

Portrait of Provision – Book of Ruth Pt 4 (week 2)

Ruth 1.14-18, 22

The Word of God Speaks Over our Life.

In verses 16-17 we have some of the most beautiful language in the entire Old Testament. Ruth here utilizes the only two things she has to create this clinginess to Naomi

- Ruth has her Presence
- Ruth has her Promise (Words)

Words are powerful things.

The Power of Words, The Tools of Creativity

In 1960, two men made a bet. There was only \$50 on the line, but millions of people would feel the impact of this little wager. The first man was Bennett Cerf, the founder of Random House. The second man was named Theo Geisel, but you probably know him as Dr. Seuss. Cerf proposed the bet and challenged that Dr. Seuss would not be able to write an entertaining children's book using only 50 different words.

Dr. Seuss took the bet and won. The result was a little book called *Green Eggs and Ham...*

- James Clear, "The Weird Strategy Dr. Seuss Used to Create His Greatest Work," JamesClear.com (11-25-13)

This could seem at first like a lucky fluke or fortunate accident.

But the truth is that this gifted author plays this game with 50 words because there is power in setting boundaries...when you only have a few tools, you learn to use those tools to their maximum ability.

- Success is NOT found in griping and whining about what you DON'T have
- It is found in maximizing the power and effectiveness of what you DO have
 - ♣ Artists are limited to the type of art they choose (paints, charcoal, pencils, clay, etc..)
 - ♣ Athletes have to learn what they can do best and then exploit that gift

YOU DON'T HAVE TO HAVE EVERYTHING, YOU JUST HAVE TO GET EVERYTHING OUT OF WHAT YOU HAVE.

And Ruth does just this!

- She's on this journey with basically nothing
- She doesn't have a mule, a savings account, a 401k or anything else tangible to offer
- So she says, "here's what I've got...my presence and my words."

BUT WITH THESE LIMITED RESOURCES WE SEE THAT EVERYTHING IN THE STORY TURNS ON THIS BEAUTIFUL EXCHANGE! HER COMMITMENT, HER AMAZING EXPRESSION OF COMMITMENT CHANGES EVERYTHING.

- So the challenge for us is to jump to performance:
 - ♣ I've got to commit like Ruth committed.
 - ♣ I've got to be dedicated like she was.
 - ♣ I've got to be the kind of person who does it all!

But there is a powerful and important perspective if we flip that over and say, "okay, but what if I'm Naomi?"

- What happens if I'm the one who's hearing the words of the provision of God as they are clinging to me and committing to me?
- What happens if God's provision seems to cling to me even when I've tried to push it away?
- The power of Naomi's story is not found in seeing myself as the one who committed, or as the one who gave my life to a lost cause.

What are we to make of a God who not only gives us exactly what we need, exactly how we need it, but also, when we in our small-minded ways try to ignore or get away from the gift of His grace, THIS GOD MAKES SURE THAT THE GIFT IS MORE STUBBORN THAN THE RECEIVER OF THE GIFT??

NOW TAKE THIS TO THE BEAUTIFUL WORDS OF RUTH HERSELF:

Ruth 1:16-17

¹⁶ But Ruth said, “Do not urge me (provision/grace/legacy/mercy/hope) to leave you or to return from following you.

For where you go I (provision/grace/legacy/mercy/hope) will go, and where you lodge I (provision/grace/legacy/mercy/hope) will lodge.

Your people shall be my (provision/grace/legacy/mercy/hope) people, and your God my God.

¹⁷ Where you die I (provision/grace/legacy/mercy/hope) will die, and there will I (provision/grace/legacy/mercy/hope) be buried.

May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me (provision/grace/legacy/mercy/hope) from you.”

THE BEAUTY OF THIS MOMENT IS NOT JUST IN RUTH SAYING SOMETHING SO POWERFUL, BUT IN SEEING WHO SHE SAID IT TO.

- She said it to someone who had already said, “leave me, go back home, I don’t need you with me.”
- This isn’t the good being rewarded for getting it right, this is the gracious reward for the one going home empty and bitter!!!

That sounds nearly heretical to some of us.

What? God stubbornly giving something we don’t want? I thought the Holy Spirit was a gentleman, never imposing, only showing up when invited? What’s all this talk of sovereign imposition???

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE?

BECAUSE GOD’S WORD OVER US ISN’T JUST AN AFFIRMATION OF WHAT WE’VE ACCOMPLISHED, SOMETIMES IT’S A PROPHETIC DECLARATION OF WHERE WE’RE GOING!

- Sometimes God has to speak over our lives in a way that leads us to where we’re supposed to be!
- Sometimes God isn’t waiting for us to get it right, He’s telling us what right looks like so we can know which way to go!

GOD WILL DO THIS AS WELL! “NO YOU’RE NOT ALONE, YES I AM YOUR HEALER, THIS IS A LIGHT AND MOMENTARY AFFLICTION, YOUR TROUBLES ARE REAL BUT I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD....”

- He’s speaking future over us so what the enemy or the sickness or the frustration or the stress doesn’t have the power to overwhelm us!

Let me take you to the New Testament, so you don’t think I’m just telling stories around the campfire.

John 21:4-8

⁴ Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, “Children, do you have any fish?” They answered him, “No.” ⁶ He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself

into the sea. ⁸ The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

Peter was trying to get away. Peter was running back to his old life. Peter was hitting the eject button on everything Jesus had called him to because of his betrayal on the night of Jesus' arrest!

- Peter and Naomi sound the same.
- Telling everyone, "go, return each of you to where you came from and may the Lord deal kindly with you..."
- On the shoreline Jesus said, "**Nope**, your bad decisions are NOT stronger than My love and calling."
- And on the road Ruth said, "**Nope**, provision isn't done Naomi, it's just getting started."
- **And wherever you are right now God says, "Nope, if I was finished with you, you wouldn't be here...you wouldn't be listening to this...your heart wouldn't be longing for more...you wouldn't care so much – MY CLINGING PROVISION IS CONNECTING YOUR LIFE TO MY PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE!"**

Peter is guilty, confused and tired...

Naomi is depressed, bitter and emotionally weak...

BUT!!!

WHEN WE ARE IN NO CONDITION TO RECOGNIZE HIS WORK, GOD CONTINUES TO SPEAK HIS PROVISION OVER US!

Ruth's words in verses 16-18 are the most resonant syllables of provision and grace that have entered this woman's ears and soul in years.

Ruth 1:16-18

16 "But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

17 Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." 18 And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more."

LOOK AT VERSE 18!

When Naomi came face to face with this word, there was nothing more to say!

- All her doubts lost their voice
- All her excuses lost their voice
- All her reasons lost their voice

NAOMI TRIED TO TELL RUTH, "I'M FINISHED," BUT RUTH SIMPLY REPLIED, "OKAY, BUT I'M NOT FINISHED WITH YOU!"

Once God speaks the best thing that can happen is for every other voice to contract spiritual laryngitis.

There is this expression: "Words Make Worlds," and I believe it's true...the words we allow to be most important to us will create the atmosphere and environment of our life!

Here's your takeaway: **Sometimes it's not what you speak that shapes your life, it's when you stop speaking...it's what you allow to be the last word that creates the world you live in.**

- I know we pull that verse that there's life and death in the tongue
- Okay, so doesn't that include when we stop wagging our tongue as much as anything?

LET GOD HAVE THE LAST WORD.

FOR SOME OF US, IT'S TIME TO "SAY NO MORE" ABOUT SOME THINGS BECAUSE THE VOICE THAT SAID, "LET THERE BE," HAS ALREADY SPOKEN...DON'T ADD TO HIS PROPHETIC DECLARATION, REST IN IT!

And even though Naomi didn't ask Ruth to come back with her, and even though Naomi said she'd come back "empty" even with Ruth standing right beside her...

After that first day when the harvest (v 22) ceased to be confined to the fields, but began to pour into Naomi's kitchen THROUGH THE VERY GIRL NAOMI HAD TRIED TO LEAVE BEHIND...

How often did Naomi turn those word back over in her head, "do not urge me to leave you...?"

And now, instead of trying to convince Ruth to leave, how much had those words become a song of hope, and provision to this old widow?

And when Jesus declares over his church in **Matthew 25**, "yes, I am with you always, even to the end of the age," how much different is our life if we believe that he actually means it?

How much difference is our life if we don't hear that as a threat like he's watching over her shoulder, but we hear it as the clinging provision of heaven, because he's committed to walking with us through thick and thin?

The Hope of God Replenishes our Life.

- **Ruth is the means of connection that brought God's provision and healing to Naomi's life!!**
- The harvest had already started (v. 22), but Naomi needed a way to be connected to the harvest
- Ruth becomes the FAITH that Naomi doesn't have the strength to muster...this seems strange to some of us who believe we have to earn everything we get from God - **but there are times when God sends us a gift, the gift of connection to the provision He has already provided!**

This is faith...faith has never been about believing hard enough, it has always been about connection to the One who is capable of rescuing us!

This is why we continue to say, "come to church, read your Bible, pray, spend time with other believers, sing, worship, etc..."

WE DO NOT RECOMMEND ALL OF THESE THINGS BECAUSE THEY GET US TO GOD...WE PRESENT THESE PRACTICES AS WAYS THAT GOD HAS GIVEN US TO ALLOW HIM INTO OUR LIVES!

NAOMI HADN'T LOST GOD'S PROVISION, SHE WAS SIMPLY UNABLE TO RECOGNIZE IT EVEN THOUGH SHE WAS SURROUNDED BY IT! SO GOD SENT RUTH, A FRIEND WHO WOULD RATHER DIE THAN ALLOW NAOMI TO WALK ALONE.

If we assume that God is waiting on us to do something to wake Him up or convince Him to show up, we have already missed the point - no one bribes God, no one forces God.

- when God says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," He means it
- and just because we don't feel like He's around, doesn't mean He's not around!
- He's never left you, He loved you enough to send His Son to die for you, and He's not going to walk back His own promise or His own word!
- Your circumstance is NOT broken enough to scare Him away, make Him nervous or push Him out of the picture

- God is not waiting to show up, He's already here...He's already near...He's already arrived with healing in His hands and mercy in His eyes, with provision in His arms and forgiveness in His heart!

WE DON'T CONJURE GOD LIKE A DEAD SPIRIT FROM THE GREAT BEYOND, WE OPEN OUR EYES AND HEARTS AND FIND OUT HE'S BEEN SPEAKING ALL ALONG!

Ruth 1:22

²² So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

- Naomi had been given Ruth as a gift to connect her to God's provision
- Naomi had arrived home at the beginning of the barley harvest
- And it was in this place that Naomi was able to be restored...to heal.

GOD DOESN'T EXPECT YOU TO "GET BETTER" ON YOUR OWN...HE GIVES MORE GRACE.

WHEN YOU CAN'T SEEM TO REMEMBER WHO YOU WERE WHEN THINGS WERE BETTER, WHEN THE STING OF DEATH HAS TOUCHED YOUR VERY IDENTITY...DON'T LOOK DOWN, LOOK UP: GOD HAS NEVER ALLOWED A PLACE OF DEATH TO EXIST ALONE.

John 19:40-41

41 Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.

YOU HAVE NEVER ENTERED A SINGLE MOMENT OF TRIAL THAT WAS NOT COMPLETELY SURROUNDED BY VICTORY, BECAUSE THE GOD WHO HAS NEVER BEEN DEFEATED HAS NEVER EXPERIENCED A SINGLE MOMENT WHEN HIS GOODNESS WASN'T SURROUNDING YOU IN YOUR DIFFICULTY!

What if I told you that the moment you choose to leave everything else behind and allow the trajectory of your life to be defined the Presence of God, on that journey you're walking into a harvest that just began?

The blessing that Bethlehem declares over Naomi in chapter 4 is a powerful revelation:

Ruth 4:14

Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer."

The word "this day" is the Hebrew word *yowm* which can indicate a team period from a single 24 hour day all the way up to a lifetime!

**Naomi had never been left without a Redeemer.
And neither have you.**