

# Portrait of Triumph

Ruth 4:11-22

## i. Intro – a theology of triumph

Two shopkeepers were bitter rivals. Their stores were directly across the street from each other, and they would spend each day keeping track of each other's business. If one got a customer, he would smile in triumph at his rival.

One night an angel appeared to one of the shopkeepers in a dream and said, "I will give you anything you ask, but whatever you receive, your competitor will receive twice as much. Would you be rich? You can be very rich, but he will be twice as wealthy. Do you wish to live a long and healthy life? You can, but his life will be longer and healthier. What is your desire?"

The man frowned, thought for a moment, and then said, "Here is my request: Strike me blind in one eye!"

One sign of jealousy is when it's easier to show sympathy and "weep with those who weep" than it is to exhibit joy and "rejoice with those who rejoice."

- Thomas Lindberg

This parable exposes something that is remarkably important in the life of a believer: we are often better at weeping with those who weep than rejoicing with those who rejoice.

- It seems to be easier to pat someone's head who is in the ditches of despair than it is to call people's attention to them when they are at the heights of victory.

We need a better theology of triumph.

Too many of us are waiting on a single day, at some point in the future, when all things and everything is made right – WHICH IS A WONDERFUL AND AMAZING PROMISE!

But that fact that a day is coming when total victory comes DOES NOT NEGATE THE REALITY THAT WE'RE WALKING DAY AFTER DAY RIGHT NOW SURROUNDED BY A THOUSAND LITTLE VICTORIES!

- Are we celebrating today in the middle?
- Or are we only willing to rejoice someday at the end?

In **Nehemiah 12** we see this incredible scene take place in Jerusalem.

The Temple has been repaired (starting with the altar) and now Nehemiah has led a civil engineering campaign and in 52 days they rebuilt the wall around the city that had been rubble for nearly a century and a half!

- Upon completion of the wall, and after observing the feast of booths, Nehemiah does something amazing: he leads an enormous praise march around the top of the wall they'd just rebuilt
- The choir is up there singing, the people are up there shouting, it's a whole scene.

BUT...Israel is still under the rule of Persia, they aren't independent

BUT...there are still exiles in the foreign land, away from their family lands and homes...they haven't all returned

BUT...enemies who had been subdued under David's rule have surrounded Jerusalem again...there is still the threat of war and attack!

### **Nehemiah 12:43**

And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. **And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.**

**They might not have been all the way there, but they were going to make sure they celebrated how far they'd come!**

**You might not be all the way there...but you have something to celebrate, something to bring a song through your lips, something to rejoice over!!**

**WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE DO WE BECOME WHEN WE'RE ONLY WILLING TO TRULY CELEBRATE THAT ONE MOMENT WHEN THE TRUTH IS THAT GOD HAS GIVEN US SOMETHING TO BE THANKFUL FOR IN EVERY MOMENT!?**

I'M CELEBRATING WITH BOAZ, RUTH, NAOMI AND GOD IN THIS PASSAGE BECAUSE I NEED IT! THERE'S AN ENTIRE WORLD OF EVIL, FRUSTRATION, HATE, VIOLENCE, ABANDONMENT AND UNGRACE ALL AROUND ME...IN THE CURRENT CONDITION OF THE WORLD I WILL NEVER RUN OUT OF REMINDERS THAT THINGS CAN GO BAD AND GET WORSE...

BUT WHEN I BEGIN TO CELEBRATE THE VICTORY AND TRIUMPH OF OTHERS IT BECOMES A WEAPON AGAINST MY OWN PAIN, MY OWN FEAR, MY OWN QUESTIONS – BECAUSE IF HE CAN DO IT FOR THEM....!!!

Paul told the church at Rome something powerful...he said, “when you begin to understand all that Jesus did for you, when you begin to comprehend the mercies of God, when you begin to see the truth of what HE HAS ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED...here is how you live:”

### **Romans 12:15**

**15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.**

#### **Triumph.**

We must celebrate both the moments of victory we have walked in AND by faith the ones we've been promised but have yet to experience fully.

Let this point be settled, that the battle is the Lord's, and we may be quite sure of the victory, and the victory in such a way as will best of all display the power of God.

- Charles Spurgeon

**So there are FOUR triumphs in the last movement of this story, and they all need to be seen, embraced and celebrated!**

## **ii. Boaz: Triumph of The Unexpected (4:11-12)**

There are blessings spoken over Boaz here...over his marriage, over his character and over his household. THE TRIUMPH OF BOAZ IS SEEN IN THE WAY GOD STRATEGICALLY CONNECTS THE RIGHT PEOPLE FOR THE RIGHT PURPOSES IN GOD'S RIGHT TIMING.

**Boaz shows us that when we are faithful, the complexity that comes into our lives can become a grand blessing, instead of a crushing burden.**

- Boaz was single, wealthy and well-liked
- Ruth coming into his world, and his faithfulness to care for, bless, and eventually love her, added layer upon later to his life.
- But because of Boaz's faithfulness to God, to Ruth and to Naomi, the people at the city gates did not give him three warnings, they spoke three blessings/hopes over his life:

**a. May the Lord Make Your Wife the Builder of Something Bigger Than Her**

- i. The word for “make” in Hebrew (*natan* – naw-than) connects us with two interesting companion texts, both in Genesis 1
  1. This word is used – also speaking of God creating/making – in verses 17 and 29.
  2. In those two verses we see God creating STARS and SEEDS
    - a. The diversity of roles is incredible in these two ideas
    - b. Sun, moon and stars all working together for the good of the earth and mankind...
    - c. All the various kinds of seeds (and trees) being created in intentional diversity, all leading to the nourishment and sustainability of life on earth.
    - d. And this tells the story of Rachel and Leah in such a beautifully creative way:
      - i. The one who wasn't loved was blessed with children almost immediately
      - ii. The one who was immediately fertile struggled to be accepted and loved
      - iii. **AND WITHOUT GOING INTO THE DETAILS OF THE STORY WE SEE CLEARLY THAT BY THE END BOTH WOMEN FOUND THEIR IMPORTANCE AND SETTLED INTO THEIR ROLE.**

God loves to take diverse and scattered things and bring order to them.

When we create produce farms and orchards and that sort of thing, we tend to know they're a farm because everything is lined up in very straight rows and each vegetable or fruit or crop is in the same place together. WE see rows of soy beans and long stretching lines of orange tress in groves, apple orchards are meticulously set so each kind of apple has it's place and rows of each are measured at the time of planting.

But that's not how nature works.

Only humans try to standardize something and then call it order.

Only humans think conformity is a better way to make things grow.

However, naturally, in Creation this type of conformed order is a completely foreign concept.

One of the theories of this has to do with the unique sufficiency of diversity.

- When different kinds of trees or plants or crops are intermingled their roots create an interconnected system of communication underground.
- What happens in that network is the supply of unique nutrients and minerals – an apple tree might have a certain nutrient that a tomato plant needs...and when they're roots are connected, they can share all kinds of things with each other!
- BUT, when everything is the same they only have the same thing to give that all the others have, so they don't have the opportunity to receive all they need to be as healthy as possible!

Erwin McManus speaks of this and makes the incredible statement that, “we tend to move things to standardization and conformity but God always moves things toward complexity and organic [growth].”

**AND THIS BLESSING AT THE GATE IS CURIOUS BECAUSE THEY ARE INVOKING A VERY COMPLEX AND TENSE SITUATION OVER THE HOUSE OF BOAZ...BUT THEY ARE SAYING THAT THE VERY GOD WHO MADE ALL OF THE STARS TO EXIST TOGETHER IN ALIGNMENT AND THE VERY GOD WHO CREATED EVERY SEED (NOT JUST THE ONES THAT GROW MACARONI) AND GAVE THEM SPACE TO FLOURISH AND PRODUCE ON EARTH ....THAT GOD CAN TAKE THE COMPLEXITY OF YOUR SITUATION AND CREATE A BLESSING FOR THE WORLD OUT OF IT!**

- ii. And the blessing the city speaks over Boaz is beautiful: “may the God who intentionally created every bit of the diversity of the heavens and the earth, who also used a diversity of stories in Jacob’s household to create the tribal pillars of Israel...”MAY THAT GOD, WHO IS PERFECTLY COMFORTABLE WORKING ONE GOOD OUT OF MULTIPLE INGREDIENTS, TAKE THE UNIQUE THREADS OF YOUR WIFE’S STORY AND BRING THEM TOGETHER FOR GOOD, FOR STABILITY AND FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE WORLD!”

**b. May You Continue to Act With Honor Consistent with Your Name**

- i. This blessing (this “may you”) is interesting not so much on the surface, but perhaps in the implication.
- ii. The interesting thing here is that Boaz was ALREADY CONSIDERED worthy and his reputation was widely known!
- iii. So why would we say, “may you be worthy and have a good reputation” if that’s already true?
  1. Perhaps because changes in life – even good changes - can threaten what we’ve worked hard to become.
  2. There is an almost seamless transition between “hungry” and “full” – and there is always the danger of letting the joy of those moments steal the character that was required to get there.

What if I put it this way:

There is a way that many of us acted when we were dating and engaged that isn’t always sustained a few years into marriage.

- The people at the city gates are perhaps offering a blessing and a warning
- Don’t lose the spirit of “dating Boaz” once you become “married Boaz”
- Don’t lose the hunger and passion of the seeker once you have become a finder.
- Don’t lose the energy of the curious once you’ve started to learn some things.
- Don’t adopt a spirit of “settling” when you’ve actually been called to be an “explorer.”

There is a theory about Revelation 3 and the church at Laodicea and that is pretty interesting with this point

Even though many commentators have talked about the Laodiceans and their aqueduct system, when speaking of the lukewarm imagery in the passage, Craig Koester has a different and quite compelling take on this passage.

Historically, the water that flow into that city was considered very drinkable. So when we see this passage, they almost begs for another explanation.

And it may not have to do with the water coming in through the aqueduct, but with the way that drinks were presented to guests when they came into the homes of the people of the city.

Generally, it was considered hospitable to serve either chilled or warmed drink to the guests coming into your home. That showed a level of hospitality and preparation, and it valued the person that you were opening your door to.

Snow would be used to drinks and heated water would be used to warm them. But if you were to give a guest tepid water, it meant that you didn’t care enough about them to prepare something for them.

The Laodiceans have not welcomed Jesus as an honored guest. Even when they don't leave Him outside the door knocking to get in, they haven't been good hosts.

It seems that they had taken Jesus for granted. This was the indictment.

Either they did not open the door to him when he knocked, or when they realized it was him at the door, and they let him in what they gave him revealed a lack of honor and passion for him and what he had done to save them.

They tell him: don't let what's happening in your life change you from being exactly the kind of person who it could happen to.

And for us: don't just let some "Sunday blessings" become the kind of things that cause you to sit back and wait on more of them when what got you to the place that allowed you to walk in those blessings was passionate hunger, was devotion and dedication, was radical obedience and was prayer and a ferocious desire for the truth of the Scriptures.

**DON'T ALLOW WHAT GOT YOU HERE BE CHANGED ONCE YOU GET HERE. LET THE CHILDLIKE DESIRE AND UNHINDERED HUNGER LEAD YOU DEEPER AND DEEPER IN CHARACTER AND LOVE AND PURSUIT AND PASSION.**

**c. May your house be blessed by the breaking out of that which is unexpected**

- i. The story of Tamar, Judah and Perez is fascinating and rich in imagery
- ii. But the blessing the people at the city gate speak over Boaz is pretty specific: like the house of Perez...
  1. Ultimately Perez was the least likely character to become the father of so many
  2. Judah had three sons, and even though two of them should have been, none of them gave Tamar children
  3. Judah wound up being the father not of one child, but of twins by Tamar
  4. But even in the process of birth, the first thing that emerged from her womb was a hand, not a head (which is powerful imagery in itself: we are not born into destiny by activity, but by identity) – and they tied a string to that hand, thinking this was to be the first born...
  5. But, as the process of birth continued it was NOT the hand with the string which was born first, but the other: Perez...whose name literally means "the one who bursts forth!"

The application is not difficult...the blessing seems to be pointing not only to the lineage of Perez, but perhaps also to the odd nature of his conception and birth.

IT'S EASY TO GET CAUGHT IN A MONOTONY OF EXPECTATION. WHERE WE FEEL LIKE WE KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN BECAUSE WE'VE SEEN THIS HEADLINE BEFORE OR WE'VE READ THIS BOOK BEFORE, OR WE'VE HEARD THIS STORY BEFORE...

- And what's amazing about this brief retelling of Perez's peculiar beginning is seen in his given name: "Oh! A breakout!" (**Gen 38:29, The Message**) – this was a jailbreak! You weren't supposed to be here, but here you are!

Some things might seem ahead of their time, but that really only means they might be ahead of our timing for them, but God's timing brought them when they were supposed to be there!

I'm afraid some of us have been mourning over the loss of, and wishing for the elevation of some things we'd tied scarlet threads around...

But God is breaking through with some unexpected things...some things that we couldn't have predicted – and it's His blessing to us!

They aren't telling Boaz, “may your household be wrapped up in Tamar's troubles, Onan's irresponsibility or Judah's lack of character!” NO!

They are saying, **“Boaz, may your household be filled with the breakthrough power of the God who sustained your own lineage through Perez's unlikely firstborn status! May the unexpected blessings of God break out in your household and in your life!”**

IT'S THE SURPRISE OF GOD THAT CREATES THE BEAUTY OF THIS SITUATION. THIS IS A BEAUTIFUL DECLARATION THAT: THE GOD WHO BREACHES THE WOMB WITH WHAT HE HAS ORDAINED IS THE GOD WE ASK DO THAT SAME THING IN YOUR LIFE AND IN YOUR HOME.

- And the triumph of Boaz is seen in the breaking out of an unexpected marriage between a Moabite widow and an oldest bachelor in Bethlehem
- And the triumph of Boaz is seen in the breaking out of their great grandson David, the youngest of 7 who would break out of the obscure fields and become king of Israel
- And the triumph of Boaz is seen the most UNEXPECTED birth, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ to Mary in that SAME CITY OF BETHLEHEM centuries later.
- But perhaps even greater than even this is that this ONE, THIS JESUS FULFILLS FULLY THE POWERFUL IMAGE OF PEREZ AS HE BECOMES THE FIRST ONE TO BREAK FORTH OUT OF THE WOMB OF THE GRAVE, BEING BORN TO NEW LIFE AND LEADING AN ENTIRE GENERATION IN DEFEAT OF THE GRAVE BY THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION!

Just when the world thought it knew what we could do on, when we tied a scarlet chord around the wrist of death because it “reached first,” suddenly everything changed! Because the death we'd been so convinced was the firstborn was swallowed up in the victory of what Paul (Col 1:18) calls the “Firstborn from the dead”!

What if the triumph of Boaz has so much to do with his own mother, Rahab who was not an Israelite?

We ask the question why was Boaz single?

There are a lot of different speculations about this point. But, if we're just throwing theories out, maybe it's because he didn't come from the right background. Maybe it's because he didn't come from the right family. Maybe it's because his mother created some problems that some prospective fathers of potential spouses didn't like.

Rahab wasn't an Israelite, she was a Canaanite.

Rahab doesn't enter the story as a pure woman of character, but as a woman whose profession would have raised a lot of eyebrows.

What if this is why Boaz was single?

But now, what if the blessings spoken over him at the city gate is directly connected to the very thing that was a liability??

Ruth background was diverse and questionable on its own!

She was exactly the kind of woman who he would've had sympathy for BECAUSE of the origin of his own mother.

And so God, the same one who knows how to take a multitude of stars and hold them in order to make beneficial light... and the same God who could take a multitude of seeds and create nourishment and variety for the world... the same God could take two people whose pasts were not as pure and similar as the traditionalists would have preferred, and create something so beautiful that it would not only redeem (through David), but the entire world (through Jesus).

Andrew Dooyema, a 17-year-old senior at Luverne High School in Minnesota, is no star athlete, high academic achiever, or model of fashion. But that didn't keep 450 classmates from overwhelmingly voting Andrew, a student with Down syndrome, their homecoming king.

Each year, seniors select five boys and five girls as candidates for king and queen of the school. The entire student body then chooses the winners by secret ballot.

"I wasn't expecting it," Andrew said. "I thought I'd be on the bottom."

Now that he is king, Andrew has gently let friends and family know they may call him "King Andrew"

- Associated Press, Arizona Daily Star (10-7-00), p. A8

WHAT MAKES THIS STORY INTERESTING AND WONDERFUL IS THAT IT WASN'T THE "EXPECTED" ONES WHO WON THE CROWN – IT WASN'T THE QUARTERBACK, THE CLASS PRESIDENT OR THE SENATOR'S SON – IT WAS THE ONE WHO WHO MOST WOULDN'T HAVE THOUGHT HAD A CHANCE – AND THAT IS WHAT CAPTURES OUR HEART AND ATTENTION!

- God has some unexpected triumphs for your life
- And it's precisely these things – the things we often think of as liabilities – that make the best stories, that draw people to the amazing grace of Jesus and that give hope and joy to those who are starving for both!