse.²

¹ F. B. Huey, *Ruth, The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 3, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 509; quoted in John Piper, *A Sweet & Bitter Providence: Sex, Race, and the Sovereignty of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 12.

² Yet, as God's people were running further and further away from Him, He was continuing to pave the way for the promised Hero to come. The Messiah.

2. The second thing we notice in this story is that there is a famine in the land (**1:1**).³

This shouldn't be surprising. Before God brought them into the promised land, He warned them that while obedience would result in blessing and disobedience would result in cursing – including “*cutting off their supply of bread*” (**Lev. 26:26**),⁴ and we know from the story of Judges that the landscape was covered with disobedience. “*Everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes*” (**Judges 21:25**).

There are a number of reasons why God might have brought a famine across the land of Bethlehem, but one of the reasons was as a means of disciplining His people so that they would repent and turn back to Him.⁵

But, instead of repenting, the story of Ruth begins with an Israelite family running away.

3. The third thing we see is a man named *Elimelech* taking his wife, *Naomi*, and their two sons, *Mahlon* and *Chilion*, and moving to the country of **Moab** where they stayed for about 10 years. During that time, the two sons marry women from Moab, Orpah & **Ruth**.

Not only did Elimelech turn his back on the land that God had given and move his family to a pagan land (*which had a history of oppressing God's people*),⁶ but then he let his sons marry pagan women – which God had forbidden (**Deut. 7:3–4**).⁷

To make the situation even harder (especially for Naomi), during the 10 years that they were there, neither of the daughter-in-laws had children. And then, by the end of those 10 years, all the walls in Naomi's life had come crashing down as all the men in her family died.

By the time we've finished reading the first 5 verses, Naomi's life has absolutely shattered.

- She is a woman, alone in a foreign country...
- with no husband and no sons...*and no hope* – or so she thinks.

Maybe some of you here feel like you can relate to Naomi on some level.

- For the past ten years, it's felt like one hardship after another, and Naomi is tired of hard.
- And her situation has made her **bitter**.

In fact, she tries changing her name to **Mara** because she believed that God had dealt bitterly with her.

³ This isn't the first time we've seen a story in the Bible that begins with crisis.

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| • Genesis 3 | God's people are exiled from the Garden of Eden |
| • Exodus 1 | God's people are slaves in Egypt |
| • Judges 1 | God's people are making peace with a culture of sin |
| • Ruth 1 | God's people are facing a famine in the land |

Why this hardship? One answer is simply: *because you are a child of God*. Hardship has always been part of the history of God's people.

⁴ See also: Lev. 26:3–4; Deut. 28:17–18, 23–24.

⁵ See Deut. 30:1–3, 8–10.

⁶ See Judges 10:6.

⁷ See also: Deut. 23:3–6.

But she said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara,
for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.”
~ **Ruth 1:20**

How often have you felt that way towards God?
How often have you looked at the hardships in your life and felt like God isn't treating you well?
How often have you justified a bitterness in your heart because it doesn't feel like God has been good to you?

Instead of feeling loved and cared for by God, Naomi felt like God was out to get her.
In a conversation with her two daughters-in-laws, she says,

...It grieves me very much for your sakes
that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me!
~ **Ruth 1:13**

At North Center, we sing songs that declare,

“All my life, You have been faithful. All my life, You have been so, so good.”

Now that's gloriously true; **but**, if we are honest, it doesn't always feel that way.

- To Naomi, it didn't *feel* like God was “*being faithful*.”
- It didn't *feel* like He was “*so, so good*.”

Lesson: Church, one of the lessons that we are supposed to learn from this story is that God is calling us to **fight bitterness with truth**.

Regardless of the bitter circumstances in your life...

- God is the Author of your story (***Psalm 139:16***)⁸
- All that He does is good (***Psalm 119:68***)
- He is working all things together for your good (***Romans 8:28***)
- He has never left your side, and He never will (***Deuteronomy 31:6, 8***)

These things are true regardless of the painful circumstances that God is working in your life.⁹

By the time we get to the end of the story, we see that God was never “against” Naomi like she thought. Rather, He was using her bitter circumstances as a means of unspeakable grace in her life.

THE PLOT CONTINUES...

⁸ **That's true regardless of how you feel.**

⁹ “Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace; behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face” (William Cowper [1731–1800], “God Moves in a Mysterious Way”).

Eventually, Naomi learns that God has taken away the famine in Bethlehem, and so she decides to return home (1:6). Initially, both of her daughters-in-laws follow her, but then Naomi convinces them that there is nothing for them in Bethlehem, and she pleads with them to start a new life in their homeland.

In a profoundly emotional scene, Orpah kisses Naomi and returns home, but “Ruth clung to Naomi” (1:14). And then Ruth gives one of the most powerful speeches in the entire Bible.

But Ruth said:

“Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you;

For wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge;

Your people shall be my people, **and your God, my God.**

Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried.

The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me.”

~ Ruth 1:16–17

Q. Why did Ruth leave everything behind in Moab – when the only thing that awaited her was a life of poverty and singleness?

A. One answer might be because of her love for Naomi, but (as we will continue to see) the even deeper answer is because she had come to put her faith in Naomi’s God.

- “Don’t make me turn back because your God is my God.”

Chapter one ends with Naomi & Ruth back in Bethlehem “at the beginning of barley harvest” (1:22) which turns out to be impeccable timing!¹⁰

Since neither Naomi or Ruth have husbands to take care of them, Ruth goes out into the nearby fields to glean the leftovers of the harvest in order to provide for her and Naomi.

III. This is kind of like what I used to do when I worked at **Applebee’s** before I was married! I couldn’t believe how much food people just left on their plates, and we were supposed to just throw it all away. Well...instead of throwing away perfectly good food, I would take the plates back into the kitchen and dump the leftovers in a bunch of “to go” boxes that I would bring home! 😊

That’s called “gleaning” – except what I was doing wasn’t technically legal. What Ruth was doing, however, was totally legal.

Q. The question is: why would a foreigner like Ruth be allowed to glean in somebody else’s field?

A. Because God cares for the widow and the foreigner...and so He made a law **in Leviticus** that provided for somebody like Ruth.

¹⁰ Almost as if God had written the script Himself!

When you reap the harvest of your land,
 you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap,
 nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest.
 You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger:
 I am the Lord your God.
 ~ **Leviticus 23:22**¹¹

Isn't God good! When He was giving His people His good laws back in Leviticus, He was looking ahead to the day that Ruth would find herself a stranger in the Promise Land. He was caring for her since before she was born!

But the story gets better!

She ends up gleaning in the field of a guy named Boaz, and Boaz shows Ruth a kindness that is totally unexpected during the time of the judges.¹² And...he's single! 😊

Ruth works hard that first morning (2:7), and then Boaz returns from a trip to town, and he sees Ruth for the first time! The Bible says that he took notice of her (2:10, 19)! 😊

Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers,
 "Whose young woman is this?"
 ~ **Ruth 2:5**

Translation: "Is she single?!" 😊

His servant tells Boaz everything he knows about Ruth, and then Boaz goes over to Ruth and "makes a move"! And it's sweet and kind and compassionate and very, very subtle.

He says, "*Please...don't go looking for food in any other field. Stay here, and I promise to take care of you*" (see: 2:8–12, 15–17).

And then he prays a blessing over her. He says,

The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel,
 under whose wings you have come for refuge.
 ~ **Ruth 2:12**

Boaz knows why she's come to Israel: she left her old life because she was trusting in God to protect her and to provide for her (*just like an eagle protects her babies underneath her wings*), and Boaz is praying that God would reward her for her faith.

¹¹ When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleaning of your harvest...; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the Lord your God (**Lev. 19:9–10**); see also: **Deut. 24:19**.

¹² Remember how the book of Judges concludes: "*everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*" When people only do what is right in their eyes, that rarely results in a life of sacrificial kindness.

Later on that day, when it came time to eat, Boaz invited her to eat with him (2:14) – which was bold and sweet and kind.¹³ And then he makes sure she has extra food to take home to Naomi (2:14, 18).

Later on that day, when everybody gets back to work, he instructs the workers to let extra grain fall to the ground so that Ruth has even more to glean (2:15–17). *Do you think Ruth noticed!* 😊
The first half of the day, there's a little grain, but all of a sudden, in the second half of the day (after Boaz has met her) all of sudden there's a trail of grain in front of her!

He is communicating (both through his words and through his actions) that he cares for her.

And Ruth is going to remember that day: not only Boaz's kindness, but also the picture of being under the wings of protection.

At the end of the day, Ruth goes back home and tells Naomi about everything that had happened, and Naomi can hardly believe it. Naomi looks at all that Ruth brought back, and she says,

“Where did you glean today? And where did you work?
 Blessed be *the one who took notice of you.*”
 ~ **Ruth 2:19**

And then Ruth said,

“*The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz*”
 ~ **Ruth 2:19**

And in that moment, something inside of Naomi changes.

At the sound of Boaz's name, a spark of hope flickers to life inside of Naomi's bitter soul. She knows that name!

Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law,
 “Blessed be he of the Lord,
 who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!
 And Naomi said to her,
 “This man is a relation of ours, one of our close relatives.”
 ~ **Ruth 2:20**

If you're reading from the _____ verse 20 says,

- **ESV** | “*The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.*”
- **AMP** | “*The man is a near relative of ours, one who has the right to redeem us*”
- **NIV** | “*That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.*”

¹³ **Illustration:** Inviting Liz to sit by me during class!

The Hebrew word that Naomi uses to describe Boaz literally means “*one who redeems, [or one who] acts like a kinsman*”.¹⁴ In other words, because he was a close relative of theirs, he had the opportunity of redeeming them from a life of poverty.

Q. Where is Naomi getting this from?
A. You’ll never guess. **From Leviticus!**

Once again, God was looking out for His people by giving them good laws!

If one of your brethren becomes poor, and has sold some of his possession,
 and if his **redeeming relative** comes to redeem it,
 then he may redeem what his brother sold.
 ~ **Leviticus 25:25**¹⁵

God’s heart for the orphan and the widow is so big that He gave His people laws to protect them in their most vulnerable situations, and one of those laws is the law of the **kinsman-redeemer**.¹⁶

- He can buy back the land that her family sold so that it can stay in the family as a means of income for Ruth & Naomi.
- And Boaz could marry Ruth so that Naomi’s family name wouldn’t be forever lost.
- Not only was a kinsman redeemer *able* to do this, he was *expected* to.

Naomi knows this law, and at the sound of Boaz’s name, a spark of hope flickers to life inside or her. Though her land has been sold and her future appears dead, Boaz can redeem all of it.¹⁷

Naomi sees this as a gift from the hand of God (*just as she’s seen everything else as coming from the hand of God*), and she instructs Ruth to stay close to Boaz (**2:22**), and so that’s what Ruth does (**2:23**).

That brings us to the final two chapters. While **chapters 1–2** have covered a period of about ten years, **chapters 3–4** tell the story of just two days in Ruth’s life.

¹⁴ “migōālênū” [מִגְוֹאֲלֵנֻּ]; Strong’s Concordance: <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/1350.htm>

¹⁵ See also Lev. 25:47–48.

¹⁶ He can restore the years that the locust have stolen away (Joel 2:25). The law is a mirror into the heart of God. Over and over in the Bible, we see God as a redeemer, deliverer, rescuer “Therefore say to the children of Israel: ‘I am the Lord; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments’” (**Exodus 6:6**).

¹⁷ Here’s what Naomi knows about Boaz:

- He is kind (2:4)
- He has eyes for Ruth (2:5, 10)
- He cares for Ruth (2:7–9)
- He is a godly man (2:12)¹⁷
- He has pursued Ruth (2:14)
- He is generous (2:19)
- He is a close relative (2:20)
- Which means that he can redeem them if he chooses (2:20)

In **chapter 3**, Naomi decides to play “matchmaker” with Ruth & Boaz! At some point during the barley harvest, she plans this wonderfully romantic setting where Ruth goes to Boaz in the middle of the night, and then there’s this powerful moment where Ruth reminds Boaz of the words he said to her on the day they first met.

There beneath the stars of Bethlehem, Ruth comes to him and says,

... Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a kinsman-redeemer.
~ **Ruth 3:9**

It was as if she said, “Remember the day we met, and you prayed that God would reward me for seeking refuge under His wings? And then remember how you comforted me and cared me and pursued me? And then remember when you asked me to stay under your protection. Well... I accept! For some reason you chose me, and I choose you back.”¹⁸

Boaz is overjoyed! This is what he hoped for but thought it was too good to be true. But... there’s a problem.

Boaz tells Ruth,

Now it is true that I am close relative;
However, there is a relative closer than I...

[which means that legally he has the first opportunity to act as your kinsman redeemer and marry you]

¹⁸ That night, beneath the stars of Bethlehem, a man and woman communicate their desire for each other, but what makes this moment so breathtakingly beautiful is that they don’t ruin it by having sex outside of marriage. Not only is it incredibly romantic, but it’s also clean and pure.

God created sex as a wonderful, beautiful, and powerful gift within the covenant of marriage.

- After God brought Adam & Eve together as husband and wife, the Bible says that “*they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Gen. 2:25).*
- We read the same thing in the New Testament: “*Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled...*” (Heb. 13:4).

In that moment, Boaz and Ruth both show the strength of their character. The scene is romantically charged. It’s dark. They’re alone. They have both communicated their desire for each other... and she returns home with zero regrets!

Lesson: we live in a culture that has almost no concept for the sacredness of marriage and the beauty of sex.

- For so many people, marriage has become little more than a relationship of convenience
- And sex has become so commonplace outside of marriage that you are seen as strange if you are a virgin.

III. Shortly before Elizabeth and I were married, I was working as a server at Applebee’s, and I remember one evening, being surrounded by a bunch of my coworkers in the kitchen, trying to explain why Liz and I were waiting 0[for marriage. It was like they had never even heard of such a thing before.

To all the young men and women in our church, God is calling you to embrace a higher view of marriage and sex than the cheap imitation you see in the world around you. Boaz is going to wait for his wife, and in that moment, Ruth was not yet his wife.

But if he does not want to perform the duty for you,
Then I will perform the duty for you, as the Lord lives!...
~ *Ruth 3:12-13*

The very next day, Boaz goes into town to confront the man who is a closer relative than Boaz, but the man declines because he believes that marrying this foreign woman who ruin his own inheritance (4:5).¹⁹

So, there in the city gate (where all the official business took place) Boaz made the official announcement that he was going to act as the kinsman redeemer by buying back the land that Naomi's family had sold (so that it would stay in the family) and that he intended to make Ruth his wife (4:9-10).

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife;
And when he went in to her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son
~ *Ruth 4:13*

...And they called his name Obed.
He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.
~ *Ruth 4:17*

And eventually...the father of Jesus!

As we close, let me offer 3 things that I think the Author wants us to learn from this love story.

1. Moabite blood runs through the veins of Jesus.
 - Meaning: the blood that poured down Calvary was from the nations and for the nations.
 - God moved mountains in order to bring this foreigner into His family, and He is moving mountains for the same reason today.
 - The story of Ruth reminds us that this Gospel is for all the nations, and that we are commanded to be making disciples of all the nations.

2. The sovereign kindness of God is at work behind every moment in your life.
 - God used Elimelech's sin to bring his family to Moab.
 - God used the son's forbidden marriage to a Moabite woman to make Ruth part of Naomi's family.
 - God used the death of Ruth's husband to make her single.
 - God brought them to Bethlehem at the beginning of the harvest.

¹⁹ This raises the question, "Why would Boaz give his life (and his bed) to a foreigner? It makes sense that Boaz would do this for a blood-relative, but Ruth is a foreigner.

Here's the beautiful thing about the providence of God! Out of all the people in Bethlehem, Boaz is the one man who knows something about foreigners in the family of God. "Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab" (*Matthew 1:5*) – the Canaanite prostitute. In the sovereign providence of God, Ruth gleaned in probably the only field in the land whose owner was the son of a foreigner!

- God led Ruth into the field of a single man who was a close relative of Naomi, which put him in a position to redeem them.
- And, in the providence of God, Boaz was also the son of Rahab the Canaanite prostitute (*Matt. 1:5*) – which meant that he had a personal history of God bringing pagan foreigners into His family.

Friend, God knows what He is doing with your life!

3. This story paves the way for the ultimate kinsman redeemer, Jesus Christ.

- God made a way for Jesus to become our Redeemer by making Him our Brother!

For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one,
 For which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,
 Saying, “I will declare Your name to My brethren...”
 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood,
 He Himself likewise shared in the same,
 that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death,
 that is, the devil.
 ~ *Hebrews 2:11–14*

- He became our Brother so that He could redeem us from a life of spiritual poverty and death.
- And then after sacrificing everything to purchase our salvation, He made us His bride.

The Bible says that all of us were once like Ruth.²⁰ We were “strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (**Eph. 2:12**), but Jesus chose us (**1:4**) and then (as a church) He’s made us His bride (**5:25–27**) so that instead of living in the poverty of our sin, we would inherit the riches of His righteousness forever.

This is the redemption story that Ruth is pointing toward.

- It’s about the one who leaves everything behind to find their refuge in God.
- And it’s about the Redeemer who rescues the one who calls on His Name.

PRAYER

²⁰ In fact, when we finally get into the New Testament, we will see that this is precisely the message of Ephesians.