

Understanding What Christmas Actually Did

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Ruth 4:18-22
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Well, Merry Christmas! Thank you for that. I'm Jon, one of the pastors here. I just need to warn you. I've lost my voice in two out of the four services today. So today, this one, we don't know what's going to happen right now. All right. So we'll see. Ushers are coming up now because they've got Bibles. If you forgot a Bible or if you don't have a Bible, please take one of these Bibles and do not give it back to us. Maybe this is the first Christmas present of this Christmas, so keep it. It's yours. We want you to have it. Write your name in it, belongs to you now. Grab your Bibles and open to the book of Ruth. I'm here to tell you the Christmas story but probably in a way that you've never heard it before.

As a church, we spent four weeks in the book of Ruth. That's the eighth book of the Bible. If you got a Bible from an usher, that's page 294, 294. It's been said about the book of Ruth that what the Venus is to sculpture and what the Mona Lisa is to paintings, Ruth is to literature. Everyone loves an underdog story, and Ruth is one of those rags to riches epics. It may be the first one ever written, but listen, Ruth is not fiction. It's about real people in a real city who had real experiences, real experiences of uncertainty and compromise, tragedy, poverty, compassion, generosity, more uncertainty, and joy. Ruth teaches us that even if we think that God is not there or if we think that he's not interested or if we think that he's actually ignoring us, all of that could not be further from the truth.

The storm clouds of adversity that come into our lives often hide the sunshine of God's smiling face. God is constantly at work. He's working in all things that happen. He's working all of the things that happen to fit exactly what he wants to happen. He never forgets something, misses something, or ignores something. No one and nothing in the universe can stop him or even slow him down. He didn't wind up the universe, walk away so that he could like get to something more important. No, he is absolutely high and exalted. He's absolutely the creator. He's beyond us in every way, but yet he's not far away. He is near to his creation, near to our planet, to our country, to our state, to our neighborhoods, to your address. He is nearer to you than your next thought. And this God has a plan, and that plan is a good plan.

He has a plan that actually could not be any better than the plan that he has. And this is what the book of Ruth is all about. I want to talk about this plan with you. There are three aspects to it, and this plan is actually going to help us understand what's going on at Christmas. What is Christmas all about? The first aspect of God's plan that helps us understand Christmas is that God's plan is personal. If you're taking notes, it's point #1) ***God's plan is personal***. You see this in Ruth with a woman named Naomi. If you don't know the story, that's okay. I'll kind of summarize it for you right now. Her life starts out full, really full. She had a husband and two sons and everything was great. Life was hard, yeah, but at least she had them.

They had to leave what was familiar in order to go somewhere to make money. They go to a place where there's no family, no friends, no church, no worship, no Bible teaching. And they live away from God's people in God's place, away from God's presence for 10 years just to make money. And then her husband and her sons die, both of them. Chapter one of Ruth has Naomi

returning to the place where she left, and the people are there, and they remember her, and they remember how she left. And she tells them, "Look, I'm bitter now. I went away full, but I'm empty. I have no husband. I have no sons. I was content, but now I'm broke and I'm bitter. God is against me." Chapter two begins, and it's Naomi, and she's having a conversation with Ruth, one of her daughters-in-laws.

You see, both of her sons got married before they died. And while one daughter-in-law, she goes back to where she came from and back to her people, the other one, Ruth, she stays with her. She wants to take care of her, make sure she's going to be okay in her old age. And so they're having a conversation at the beginning of chapter two. And then Ruth goes out into the fields and meets a man named Boaz who blesses her generously, gives her a whole bunch of barley, which allows them both to eat for weeks. So by the end of Ruth chapter two, Naomi, the bitterness is starting to fade away, and she's got some food now. Things are changing. Chapter three begins with another conversation. Now, Naomi is no longer looking at herself. She's now looking at Ruth and she's going, "Ruth, you need to get married. What if I die? If I die, you're going to be in big trouble here. You need to get married. And what about that Boaz guy? Maybe you guys should get married."

And so Ruth leaves in the middle of chapter three and goes and talks to Boaz. And wouldn't you know, Boaz would love to marry her, but there's a complication there. And so Ruth comes back, and the end of the chapter is a conversation between Ruth and Naomi. And by the end of chapter three, Naomi is very different. And now she's saying, "Hey, I know there's that complication, Ruth, but, but let's wait and see what happens." You can sense she's not just saying, "I trust Boaz," but she's saying, "Let's trust God and see what he does." Chapter four, Naomi is in the background. That is, until the very end, right? Ruth and Boaz get married, and it's celebration. It's fantastic. And they even have a little boy. But when you read the end of Ruth chapter four, you realize that more than being a blessing to mom and dad that this little boy is seen as a blessing to Naomi. All the characters in Ruth are seen in relation to Naomi. Each person is blessed or ignored based on whether they were kind to Naomi.

No matter what happens, the attention of each scene in Ruth begins and ends with Naomi. And if you're reading the book closely, you'll come to the end and you'll go, "Well, why is that? Why is everything revolving around Naomi?" And I think that there is a reason, there's an answer to that question. I think the answer is this. This suggests that God is preoccupied with Naomi. Everything that happens is to help her, that he is never absent from his thoughts. She may have felt forgotten or that God was against her, but in fact, he was fixated on her and he would not stop being preoccupied with her until her emptiness was full once again. See, there's this personal aspect to God's plan. It's seen in this preoccupation he has with one widow from one family in one city in Israel, but it's also seen in the promise of Romans 8:28, that everything good or bad, everything easy or hard, everything comfortable or uncomfortable or terrible, all things work together for good, but not for everybody.

That's not a hallmark card for everybody. That is a promise given only to those who love God. Now, there's more to God's plan than just interacting with us personally. God's better than you could imagine. Plan has a second aspect, and it's this. God's plan is generational. So if you have your Bibles open and you're looking at Ruth chapter four, then you see the very end of chapter four is a genealogy. It's not slapped on the end like it's an afterthought, like the last moment in movies, like *The Usual Suspects* or *Sixth Sense* or *Citizen Kane*. It's the plot twist at the very end that explains the entire story. And that's what happens here in the book of Ruth. The genealogy

not only confirms that we're talking about real people in the book of Ruth, but the entire book is actually leading up to this genealogy, but the question is, "Why?" Well, if you've got your Bible open, you can see that the last word of the last chapter is the name David. And that's why.

That's where everything was headed, to this person, David. See, Ruth is more than a love story, and it's more than a story about God's personal plan to care for one widow and one family in one city in Israel. Ruth is about how God used the love story between two very godly people to protect one widow and to produce a baby that became the grandfather of a king who was a part of a family line that almost went extinct, and not just any king, the greatest king in Israel's history, King David. Yes. If you know David, you know that he's not a perfect man. He's a little bit too much like us, but at his core, David loved God, and he wanted God's will for his life and for the life of all of God's people. And it's not because he deserved it, but because God is so merciful that God makes David a promise.

He says 1 Chronicles 17, "David, I'm going to take one of your ancestors." And he says, "I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me." God continues and says, "I will confirm him in my kingdom, and I will establish his throne forever." Now, for many people for centuries, really, we all have Christmas traditions. And for many, one tradition is seeing Handel's Messiah. They see it on TV. They go see it live. And there's the Hallelujah Chorus that's so famous. Everybody stands, but then there's this constant reframe after hallelujahs. Remember what that is? "He shall reign forever and ever, forever and ever, forever and ever." They just keep saying that over and over again. Well, that song, that part is talking about this guy. One of David's ancestors shall reign forever and ever over God's worldwide kingdom. And though related to David, he will also be the Son of God.

Now, if you don't have a Bible open, Ruth 4:18, the genealogy begins with a man by the name of Perez. He lived about 500 years before Naomi and 600 years before David. And for us, we haven't any idea what anybody we were connected to were doing 500 and 600 years ago. Does that even matter? Well, it matters incredibly to this story. Perez's dad was a man named Judah. Again, a very imperfect man, but God made Judah a promise too, again, not because he deserved it, because he doesn't deserve it. God made him a promise because he's merciful. He says to Judah basically this, "Judah, your family line is going to be the line that all the kings come from. You are going to have the royal line. Your genealogy is going to have the kings of Israel." Wow. So this genealogy at the end of Ruth doesn't just show that David comes from like good people like Boaz and Ruth. No, he comes from the royal line of Judah, making David the rightful King of Israel.

But that also means what? That David's ancestor, the one who will reign forever and ever, he too is an ancestor of Judah, which means he too is the rightful King of Israel. All of that from a short list of 10 names at the end of the book of Ruth. There's actually a lot more there, but this is Christmas and there's another baby that we've got to talk about. If you're interested, I posted a document on our Facebook page. You can read about this genealogy, that the intricate details will just blow your mind. But I want you to think about this. I think it's safe to say that we never have enough information to say with certainty, "I know what God is doing in this situation." Right? Things happen in our lives, and we try to interpret it like, "What is God doing? This is what he's doing."

And others will tell you that is what he's doing, but really, we don't know what God is doing. Our minds are so puny compared to him. Our thoughts, our ideas are nothing compared to him. We

don't have the wisdom to understand that. I think about Naomi, lost her husband, lost her sons, utterly destitute. Could she have ever imagined that 100 years after she dies that her great-great-grandson is going to be king over all of Israel? No way, but God had a plan. And that plan was more than personal. It was a multi-generational plan to do good to an entire people group, the people of Israel, through the great-great-grandson of one widow in one family in one city in Israel. Now, the story of Christmas will come into clear focus as we see the third aspect of God's better than you could imagine plan.

And for this, I've got to take you all the way back to the first verse of the Bible, Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." What that means is that God is God overall things. He's God's over things because he created everything. He's not a localized deity that's God over this mountain or he's the God of fire or the God of storms. That's not this God. This God created everything. And by the way, he created everything with his voice, not a weak failing voice like mine, but a powerful, powerful voice. And the next thing he does is he personally creates human beings, and though these human beings lived in a completely perfect state, the best environment imaginable, they rebel against God. They trust in themselves instead of him. They follow their own hearts rather than his word. Sound familiar? God's plan was always to have a family that enjoyed infinite love and infinite goodness with him as their Father.

And so to rescue humanity from ourselves and our rebellion, he talked to Judah's great-grandfather, a guy named Abraham. And like Judah, Abraham was not a perfect man, but because God is merciful, he made a promise to Abraham too. Genesis 12:3, God promises to Abraham that, "Through you, all the families of the earth will be blessed." How many of you are in a family? Yeah. You know what that means? What that means is that God has a specific blessing for you through Abraham. The third aspect of God's better than you could imagine plan is that God's plan is universal. His plan is universal. It's not just to bless individuals, and it's not just to bless the nation of Israel. God's plan has been to bless, which means to do good things for people from every tribe and kingdom and language and nation. And he's going to do that through one of Abraham's physical descendants. Now, what does Ruth's genealogy and the book and three promises made to David, Judah, and Abraham, what in the world does that have to do with Christmas?

You might be asking that right now. I'm glad you asked. I don't know if it's true for you, but it's true for me. It's hard to see what God is doing at times. Right? Things happen and like, is this really happening? And okay, it is really happening. What in the world are you doing, God? I don't get it. I don't see what's going on. Could you help me understand this? He works in a mysterious way in our world and in our lives. Doesn't he? For Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, they had no idea that he was taking these events, and he was using them and weaving a tapestry that would produce a king 100 years after they all died. They had no idea that in the same city where Ruth married Boaz and had a baby that another couple would show up to the same city, the city of Bethlehem, and that couple 1,000 years after Ruth and Boaz would also be in Bethlehem and have a baby.

And they had no idea that in the same city where this couple would travel through the same gates where Boaz won the right to marry Ruth. Only instead of finding rest and security in a home like Ruth did, they found a stable full of animals. And when that baby was born in the same fields outside of Bethlehem, where Ruth and Boaz met, angel split the sky and announced, "Glory to God in the highest. Good news of great joy will be for all people, for everybody, every tribe and

language and kingdom and nation. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." And then there's this tax collector guy named Matthew.

And he's so taken by this Christ that he wants to write kind of a biography of the baby. And so, you know what he does when he starts his book? He starts his book with a genealogy, and the genealogy starts with the name Abraham. That's the guy that God gave that first promise to you that, "Through you, Abraham, I'm going to bless every family on the face of the earth." It says Abraham was the father of Isaac and Isaac, the father of Jacob and Jacob, the father of Judah. Judah, that's the guy that God gave the second promise to that. The royal line of kings would come from your family. And Judah was the father of Perez. Sound familiar? Judah was the father of Perez by Tamar. And you know what Matthew does? Matthew takes his copy of Ruth.

He takes it to the copy machine, and he makes a copy of chapter four, and he cuts out verses 18 to 22, and he pastes it right into his work because the genealogy at this point is verbatim, Ruth four verses 18 to 22. And Perez is the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, all the way down to Salmon, the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David, the king. And there's the man who received God's third promise, that an ancestor would establish God's kingdom on earth and reign forever and ever. And who was that ancestor? Matthew tells us. 28 generations down, he says, "And Jacob, that was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born who was called the Christ."

Often, we think that Christ is the last name of Jesus. That's not what it is. Christ is a title. And that title, Christ, means King. He is the one who will reign forever and ever, and that's God's universal plan, and it's being fulfilled even to this day. All this doesn't happen unless God had a personal generational and universal plan that starts with Abraham and gets a little more specific through Judah, was protected from extinction in the book of Ruth and got even more specific through David, and then saw the beginning of those plans, those promises being fulfilled on that first Christmas when Jesus was born. Now, in Jesus's genealogy, I read the names of four women, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Mary. There's another woman in his genealogy. Her name was Bathsheba, and I want to tell you about these women.

Tamar was not a part of the Jewish people. She was a Canaanite, and she married one though, but he died, and they didn't have any children, and things got really desperate. And so she decided that she was going to dress up like a prostitute and seduce her father-in-law. Her father-in-law was named Judah. Yes, that Judah. And they had a baby named Perez, that Perez. Rahab didn't just dress up like one, she actually was a prostitute, and she was also not Jewish. And then you have Ruth, she's godly woman, no doubt. She's not part of the Jewish people either. And her people were the Moabites, an entire race of people that came from an incestuous relationship between a father and his daughter. And then there's Bathsheba, committed adultery against her honorable husband, Uriah, with King David. Yes, that King David, who then had Uriah killed to cover up the adultery.

And number five is Mary, the mother of Jesus. She was a social outcast. Do you know why? Because everybody thought that she was fooling around behind her fiancé because she got pregnant. The genealogy of Jesus includes Abraham, the coward, and Jacob, the deceiver, Solomon, the unfaithful, Rehoboam, the fool, and then there's Manasseh, the idolatrous, heretic, child sacrificer. See, arrogant, self-righteous, often very religious people look at that group and say, "Get me away from those people." Jesus says, "Those are my people. That's my family."

Everyone is welcome in my family. Jews, non-Jews, prostitutes, adulterers, murders, outcasts, cowards, liars, and idolators, everybody is welcome." Listen, there are not good people and bad people. There are just bad people and Jesus. The angels that first Christmas called him Savior for a reason. One angel told Joseph, here is the reason. He said, "Mary will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins."

God's universal generational plan is also a personal plan that can include you. Will you own that you're far more like the people in Jesus's genealogy than you are like Jesus? Will you admit that it's not just those people over there that need a Savior, but that it's you that needs a Savior? If you can embrace the fact that you need a Savior, one who will save you from the penalty you deserve for your sins, then will you embrace Jesus as that Savior? He will save you from your penalty for your sins by taking the penalty for you. The baby born into the wooden manger, he grows up and is hung on a wooden cross. And it was on that cross that God treated Jesus as if he lived your life and lived my life of sin. He was our substitute in death. And listen, he is willing to trade all of your sins, every single one of them, for his perfect sinless life.

Who would not take that trade? God does not accept our achievements. He's not impressed with our good works or our good intentions. It doesn't matter if we are "better" than other people. There are only bad people and Jesus. And God only accepts perfection. And Jesus is merciful. He is willing to give you his perfection. He doesn't care what you did last millennium, last decade, last year. He doesn't care what you did last night. He is merciful and will forgive you. I talked to a guy about this a couple weeks ago and going back and forth on these things. And at one point, he says, "Will you pray for me?" And I said, "Okay, I'll pray for you, but really, you need to pray because you've heard everything that I've said here. You need to pray that you give your life to Jesus. Jesus, I believe in you. I trust in you. I give my life to you. That's what you need to pray." He goes, "I just did." Kind of taken back, I was like, "In your own head?" He's like, "Yeah."

Okay. I didn't know what to do. So let's pray. I start praying. And the tears are coming down for him. And I say, "Amen," and then there's that moment of awkward silence after the amen. And so I said, "Jack, what are you thinking?" I'll never forget this as long as I live. He goes, "I feel clean. 70+ years of feeling dirty, and now I'm clean." Listen, you can be clean now. You can be clean today. Trust Jesus, turn from your rebellion, turn from trusting in your own good works and your own goodness, be done with that, and put all your hope in Christ. Jesus's cousin, John, put it this way. He said, "To all who receive Jesus, who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." The story of Christmas is the story of one family line that God used to make his family from all the families of the earth. Come to Christ and join the family of God. Let's pray.