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**Transcribed Message**

**August 4, 2019**

**Message: Ruth: A Love Story**

**Ruth**

My name is Steve. I'm the youth pastor here and it is my privilege to share the Word with you this morning. I think it's a pretty good arrangement for everyone because I love getting up here to preach, and for you guys we usually get out a little bit early. Since we don't have community groups, we're going to get out of here extra early which is always nice. But full disclosure – I practiced this sermon with a one-month-old earlier this week and he fell asleep very early in the sermon. So hopefully you guys fare a little bit better. I won't hold it against you. I completely understand.

My wife Lisa and I have two-year-old twin boys. Anytime you want to pray for us, we would appreciate it. It would be great. They are reaching new levels of destruction that we did not know were possible. One of our boys is Jack. We named him after my grandfather on my mother's side who is an incredible man with an incredible life who had a great, great story. Then we named our other son Boaz after the story that I'm going to share with you guys this morning. We named him Boaz from the book of Ruth because the book of Ruth is probably my favorite story in the whole Bible. It is definitely my favorite story in the Old Testament. I think it's incredible. I think it's a beautiful picture of God's love, a beautiful picture of redemption.

While it's my favorite story I think it's also got some universal appeal. I think that anyone can get into the book of Ruth because it's an incredible story. If you're into looking for themes of redemption anytime you're watching a movie or you're reading a book, then then you'll love the book of Ruth. It's all over the place. I also think that this book will have some appeal for those of us who have been through some harder things. If you have felt the sting of loss and it has affected the way that you relate to your God, then there are some things in the book of Ruth that are absolutely there for you to remind you of God's love. If you're someone who tends to quickly blame God for the hard things in your life, then you're going to relate to Naomi in the story. You're going to

see some things in there that might be helpful for you. Finally, some of us can tend to look at the past and only see the past through rose-colored glasses. Remember how good things used to be? We see how hard things are now and how bleak the future is. If that's you, I think there's also some great reminders in the book of Ruth for you.

Like I said, there's a lot of redemption in this book. I think the main theme of the book of Ruth is redemption. Actually, in the four short chapters of this book, redemption or some form of that word is mentioned 23 times in four chapters. So you know that's a big deal and it is made very, very clear in this book.

If there was a secondary theme for the book of Ruth, it would probably be love. Not even just love in general, but specifically two aspects of love. Those are loyalty and kindness. You see those in every chapter of Ruth. I think that you can actually say that Ruth is a love story. It's a love story in every sense of the word. There is the obvious love story of Ruth and Boaz. There is also incredible love and devotion from Ruth to her mother-in-law Naomi. One of the really big parts of the book that you realize once you've read it a couple times is the love that God has for Naomi all the way through this book. It is incredible. There is love but it is all kinds of love.

I enjoy this book but I also think it's good to give a little bit of background. The ESV Study Bible commentary says, "In terms of compact storytelling, Ruth is a masterpiece of narrative art. It is densely packed yet the charm of the book is evident even to the most unsophisticated reader." I can attest to that. It goes on to say: "The book of Ruth is the classic love story of the Bible." So we are going to be in the classic love story of the Bible this morning.

The setting of our book is not the normal setting for a classic love story. The opening words of the book of Ruth are "In the days when the judges ruled..." The book right before Ruth in your Old Testament is the book of Judges. The time during Judges was a hard and crazy and chaotic time for Israel. They're in this big downward cycle of faithlessness and then God coming and saving them, and then starting over again and things just getting worse and worse. Judges finishes with the line "Everyone did what was right in their own eyes." Of course, we know that everyone did what was right in their own eyes, which means everyone did wrong. There was a lot of hard things in

Israel at this time. Not your typical love story setting, but that's where we are going to start off.

I want to share the story with you this morning. We're going to go to the beginning, the middle and the end, and I want to highlight some things that I think are significant. Our story begins with a man named Elimelech from the tribe of Judah and from Bethlehem. In the time of the judges there was a very bad famine in Bethlehem so Elimelech took his sweet wife and his two boys and went to sojourn in Moab. In the time that they were in Moab, Elimelech sadly passed away, leaving Naomi widowed with these two boys. After some time, her sons married Moabite wives. One of them married Orpah and one of them married Ruth. To make matters even worse, her sons died as well, so Naomi was left with her daughters-in-law. She was left without her husband, without her sons, heartbroken and devastated. When she heard through the grapevine that God had brought food back to Bethlehem, she had no reason to stay in Moab. She decided she would go back to her homeland and try her best there. Her daughters-in-law were with her but she told them go back to their families. You see, Naomi knew that the life of a childless widow in Bethlehem was not going to be an easy one. She told her daughters-in-law that they were better off going back to their families, to find a husband, to have children. They had hope for a new life. Much more hope in their land than in Naomi's land. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye and departed, but Ruth clung to Naomi and she said, "I'm not going to leave you. Where you go, I'm going to go. Your people are going to be my people and your God is going to be my God. I want to live where you live. I want to die where you die." She made this incredible oath of loyalty to Naomi. So Naomi let Ruth come with her and the two women returned to Bethlehem.

Now when they got to Bethlehem a lot of the ladies remembered Naomi from before. They remembered that Naomi had been married to Elimelech, but he didn't return with her. Naomi said, "I don't want anyone to call me Naomi anymore because Naomi means pleasant and I am no longer pleasant because the Lord has dealt bitterly with me. I want you to call me Mara instead which means bitter because that's more appropriate. I left this place full and I have returned empty." That's where our story is. It's the time of the barley harvest. Naomi and Ruth have to find a way to get some food to survive in Bethlehem. That is the beginning of our story. There's a lot there but I really

want us to keep track of Naomi in this whole story and see that in the first chapter she suffers all kinds of painful loss. By the end of the chapter, we see her saying that she is empty and she's bitter.

I think that the key passage in this first chapter is verses 15 through 18. This is where Naomi has told her daughters-in-law to leave and Ruth says she's going to stay. It starts with Naomi talking: "And she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.' 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. 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.' And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more." Like I said, one of the important parts of this book is love and especially loyalty. The loyalty that Ruth shows to Naomi here is incredible and beautiful. There's no reason for it. She's not compelled to do this. Like Naomi said, she'd have a much better chance if she stayed in Moab. But she showed this incredible loyalty to Naomi. There's something huge here that I don't want us to miss, something that she said. She said that your people are going to be my people and your God my God. She said I'm going to leave the gods of my people. I'm going to leave my father and mother and everything I know. But your God is going to be my God. Here we see I think Ruth's conversion. I think that Ruth here becomes what Paul would call a child of Abraham by faith. She left her false gods for the one true God, the God of Israel. That's an incredible way to start our story.

While that is incredible, we're in a hard place. Ruth and Naomi have come back to a very, very different Bethlehem. I think it's interesting that Naomi says that when she left Bethlehem she was full and when she returned she was empty. Remember at the very beginning of the story, they left Bethlehem because there was a famine and they didn't think there be any food for them to eat. Sometimes we can look back on the past and we can see it as so much better. I don't know if she really left full but one of the things that we're going to see in this story is God is going to show Naomi such incredible love that by the end of the story we're going to realize she didn't even know what full was. God is going to fill her up in ways that she can't even imagine here in

chapter 1. So while things have been rough in the middle, things are starting to pick up and things are going to get a lot better really quite fast.

In this time in Israel, there was a custom that during the harvest anyone who needed to could go through after the harvesters and pick up any leftover grain. Anything that was left after the harvesters was fair game. For a lot of poor people, this was how they survived. This was how they lived. Naomi sent Ruth out to the field and Ruth went to the fields to follow the harvesters just like the custom went. She was going to get food and get leftover grain. She happened to end up in a part of a field that was owned by a man named Boaz. Boaz was a relative of Elimelech and that will turn out to be a crucial detail in our story. While Ruth is gathering grain, she actually catches Boaz's eye. Boaz brings one of his servants over and he asks who she is. The servant tells him that's Ruth. She's a Moabite. She actually came with Naomi to Bethlehem. The servant tells Boaz the whole story of Ruth's loyalty. Boaz is impressed. Boaz goes and meets Ruth. We have this first meeting. It's this wonderful scene where Ruth finds unexpected favor in the eyes of Boaz. After that, Boaz has Ruth come and eat lunch with his crew. While they're eating lunch, he makes sure that Ruth is well fed. In fact, she has enough to eat that she can take her leftovers and put it in a doggy bag and bring some back to Naomi later. Considering their prospects in going to Bethlehem in the first place, that was pretty good. Boaz suggests to Ruth for this harvest to stay with his people and they would protect her and make sure she was safe. If she needed something to drink they would make sure that she got water and enough grain. That's exactly what Ruth does the rest of the day. She stays with Boaz's group. She goes home to Naomi and Naomi can tell instantly from the amount of food that she's got that it was a good day.

So she asks Ruth where she went. Whose field had she been in? Ruth told her she had been in the field of Boaz. When Ruth says Boaz, Naomi lights up. She knew that Boaz was a relative of Elimelech. He was actually a kinsman redeemer. He was eligible to save their family. It was a very good thing that Ruth found that field. Naomi tells Ruth to stay in that field for the rest of the harvest. That's just what Ruth does. Ruth and Naomi are provided for and they've got enough food to make it through this time because of God's kindness and because of Boaz's generosity. Toward the end of the harvest, Naomi shifts gears and she goes into full Jewish mom matchmaking mode.

Naomi says to Ruth, "Wouldn't it be nice for you to maybe get married? Maybe have some kids? Wouldn't that be nice?" And Ruth agreed that would be fantastic. Naomi suggested that Boaz been really great to them and that Boaz was a kinsman redeemer. He was related to Elimelech and that meant that he could really save their family. Ruth agreed Boaz been fantastic. Together the women made a plan and Ruth got dressed up nice. She went out to the farm where Boaz was working that night. it was late and Boaz was asleep. Ruth found where he was and Ruth went to Boaz. He woke up and Ruth identified herself and she gets right to the point. She wanted to see if he was willing to marry her and to redeem her family. Ruth shows incredible boldness here. This was a very brave thing for her to request.

Our story has a lot of great things in it but there's not a lot of suspense in the story. Boaz is impressed. Boaz is very quick to say that yes, he is interested. He was willing to marry her. He wanted to redeem the family, but there's one wrinkle in the story. This is coming from a very different culture from our own, but I'll try to unpack this for us. He says that there's one person who's a closer relative of Elimelech and he's got first dibs on redeeming Ruth's family. Boaz said he'd go to the other relative and see if he wanted to redeem the family. If he does, then great. Ruth and Naomi would be provided for and would be all right. If he doesn't, then Boaz would marry Ruth and redeem her family. So Ruth goes home and tells Naomi the good news. Naomi is thrilled and she said this is important and this will be dealt with quickly.

That's the middle of our story. That is chapters 2 and 3. A lot happened there. First, let's talk about this kinsman redeemer thing because it is key to understanding our story. This isn't something that we do anymore. It's not something we're super familiar with. The kinsman redeemer comes from the law of Moses. It was an opportunity for when a head of a family died, it was an opportunity for his family to be provided for. But the problem is it is costly. Redemption is a costly business. There are two different aspects of redeeming here in the story. They're not always together but in this story they're put together. The first is purchasing the property and redeeming the land. This is an opportunity that a relative has where they can purchase the property of the relative and that way it will stay in the family. This means that Naomi will not be destitute if this

land is purchased. Again it's an incredible opportunity but it comes at a cost. This particular form of redemption is found in Leviticus 25.

Next there's this other half of it and that is marrying a childless widow so that there can be an heir. Honestly, that's very important because that means that the line of Elimelech can continue. This family can continue and not end with Naomi and Ruth. This type of redemption is found in Deuteronomy 25. Marrying the childless widow allows there to be an heir and allows the family to continue. This comes at maybe an even greater cost because this means that the man who's going to do this redeeming is going to have to split his inheritance. Inheritance is a big deal. We remember that from a lot of our stories in the Old Testament. That's a really big deal in this world. Being willing to do these things comes at quite a cost. So that is the kinsman redeemer side of it.

Next there is just one little note I think is really interesting. Ruth is an incredible character, an incredible woman in history. Boaz refers to Ruth in chapter 3 as worthy. The word for worthy that Boaz uses when he's talking to Ruth is the same word used in Proverbs 31 when it is talking about the worthiness of the Proverbs 31 woman. I think that's just a really neat small detail because if you look at Ruth and her life and her story, and you look at the Proverbs 31 woman there is a lot of overlap.

A key passage for this section for the middle of our story is not so much central to the narrative as it is just what I think as a great line. In chapter 2 verse 10 through 12 this is the first meeting of Ruth and Boaz. it says: "Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, 'Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?' But Boaz answered her, 'All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!' Boaz's description of God is incredible. A God where a foreigner can come and find refuge and find protection. We've seen it here already in the story, God providing for Ruth and Naomi.

But I love what Ruth says to Boaz. I think that if you took that way out of context and if you prayed those exact words today as a New Testament Christian that they are

profoundly meaningful. She says, "Why have I found favor in your eyes that you should take notice of me since I'm a foreigner? In the story, we see why this makes sense. She's a Moabite. She is in the fields of this man of Judah. There's no reason for him to come over and invite her to stay with his people so they can take care of her and provide for her. When I look at my Creator and my God, my heavenly Father, there is no reason that I should have caught His eye. There's no reason for Him to have given me the mercy and grace that He did. I didn't bring anything to the table in my salvation. When I look at this verse, it is powerful. There's just some words in God's Word that I think mean so many different things. I wanted to highlight that because that is something that has always jumped out to me.

Now, at the end of the first chapter, we saw that Naomi was bitter and that she was empty, but at this point halfway through our story at the end of chapter 2 and the end of chapter 3, we see that Naomi is finally willing to hope again. We see that she's hopeful. At the end of the second chapter when she finds out about Boaz, she is excited. She's hopeful. At the end of the third chapter, I'm guessing she's over the moon. Naomi, the woman who wanted to be called bitter, is really starting to hope again.

We're going to finish the story here and like I said, there's not a ton of suspense, so things are going to go pretty quickly here. But the story has a great ending. Like I said, there was a closer relative of Elimelech who was eligible to redeem the family. Boaz went and he found this redeemer and he got a couple of worthy men from the city and brought them together. He said to the man, "This is your lucky day. You have an opportunity to redeem the family of Elimelech. There is property and there is land that you can purchase and redeem this family." And the redeemer said, "All right. Amen. I'll do that." Then Boaz said, "That's not all. Actually there's an even greater opportunity. Ruth the Moabite was married to Elimelech's son and you can redeem the family further. You can marry Ruth and you can give Elimelech an heir and an inheritance. You can redeem that family." At that point, it was too much for this eligible redeemer. He said he couldn't do that or go that far. So we have this redeem-off between Boaz and Elimelech's closer relative. Boaz wins the redeem-off. The guy says that is too rich for his blood. He takes off his sandal and gives it to Boaz, for reasons that made sense in



their culture and I don't fully get. But that's what happens when you lose a redeem-off. You give away your sandal. Boaz takes that sandal and he goes to Ruth and he tells her he's going to marry her.

The story ends with a wedding but not just with a wedding. The story ends with the wedding and Boaz is ready to redeem the family. Then we see a baby is born. The baby is born to Ruth, but almost even more than that, this baby is born to Naomi, the woman who was bitter and empty and felt like her God had dealt bitterly with her, that her God has done all the terrible things to her. God gives her this baby that is a symbol of God's redemption and His love for her family. They name the baby Obed. The cool thing is not only do they get this baby but where our story had initially zoomed in on this little family, now it zooms way out. We see that Obed is going to have a son and his name is Jesse. Then Jesse will have a son and his name is David and he is going to be the king of Israel. This little story all of a sudden became the huge story of what God is going to do for the whole nation of Israel. That is the story of Ruth. I think it's a fantastic story.

I want to show you a couple things that happened there in the end and then we're going to conclude and wrap things up in a minute. But as you guys saw, there was the scene of the redeem-off and that was pretty interesting. Culturally, pretty foreign to us, but it had a really exciting conclusion. One of my friends noted this week that this is interesting that this other guy had an opportunity to be a part of something huge and self-interest gets in the way. He said that he didn't want to split his inheritance and that's the reason that he won't marry Ruth the Moabite. It's interesting how self-interest can sometimes get in the way of big things that we get to be a part of. We can't stop God for doing what He's going to do, but we can miss out on what God is doing sometimes. I think that's what happened to this redeemer here.

Speaking of redeemer, I think if we word counted this sermon, redeem or redemption is in there a lot. Boaz should remind you of someone else. In the story, one of the functions we see is he's a redeemer and he should remind you of Jesus. One of the notes I read this weekend says Boaz was one of the very few characters in the Bible that we see him do a lot of great things. In this short account, we don't see any of his

bad qualities. He wasn't perfect, but we can't tell that from reading this story. Boaz should remind you of Jesus and especially in his role as a redeemer.

I want you to notice that the other guy got out of it because the redeeming was too costly for him. Boaz stuck with it at great cost to himself. His descendent from the line of Obed and line of David, Jesus, is going to come along and He's going to redeem all of us. Everyone. He is going to redeem God's creation. He's going to give us a chance at a relationship with God. It is going to cost Jesus everything. Boaz paid nothing compared to what our Redeemer paid for us.

I just want to remind you that. we have talked a lot about redemption and I want to make sure that that word hasn't lost its meaning from saying it too many times. What did redemption mean for Ruth and Naomi in the story? It meant a couple of things. It meant that a family gets to continue and this family was saved. It meant a transaction, a purchasing of this land. It meant that someone who was empty was made full. So it meant a lot of things for Ruth and Naomi.

What does redemption mean for us? What does it mean that we're redeemed? Again, there was this purchase. There was a huge purchase that was made. We sang that song "Death was Arrested". It said ash was redeemed, only beauty remains. What does redemption mean for us? It means that the ash is turned into beauty, the blind is given sight. It means that we were literally, spiritually dead in our transgressions. We were dead and we were given life. That's what redemption means to us. It couldn't be any bigger than that.

That is our story but there is a little epilogue in the story. The epilogue is the genealogy of David. It explains the line of David and how it came about and where Obed is in that line. One of the things that is just a small phrase used throughout the story is finding rest. Naomi wants Ruth to find rest, wants Orpah to find rest. She talks a lot about finding rest. At this time, like we said, Israel was in a chaotic state. The time of the judges was not a good time. One of the things that they're yearning for is a king. Through this family, through Naomi to Ruth and then Obed and his grandson David, all of Israel gets to find rest in the king for a little while. After that, Israel's history is pretty rough but they find rest through this grandson of Obed who is born in the story. Then again we get to see that years later, another baby is going to be born in Bethlehem.

Another baby will be born into a chaotic time. That baby is going to come and He's going to pay the ultimate price to redeem His people. These are the people who were at war with our God from the beginning. We get to find that rest in Jesus.

Don't miss this. We're just bringing it back to make it personal for us. Don't miss that God is working in your story. God worked a lot in the story of Ruth but we don't necessarily see it. He's behind-the-scenes. The narrator never mentions God once. He comes up a couple of times. Boaz mentions Him. Naomi mentions Him. He doesn't come up a lot, but obviously He's working. From the moment that Ruth sets foot on Boaz's field, you can see God's hand over this whole thing. The same is true in our lives. We can look for God in the ordinary things of our lives. All of us have stories where we can point to Him. Look at how we got our job or how we wound up living here or how we found our spouse or even how God kept us from marrying someone we shouldn't have married. We see God's hand in our story all over the place in these relatively ordinary things like this ordinary story of Ruth.

I think that we can also look for God in the hard times. Naomi was in as deep of a valley as she could find herself at the end of chapter 1. As far as she was concerned, she had lost everything. She had no hope. She was bitter and empty. Then we see in the story, God reaches down and blesses her in ways that she could not imagine. It's important that we see that no matter how bad things get, no matter how painful this life has been, we know that God can reach down and He can show us that He is bigger and He is better than whatever we're going through. We see in the story that God is perfectly capable of changing our circumstances. He may not. Sometimes He may change our circumstances, but sometimes He may just change our perspective. For Naomi, He does both. We don't see a scene at the end where Elimelech comes back and it turns out he was okay the whole time. He's gone, but despite all of her loss, we do see that Naomi is made full because her perspective is changed because of what God did for her.

Ruth is a small ordinary love story that points directly to God's giant love story. That is the gospel. The gospel that if you're in Christ today that you are saved by and the gospel that we want to share with our friends or neighbors or coworkers. It is the gospel that we here at Covenant want to be about living. So that is the story of Ruth.

We did it guys. Pretty quick. I'm going to pray and we're going to finish our morning today.

Father God, thank You so much for Your Word. Lord, I thank You for this short story of Ruth. Thank You for the beauty in it and the beauty in Your Word, for the love that we see in it. Lord, ultimately I thank You so much for the redemption that we see in the story through Boaz and his marriage to Ruth, but the redemption that we have in our lives through Your Son Jesus Christ who paid far more than the cost of the field and inheritance. He paid it all. He paid it all for us because of because of Your great love for us. Lord, we thank You so much for that. We pray these things in His name, amen.