

Sermon Notes - May 9, 2021

(Ruth 1:1-8, 16-18)

Today, I'm actually going to talk today about the Old Testament reading from the book of Ruth. Most of you know that in the Old Testament there's only a couple of books named after women - Ruth and Esther. I hope, if you get a chance, that you'll go back and read the whole book of Ruth this week. It's only four small chapters. It is a small book and I hope you'll read the whole thing. If you want a book that has romance, tragedy, love, and God's provision, this book is for you. If you've ever been pounded by one tragedy or one problem after another and thought, "Where are you, God?" - this book is for you. If you've ever dealt with grief and weeping over the loss of a loved one, then this book is for you because it shows that God is faithful, God provides, that he comforts us, and that he transforms despair into hope and sorrow into joy. I hope you'll go back and read this book.

Let me tell you a little bit about Ruth, but before I do, I want to share a story with you. Dr. Harry Ironside was speaking at a Christian conference one weekend and he loved the food at the conference center. He especially loved the homemade biscuits. So, he went back to see the cook in the kitchen, and he said, "I just want to compliment you on some of the best homemade biscuits that I've ever had." The cook said, "Well, Dr. Ironside, you know there's a lot of ingredients in those biscuits, but none of them, if taking separately, taste very good. Flour doesn't taste good by itself, nor the shortening. But, if you put all the ingredients together, mix them up, roll it out, put it in a pan, and put them in the oven, it's amazing how good biscuits are." He said, "You know, it's kind of like life - God can take the ingredients of our lives, no matter how bad, and bring something good out of them." That's what happened in the story with Ruth.

Ruth and her husband, Emilech were living in Bethlehem, in Judah with their two sons. They were experiencing difficulty in the nation of Israel; there was national insecurity. The people of God had broken covenant with God. They were worshipping idols and pagan gods. They were doing their own thing. It was at the end of the book of Judges and if you go back and read that book, you'll find out that all of the people of Israel

were living what they thought was “right” in their own eyes. So, they weren’t living for God. There was hunger and famine. You remember in the Old Testament that God was one who blessed and cursed people. If they obeyed, they were blessed. If they disobeyed, they were punished, and they felt the punishment through the hunger, lack of crops, and lack of rain.

Now, Naomi, her husband, and her family were hungry. They needed food and other resources; so, they made the decision as a family to move away and go to a country called Moab. They had wheat and barley and other resources there, and they thought they could begin afresh and start over, and that’s what they did. But, here they were, Jews, who were living in a foreign country – in a pagan country. While they were there, their sons married Moabite women, and the husband, sometime after the moved there (within two or three years) died and later Naomi’s two sons died. Think about this: Naomi is a wife and mother who has lost her husband and her two sons within a period of probably ten years. Now, she had two loving daughters-in-law -- Moabite women, who obviously had converted to Judaism. They loved their mother-in-law. (I won’t ask you how many of you have a good mother-in-law or daughter-in-law...) but, Naomi and her daughters-in-law had a good relationship. They loved each other. After Naomi’s husband died, Naomi wanted to move back home to Bethlehem. The daughters-in-law wanted to go with their mother back to Bethlehem, because they had heard that things had improved in Israel -- there was national security; the Israelites had come back into covenant with God. There was rain, and the crops were coming in; so, there were lots of resources. Naomi’s husband also had some land back in Bethlehem, so they had a place to stay. Naomi said, “I’m going back,” and the two daughters-in-law wanted to go with her.

In the scripture lesson today, we discover that Orpah decided to stay home in Moab. Naomi said to her, “Listen, I’m old. I’m probably not going to have more children. Even if I got a husband and I was fortunate enough to have a child, it would be twenty years before they were ready to marry you. Are you going to wait that long to have children? No, you shouldn’t do that. Go back home to your Moabite parents; find a husband and a home and have some kids there.” So, Orpah, the one

daughter-in-law, decided to go back, but Ruth decided that she would go with Naomi. (We have those famous words (that are often used in wedding ceremonies): Ruth said to her mother-in-law, “Where you go, I will go. Where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die and be buried there. Let nothing separate us, not even death. May God deal with me severely if anything separates us, other than death.”) Ruth was a devoted, loving daughter-in-law.

I want you to notice that in all the tragedy and sadness that was going on in Naomi’s life, God was still at work in her life. God gave her a loving, devoted daughter-in-law who went with her on this trip to Bethlehem. Then, when she got back to Bethlehem, she told her, “Ruth, there’s some provision in the Mosaic law that says that farmers have to provide some grain at the edge of their field, so that the poor and the widowed can eat. I want you to go out and glean in the field – at the edge of the fields.” Ruth went out early the next morning, not knowing that she was going in the field of Boaz. Boaz was a wealthy man, a man of faith, and he was one that saw this beautiful young woman working in his fields. He went out and asked his servants, “Who is that woman?” Can’t you imagine him saying, “Man, she’s pretty. She’s young.”? He was an older man. (We’re guessing she was maybe 35-40 years old and he’s maybe 80 – we don’t know.) But, he said, “She’s beautiful.” He told his servants to take care of her. “Don’t you let the men insult her. Don’t you let them harm her. And, I want you to make sure that she has plenty of grain on the edges of the field, enough for her and her beloved mother-in-law. Then, I want you to make sure that she gets food and drink at lunch when you all take a break, and she eats with the women.”

Boaz was kind, compassionate, and generous – providing for and protective of Ruth. God was providing and caring for Naomi and Ruth through Boaz. Do you see all that? God provided a devoted daughter-in-law who loved Naomi enough to go with her on this trip. He gave her somebody younger to glean from the fields, so she didn’t have to go on the street -- because in those days women had no status, and women would have been homeless and destitute without a husband and a family. In those days, if your husband died and you had no sons, you were

homeless and destitute. So, unless a kinsman somewhere would pick you up and take you in, you were in bad shape and on the street. Now, here is a man who sees this beautiful woman, Ruth, and offers her grain. He tells his men to protect her - "Don't you insult her. Don't you hurt her physically. Don't you do anything. You watch after this woman for me." He took a liking to her right off, didn't he? Some would say that it might have been love-at-first-sight. Boaz protected her and was good to her.

Ruth goes home and tells her mother-in-law, Naomi what Boaz did for her. Naomi is all excited because she knows that her mother-in-law knows this man. Naomi says, "This is Boaz. He's a relative of my deceased husband. You know in the Mosaic law, there's a provision made that if a woman's husband dies and she has no son, that the nearest of kin has to buy her property and take with it the spouse, the widowed woman - marry her and have children." Well, Naomi starts scheming. (None of you have scheming mothers-in-law, do ya?) She was scheming. She had already figured this out - how she was going to get Ruth and Boaz together. She pulls Ruth in one day, after she's come in from work, and says, "Ruth, I want you to take a shower, put on your best clothes and your favorite perfume, and tonight, when Boaz comes in from the fields, and he goes and has dinner, is filled up with food and drink, and falls asleep, I want you to go into the threshing floor where he will be sleeping, and you lay down at his feet." I bet Nicholas Sparks and Nora Roberts would even blush, wouldn't they? "You go down and lay at his feet, pull the cover off his feet, and when he gets a little cold and he wakes up, he's going to say, 'Who is that?' and you tell him that you are Ruth, the widowed lady, and you know that he is your kinsman -- that means that he has a responsibility to you. Let's see what he does." Can't you imagine the wheels in Ruth's head are turning, like, "What if this backfires?" She said, "Just trust me, Ruth" - and so Ruth does. She goes and lays at his feet and she uncovers his feet with the cloth, the shawl that's on them, and he wakes up, "Who are you?" She tells him who she is. "I'm the widowed lady, part of Naomi's family, and you're the kinsman redeemer." He says, "Listen, I don't want you to get in trouble. You lay here and sleep tonight. I want you to get up real early in the morning, before the men folk wake up, and you leave from my room. I want to give you some grain to take home for you and your mother-in-

law. I'm going to take care of everything. I'm going to make a deal. You see, there's somebody that is closer as a kinsman than I am, and I've got to go make things right."

So, off Boaz goes and he calls a meeting of the elders. They get together and he calls this redeemer, this kinsman to join in their meeting. Boaz says, "Listen, Naomi over here, her husband died and we are relatives of hers. You are closer kin to her than I am. You have to buy the property and with it comes this widowed daughter-in-law that you can marry and with whom you can have children." He said, "Wait a minute. I have enough wives and kids. I'll take the land, but I don't want the woman and more children. I don't need any more wives or children." So, Boaz says, "Then, I will. I will buy the property and I will marry this woman." I want you to know, in the story, that Ruth and Boaz get married. They have a son named Obed. Obed is the grandfather of King David - and through the lineage of King David came Jesus, our Messiah.

I want to ask you, "What in the world does this story have to do with us?" Sometimes, when we have tragedy upon tragedy, or problem on problem, and we wonder, "God, where are you?" - God is often working behind the scenes, being faithful and providing for us. Think about in that story -- Naomi's lost her husband, her two kids; she had moved from her homeland to a foreign country (and a pagan country); she's come back to start her life all over - empty, with nothing other than her daughter-in-law. Yet, God gave her a devoted, loving daughter-in-law who cared for her (a foreigner) - who loved her and was devoted to her. She helped her with grain and brought food in. And then, God provided a man, who was a man of faith, had resources, who loved this woman, Ruth, and who provided for she and the mother-in-law. ***God was right there all along, behind-the-scenes. God is faithful. God provides. God takes care of us, even when we're not even aware of it.***

There's a story that Jim Cymbala tells in his book, "Fresh Wind and Fresh Fire." Jim is the Pastor of Brooklyn Tabernacle Church in New York City. When that little church started, it had thirty members. It now has over 16,000 members. Jim Cymbala tells a story about when he first started the church. He said, "We had thirty members. We bought a little

building, and at that time, the mortgage payment was \$260/month. The first mortgage payment was coming due that week and I knew that we only had \$160 in the bank account at the church. I prayed, 'Lord, please, this money is due this week. We've got to find a way to pay it. Please, God. Help me to figure this out and find a way.' I went to my mailbox, hoping there would be an offering check, but there was nothing there. I went to check the church mailbox and there was nothing there either. I checked it every day. On Wednesday night, we always had a Bible study, but we only had about five members that came each week. I knew that the offering that night would only be about \$10-\$20. 'Lord, please. I'm begging you, God. Please help us not be late with the first bank mortgage on this church.' Finally that evening, I said, 'Lord, I give it to you. You know what we owe and what's due.' I went to bed and slept in peace that night. The next morning, I got up early and went to the church." When he got there and opened the door, he found a white envelope laying on the floor in the office foyer. There was no address, no stamp on it. He picked it up and opened it, and there were two \$50 bills in it - the exact amount he needed for the payment. "I want you to know that I fell on my knees in prayer and said, 'Thank you, Lord. Thank you. Help me, Lord to trust you - that you provide and that you are faithful, even when I have no idea how you are going to work it out.' Still to this day, I do not know who gave that \$100." Amazing, isn't it?

God has a way of working behind-the-scenes to show us that he's faithful, he provides, and he loves us. He wants us to trust him. Boaz was a kinsman redeemer. He rescued Ruth and Naomi from homelessness and destitution. He rescued them and provided them resources. Jesus Christ is our redeemer, who set out to redeem us and set us free from our life of sin and death. So, the Book of Ruth not only gives the geneology of Jesus through the lineage of David, it tells us about our redeemer, Jesus Christ. It tells about how much God loves us, and he's faithful and he provides for us.

I want to read something for you that's from a Heidelberg Catechism. How many of you had to study that when you went through confirmation? ... Any of you? It is a Protestant confessional. It helps us

to understand more about the Reformed Christian Tradition. This is the part I want you to hear:

I trust God so much that I do not doubt that he will provide whatever I need for body or soul and he will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends in this sad world. He is able to do this because he is Almighty God. He desires to do it because he is a Faithful Father.

Today, we have a story of Ruth - of romance, tragedy, love, and God's provision of a kinsman redeemer. We have a God who is faithful to us, who loves us, and who is behind-the-scenes working. When everything is heavy on you and you don't know where God is, God is behind-the-scenes, working through things to bring about his will and to show you that he loves you. He will not let you down. He may not do it in "my time" or "your time," but he will do it in his timetable. But, he is faithful. He loves you and he provides. May God bless you this day. Amen.