

There's Bread In Bethlehem

I. Slide1 Intro:

- A. Some consider it the greatest short story ever written, and we love stories. The literary structure is *crafted with care*. It's symmetrical. The book begins with a **funeral** and ends with a **wedding**.
- B. **The plot**: A story of redemption, in the grand story of redemption.
- C. **Conflict**: Naomi has no son to carry on the family line, the royal family line.
- D. **The resolution**: a man named Boaz, a redeemer.
- E. **It's a typical love story**: where *two unlikely people* **meet** and **unite**.
1. **Like Romeo and Juliet. Or Beauty and the Beast.** In the sound of music it was a **failed Nun & a Military Captain.** In twilight it was a **Human and a Vampire**, she's 18 and he's 109.
 2. In our story, we have **an Israelite gentleman and a Moabite widow.**
- F. **Ruth is the only book in the OT named after a non-Israelite** (a Moabite), long-standing enemies of Israel. **Why is it called Ruth?**
1. Ruth speaks **less than Boaz and Naomi.**
 2. Because of the **plot**, it could be called **Naomi.**
 3. Based on the **number of words spoken**, it could be called **Boaz.**
 4. Based on the **importance of the child** that we meet at the end of the book, it could be called **Obed** (Jesse, David).
 5. **But instead**, it is called **Ruth**. Maybe because she is in every scene (except city gates in ch.4) **And it's in Ruth's actions, the crisis is reversed.**
- G. This book helps us to appreciate *the greater story of redemption*.
- H. It's not a book of miracles, there is not one. **And God does not speak directly in it.** Which should be an encouragement to us.

1. Most of us live in the book of **Ruth**, rather than the book of **Ex**. You and I, we don't go collect manna every morning, **or** walk through Red Sea's.
 2. Here in Ruth, you're going to see God is in the meticulous details of life.
 3. We should never mistake the lack of the miraculous as God's *inactivity*.
- I. We also reminded in Ruth that God is for *the nations*, not just Israel. It's Gods global mercy.
- J. We also need models of genuine godliness, especially here in the dark period of the **Judges**, both Ruth and Boaz really shine.
- K. **Outline:** *The Famine, The Funerals, The Farewells, The Faith, The Frustration*.
1. **Slide2** It starts in Bethlehem and ends in Bethlehem. **Show Map**

II. **Slide3 THE FAMINE (1,2) READ**

- A. It starts with very devastating words. *Wait, there is no bread in the house of bread?*
- B. **The book of Judges** deals with a very dark time as a nation in Israel. **The book of Ruth** zooms in on this time period. A families trials and tragedies.
1. We are told there is *a famine in the land*, often times a sign of judgment.
 2. **Then** 3 funerals, and a grieving widow, in a foreign land, with her 2 foreign daughter-in-law's.
 3. **But** there's still *a bigger problem* in Ruth, but you need to know the end of the story, it has to do with **the royal line**.
 - a) The real threat in these first few verses is that there will be **no royal son**. God had promised to send a king to Israel. (Gen.17:6; 35:11)
 - b) **In Judges**, the threat was *widespread unfaithfulness*. Here, the threat is *through these deaths*.
- C. This time period fits in-between the settlement of Israel inside the land **and** the establishment of the monarchy. [**or** from Joshua's death to Saul's Coronation]
1. **It's that middle period**. In Judges there is no national government. (Remember king Saul was the first to get the 12 tribes working together).

2. Judges were basically **Chieftains** who would overcome their oppressors.

a) Judges is about this downward spiral of the people of God. (see last vs of Judges).

D. **Famine** - There are many threats of famine from faithlessness in the Bible. And there are many famines that happened. Many of which were from disobedience. **Most scholars seem that they lean towards this being a sin issue of them leaving.**

1. **So it seems like sin this family fled the Promise Land** (it doesn't say exactly)

a) vs.1 it says they went to **sojourn** there (short term).

b) vs.2 they **remained** there (settled).

c) vs.4 **10 years** (they felt more at home in the land of **compromise** than in the land of **promise**).

III. Slide4 **THE FUNERALS (3-5) READ** Triple Bereavement

A. **Naomi**. A widow in a foreign land. She had no significance. No husband to protect her and provide. No sons. In an honor/shame society she had no social standing.

1. We can identify with Naomi's grief. And her need ... **hope**.

2. **She** doesn't know how it all is going to turn out, but **we** do. Her story is going to go from **emptiness** to **fullness**. From **tragedy** to **glory**.

3. The question for us in **our grief**: Can we **still worship God** in the midst of **the emptiness and tragedy**? Can you say with Job ***the Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord?***

IV. Slide5 **THE FAREWELLS (6-14) READ**

A. **Turning Point** (6-10)

B. This is ***the turning point*** not just geographically, but a **spiritual** turning point.

1. And for Ruth, this is her most important turning point ... **professing faith in Yahweh, by turning to Him**.

C. (6) This is good news, ***the Lord has visited his people and given them food***.

1. This is repeated at the end of the story, where **God visits them** and blesses them with **fertility**.

D. **Cultural Awkwardness** (11-14)

E. **You guys are not just outsiders, you are Moabites.** This is OT *the cost of discipleship*.

1. One said about Ruth, **“There was *nothing kosher* about Ruth. She knew she would be at home in Israel, as much as a ham sandwich is at a bar mitzvah.”** This is going to be culturally awkward girls!

F. **Orpah’s decision**, you might call *conventional wisdom*, it was **practical**. **Ruth’s decision** required more than this. **It required faith!**

V. **Slide6 THE FAITH (15-18) READ**

A. **The Conversion of Ruth**

B. She’s not just joining **Naomi**, **but** joining **the people of faith** & joining **Yahweh**.

1. Some have said this is *the clearest conversion statement* in the OT.
2. She saying, in fact, *I belong to Naomi because I belong to Yahweh*. 2:12
3. Her conversion is one of the primary answers to the darkness in ch.1.

C. *Ruth will be the conduit through whom God pours his Grace on Naomi.*

1. **For the struggling nation of Israel** Ruth will be means through whom the nations greatest king will come.
2. **For a world separated from God and lost in idolatry**, Ruth will extend the messianic line to Jesus Christ.
3. **We also see our own story.** We were once outsiders. We were once alienated. And we turned by God's grace from idols to the living God.

D. **We also see both the need for personal faith and the community of faith.**

1. Her confession is not just about her relationship with God, but also with his people. And that’s what it means to be **a Christian**. **We trust in Christ, and we are part of the body of Christ.**

2. Remember, sometimes the church has people in it, difficult to love, like Naomi. There's no church that is filled with only *Ruth's & Boaz's*. Every church has its fair share of bitter Naomi's also.

VI. Slide7 THE FRUSTRATION (19-22) READ

A. She left **Pleasant** and came back **Bitter**.

1. But only if Naomi remembered where Mara came from in scripture.
2. In Exodus when the children of Israel were in the wilderness & murmured/ Mara (about no water), **but what happened at the end of the chapter? God made the bitter water sweet.** (look back to fight bitterness)
3. **Communion** helps us fight bitterness in the midst of our *grief, hurt and bitterness*. We look back to the cross and bathe ourselves in his sweetness.

B. **Naomi:** I admire her transparency. You always know what she's thinking.

1. The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. She's no atheist. Just hurting. But there's *no personal accountability* but shifts all of the blame on *the Almighty*.
2. It's good, that she ascribes **sovereignty** to God, **but** she forgets about his **compassion**.
3. "*It's good that her body made the journey home, but her spirit is far from restored.*" [yet we can all relate to her]

C. **Slide8** William Cooper poem, *Light Shining Out of Darkness*.

God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform; He plants his footsteps in the sea, And rides upon the storm. His purposes will ripen fast, Unfolding ev'ry hour; The bud may have a **bitter** taste, But **sweet** will be the flow'r.

D. **In the last sentence** we get *a ray of hope*, *they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest*.

1. The chapter **begins** with bread **and ends** in bread.

2. There's bread in Bethlehem (6), ⁶ and they returned to a Barley Harvest.
3. It's a new beginning, a ray of hope, it's a new day agriculturally ... will it be a new day *personally*?

E. Keywords: death, faith, grace, hope.