

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

Encouragement

Ruth 1:16-22; Ruth 2:5-16; Ruth 3:7-13

September 15, 2013

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Ruth is the eighth book in the Bible. It's a small book, only four chapters, but it is a very dramatic book. There are a lot of things that happen in the Book of Ruth. Let me give you some background information. There was a famine in Bethlehem and throughout all of Judea. There was a family from Bethlehem that went to Moab in order to have food. Now, Moab was not a good place, and it was not a place that was especially kind to Hebrew people. In fact, it was a place that was cursed by God. The family had four members Elimelek and Naomi were the husband and wife. They had two sons named Mahlon and Kilion. Elimelek dies, and Naomi is left alone with her two sons. They marry two Moabite women. Then, the two sons die, and Naomi is left with her two daughters-in-law. Their names were Ruth and Orpah. So, now we have three widows living together. After Naomi had been in Moab for about ten years, she heard that the famine in Bethlehem was over, and the people had food. She decided to return home. She told her daughters-in-law to return to their own land; she told them to go home and get new husbands, but Ruth stayed with her.

SCRIPTURE Ruth 1:16-22

¹⁶ But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” ¹⁸ When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. ¹⁹ So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?”

²⁰ “Don’t call me Naomi,” she told them. “Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. ²¹ I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back

empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”²² So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

When Naomi seemed to have no hope, God was working behind the scenes. Naomi had a rough life. She was a victim of a famine. She relocated to an unfamiliar land. She lost her husband. She lost her two sons. At this time, a woman without a man was hopeless. She was just completely lost. When she returned to her homeland, people recognized her. They called out to her, but she said, “Don't call me by my name. Call me Mara which means bitter.” In other words, she said, “I'm not Naomi. I'm bitter.”

Not only was she hopeless, but now she was dragging along another woman. Ruth was a person in a foreign land. Perhaps, at the beginning, Naomi saw Ruth as no more than a liability, but God was at work behind the scenes preparing a good future for her.

ILLUSTRATION

If a situation seems hopeless, there is hope because God is still alive, and God is at work. I want to tell you this morning about a pastor named Saeed Abedini. Some of you know about him. Saeed is an American citizen. He's from Iranian descent. Right now, Saeed is in jail in Iraq.

Saeed grew up in Iraq, and it was there that he became a Christian. Around the year 2000 he came to the US and became a US citizen. He was ordained into the ministry. He went to Iran several times. He was raising awareness and support for orphans in Iraq and wanted to build an orphanage in Iraq. He broke no Iranian law, but in 2012 he was arrested. His passport was taken, and he was jailed. In 2013 in January, he was put on trial and sentenced to eight years in jail. Reports are that he has suffered abuse, that he has internal bleeding, that he has had no medical treatment. For months, Saeed heard nothing from the outside world.

Perhaps he thought that others didn't know what happened to him, that he was in jail, but in March of this year he was allowed an extended family visit. His wife did not go. She's American, and she did not go for fear of being arrested herself. It was

his extended family in Iran that went to see him, and it was there he learned how his terrible situation had gained world attention. He sent a letter through his family to the rest of the world. His letter said this, “I heard that my persecution, my arrest and imprisonment, has united churches from different denominations, from different cities and countries that would never come together because of their differences. You don't know how happy I was in the Lord and rejoicing, knowing that in my chains, the body of Christ has chained together and has brought people to action in prayer.”

His wife has been very outspoken during his jail term, and she has been telling people that God is allowing the persecution to open up the gospel to the rest of the world. She spoke at a church, and she told the church that she would be speaking in the days ahead to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva and that she was going to preach the gospel. You know what? Just a few days later, she did just that. She spoke for about two and a half minutes to the United Nations Human Rights Council. Here's what she said at the close of her speech, “Iran has upheld his imprisonment because he believes in the forgiveness of sin through Jesus and that whoever accepts this forgiveness of sin can be reconciled to the God of peace and love.” She said that to the United Nations Human Rights Council. Now, September 26th of this month has been set aside as a worldwide day of prayer for Saeed, and I believe that I'm correct in saying that Saeed has little knowledge of really what's going on for his behalf. So, when things seem hopeless, remember that God is still on the throne, and he is still at work.

APPLICATION

I wonder if any of you today have ever felt like Naomi. Perhaps so many bad things have happened to you that you feel that God has abandoned you. Well, I want to encourage you today. He's at work in ways that you don't know. As I understand life, and I am still learning, I'm on this journey with you. There is an ebb and flow of happiness and sadness, what we perceive as good times and what we perceive as bad times. If we were on the mountaintop all the time, we would only live a half-life. It's in the trials and difficulties of life that character is built. James 4:8 tells us, “Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

EXPLANATION

Back to the story of Ruth and Naomi. Well, this very busy person took time to listen, understand, and bless Ruth's life. There was a man named Boaz. Boaz just happened to be the son of Rahab, the woman whose life was spared when she assisted the Hebrew spies. Boaz was a busy person. He owned land. He owned crops. He was rich, and here it was harvest time. He had a foreman. He had harvesters. He had servants who cared for the harvesters. He was a man on a mission. As busy as Boaz was, he noticed someone in the crowd.

SCRIPTURE Ruth 2:5-16

⁵ Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, “Who does that young woman belong to?” ⁶ The overseer replied, “She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. ⁷ She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.’ She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.” ⁸ So Boaz said to Ruth, “My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. ⁹ Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.” ¹⁰ At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?” ¹¹ Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. ¹² May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” ¹³ “May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord,” she said. “You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servants.” ¹⁴ At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.” When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. ¹⁵ As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, “Let her gather among the sheaves and don’t reprimand her. ¹⁶ Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don’t rebuke her.”

EXPLANATION

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Ruth went to the fields to glean, which means that she went to pick up what the harvesters left behind. Gleaners were not paid. They weren't regarded very highly. A Nashville equivalent of a gleaner quite possibly would be somebody who picks up cans. The law during this time required farmers to allow poor people to glean. They were just scavengers, but Boaz took time to listen to his foremen and apparently others because he knew more about Ruth than the foreman told him. Don't we all need somebody who will listen? Don't we all need somebody who will care and seek to understand?

ILLUSTRATION

Don't you want to go to a doctor who will take the time to listen to you? Don't you want a spouse, significant friend, or others to listen to you? I read this past week about why men should not write advice columns. It is an art. There was an advice column called "Dear John." One week, a letter said, "Dear John, I hope you can help me. The other day I set off for work, leaving my husband in the house watching TV. My car stalled and then broke down about a mile down the road, and I had to walk back to get my husband's help. When I got home, I couldn't believe my eyes. He was in our bedroom with our neighbor. We'd been married for 10 years. When I confronted him, he broke down and admitted they'd been having an affair for the past six months. He won't go to counseling, and I'm afraid. I'm a wreck, and I need advice urgently. Can you please help? Sincerely, Sheila."

John, the male advice columnist, wrote back, "Dear Sheila, a car stalling after being driven a short distance can be caused by a variety of faults with the engine. Start by checking that there's no debris in the fuel line. If it's clear, check the vacuum pipes and hoses on the intake manifold and also check all the ground wires. If none of these approaches solved the problem, it could be that the fuel pump itself is faulty causing low delivery pressure to the injectors. I hope this helps. Sincerely, John."

Boaz was different than Dear John. He told a woman who was a foreigner, in a public place, during the day, to have something to eat and drink. This was absolutely unheard of in this day. Remarkable for the time, he talked; he listened; he understood, and he had compassion. Afterwards, he told the workers to have mercy on her and to throw some stalks back into the field. Ruth went home with so much barley that Naomi knew someone must be watching out for her.

APPLICATION

Let's take time to learn what's going on in other's lives. If you want your prayers answered, be an answer to someone else's prayers. Let's take time to really listen. Let's take time to understand. Let's really learn how to bless others' lives. As believers in Jesus Christ why would we not want to bless others' lives? Why would we not want to be generous?

Today, if you're going out for lunch, leave an extra tip. Do you know that table service people don't like working on Sundays because the church crowd tends to be chintzy with their tips? I know a table server who told me once that a man left a gospel track instead of a tip. She said, "I'm already saved, and this track won't buy groceries for my family."

I love the part where Boaz told his harvesters to leave some stalks behind. Can't we be like Boaz? Can't we think of sneaky, fun things to do to bless others' lives without getting the credit for ourselves? I learn more and more that everyone who has gotten somewhere got there with the help of someone else. Let's never be too busy to listen, understand, care, and use our influence to help others in positive ways. There's enough negativity in this world, and it's up to us to change it.

This crowd right here this morning can change the world. I want you to hear this truth. God surprises us in ways that we do not expect. He just has fun doing that. When Ruth tells Naomi about her day, Naomi tells her that Boaz is a relative of a Elimelek, her deceased husband, Ruth's deceased father-in-law.

In this day, when a man died, the widow would be married by a single relative of the husband in order to provide security and in order to keep the family line going. In this book, The Book of Ruth, the title of this person is the kinsman redeemer. Now, let's review. A destitute Naomi returns to Bethlehem with her daughter-in-law, Ruth, who is a foreigner. Ruth immediately goes to work gleaning in a field, and, it just so happens, that the field she gleans in was owned by a single relative of her deceased father-in-law. Naomi was too old to have children; so, she did not pursue Boaz as the kinsman redeemer, but she suggested that Ruth pursue him.

SCRIPTURE Ruth 3:7-13

When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. ⁸ In the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned—and there was a woman lying at his feet! ⁹ “Who are you?” he asked.

“I am your servant Ruth,” she said. “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family.” ¹⁰ “The LORD bless you, my daughter,” he replied. “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. ¹¹ And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character. ¹² Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I. ¹³ Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning.”

EXPLANATION

Ruth has a surprise. Ruth, an impoverished, scavenger, foreigner, found out about this whole kinsman-redeemer tradition, and Naomi defers it to Ruth. Now, Boaz has a surprise. He's an older, single man, and this woman wants to marry him. As I understand it in my study of the culture of the day in which this was written, it would have been improper for an older man to ask for a younger woman's hand in marriage because the woman would feel obligated, but if the woman liked the man, she could ask the older man. She could propose to him.

Just a couple of months earlier, neither had thought about each other, and now wedding plans were happening. You know, sometimes God surprises us in ways that we do not expect. Why do we continue to be surprised by God? Don't you think God just has fun and laughs at us? “I'm going to surprise them again. Look, they're surprised!” Don't we have a wonderful God?

Boaz told Ruth that there was another relative closer than he was who had the right of first refusal. He met with the man; he told him the situation, and the man turned down the offer. So, Boaz bought Elimelek's property, and, according to the law, he took Ruth as his wife, and he took care of Naomi. Ruth had a son named Obed who

was the father of Jesse who was the father of David, and these men pop up again in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew chapter 1.

ILLUSTRATION

A woman I know took her daughter to an alcohol rehab center. She dropped her daughter off at this center, and she went to a hotel room. She was wound up from all the events of the day and the things that had transpired the days before. She needed rest but was so stressed that she knew she'd never fall asleep. She needed some encouragement. She said, "Lord, I need some encouragement." She opened the drawer, and there was a Gideon Bible. She just opened it, and it opened to Ruth chapter 1. So, she lay there and read all four chapters out loud, and the next morning she awoke, and the Book of Ruth was still on her chest. God's Word gives us peace and encouragement when we need it. She said, "I read about a woman who was in trouble and needed help," and she said, "I was a woman who was in trouble and needed help."

Jesus is our kinsman redeemer. Boaz is an example of the work of Christ. He redeemed this impoverished gleaner, and he blessed her with everything that was his. Ruth is an example of the family of faith being extended to all who believe. She was from the cursed nation of Moab, a clan started through the sin of Lot (which is another sermon for another time), but she believed in the God of Naomi, and she was included in the family of faith and finds herself in the genealogy of Jesus, our kinsman redeemer. Jesus redeemed us to himself; he gives us hope where there is no hope. He listens; he understands; he has compassion; and he never ceases to surprise us with his grace and mercy. Do you know this kinsman redeemer? Is he your Savior?

Boaz redeemed Ruth out of his riches. Jesus redeemed us with his own life. Boaz rescued Ruth and Naomi from despair and barrenness. Jesus rescues us from spiritual poverty. Boaz rescued Ruth from earthly oppression. Jesus rescued us for eternity, and so as we come to the cross yet again on another Sunday, we have gratitude.

Hebrews 9 :12 says, "He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption."

Those who seek to know the true God are redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ who paid the price in full to make us his purchased possession, his eternal bride to which he, for all eternity, pours out blessing.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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