

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 1-8-12 PM NOTES
"RUTH"
#10 in Series, "The Glory of God in the Old Testament"

Romans 8:28 (NASB) "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose."

"Life is not a straight line leading from one blessing to the next and then finally to heaven. Life is a winding and troubled road. Switchback after switchback. And the point of Biblical stories like Joseph and Job and Esther and Ruth is to help us feel in our bones (not just know in our heads) that God is for us in all these turns. God is not just showing up after all the trouble and cleaning it up. He is plotting the course and managing the troubles with far-reaching purposes for our good and for the glory of Jesus Christ."
—John Piper

I. Ruth's Resolve (Chapter 1)

Ruth 1:16-17 (NIV) ¹⁶ "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 anything but death separates you and me."

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

—William Cowper

II. Ruth's Response (Chapter 2)

Leviticus 19:9-10 (ESV) ⁹ "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. ¹⁰ And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God."

Ruth 2:3 (KJV) "And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field *belonging* unto Boaz, who *was* of the kindred of Elimelech."

Ruth 2:20b (NIV) "That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers."

III. Ruth's Request (Chapter 3)

Ruth 3:9b (NIV) "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer."

IV. Ruth's Reward (Chapter 4)

Romans 8:28 (NASB) "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose."

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“RUTH”

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Benjamin Franklin served for a time as the US Ambassador to France. While in France he occasionally attended the meetings of “The Infidel’s Club”. This club was a group of intellectuals who spent most of their time together reading and discussing literary masterpieces. Like many intellectual snobs today, they were mostly atheists or agnostics who ridiculed the Bible. On one occasion Ben Franklin brought a book to read before the group. When he finished the short story, the club members were unanimous in their praise of the book. They demanded to know where he had run across such a literary masterpiece. Franklin gleefully told them that it was the book of Ruth from the Bible which they had scorned, but evidently knew little about. Ben Franklin had simply changed the names in the book of Ruth. The book of Ruth is truly a literary masterpiece that beautifully displays love, devotion, and true romance, but it is also history. Ruth was a real person in history. Her storybook romance and marriage was with a real man named Boaz. Ruth and Boaz were the great grandparents of Israel’s greatest king – King David, and thus Ruth and Boaz were in the physical lineage of Christ Himself.

We are told in the very first verse of Ruth that the events of the book took place in the time of the Judges. The period covered in the book of Judges was somewhere around 1375 – 1050 BC. These were the darkest, most wicked days of Israel’s history. Ruth is like a beautiful flower growing beside a polluted stream. The book of Ruth is full of surprises. The first surprise is that a book of the Bible was named after a woman in a male dominated culture. The second surprise is that the woman was a foreigner – a hated Moabitess! You read almost nothing good in the Bible about the Moabites. They descended from the incestuous union of Lot and his oldest daughter (Genesis 19:36-37). The greatest surprise is that God would choose Ruth to be in the human lineage of His Son.

There are so many lessons that we learn from the book of Ruth, but let me point out one truth that flows through the book that I want to be an encouragement to us. The route to heaven for a child of God is not on a straight line and a smooth ride to glory. It is a route of twists and turns, hazardous and twisted roads full of large bumps and deep potholes. Sometimes the route seems to be taking us away from the ultimate destination, but there are frequent signs along the road that says, “God is in control; trust Him”. We see the providential sovereign control of God on the road to glory in every chapter of this short book. We see how He takes painful, hurtful, disappointing circumstances and in His sovereignty is as we read in **Romans 8:28 (NASB)** “...that God [is causing] all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.” Ruth is one of the most encouraging books of the Bible and if you are unfamiliar with this book, you will have it listed in your favorite books of the Bible when this survey is finished. Listen to this great quote from John Piper in his little book on Ruth: “Life is not a straight line leading from one blessing to the next and then finally to heaven. Life is a winding and troubled road. Switchback after switchback. And the point of Biblical stories like Joseph and Job and Esther and Ruth is to help us feel in our bones (not just know in our heads) that God is for us in all these turns. God is not just showing up after all the trouble and cleaning it up. He is plotting the course and managing the troubles with far-reaching purposes for our good and for the glory of Jesus Christ” [John Piper, *A Sweet and Bitter Providence*, Pages 101, 102].

Let’s do an exposition of the book of Ruth [Read 1:1-5]. The book of Ruth begins in Bethlehem. The Hebrew word transliterated “Bethlehem” means “house of bread”, but there was a famine and thus no bread in the house of bread. A man named Elimelech along with his wife Naomi and his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion left Israel and traveled to the land of Israel’s enemies – the Moabites. This was a trust failure on the part of Elimelech. Rather than trust God to supply their need, he set off on a “do it yourself” venture and things didn’t turn out well. The boys married outside the faith (two Moabite girls) and then one by one Elimelech and Mahlon, and Chilion died in Moab. Left behind were three widows in a culture that was not friendly to widows. At the end of the first five verses, things were about as dark as they could

be. Let's let this amazing story of God's mercy, grace, and sovereign providence unfold chapter by chapter.

I. Ruth's Resolve (Chapter 1)

News reaches Naomi that the famine is over in Bethlehem (there is now bread in the house of bread). Naomi decides to go back to her own country and calls her two daughters in laws together to tell them "good-bye". She seems to have been close to them and as we will see more clearly in a moment she has led one of them to faith in the one true God – Jehovah. She shares with her daughters in law in verses 8-9 that her desire is for God to deal kindly with them and give them each a good husband. One of the daughters in law follows Naomi's advice and with great affection toward Naomi, Orpah goes back to her family. The other daughter takes a different path. **Ruth 1:14b (NKJV)** "...but Ruth clung to her." Naomi once again encourages Ruth to go back to her people there in Moab. Ruth's reply to her Mother in law is probably the best known passage in the book of Ruth. It is often read in weddings (and appropriately so) to signify the commitment of a husband and wife to each other. When I am requested to use this passage out of Ruth in a wedding ceremony, I wonder if the bride and groom know that this passage was originally spoken by a daughter in law to her Mother in law! Ruth replied in **Ruth 1:16-17 (NIV)** "¹⁶ 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 anything but death separates you and me."

Chapter one ends with Ruth and Naomi coming into Bethlehem. Naomi is a broken and bitter woman. Someone said that trials and heartache will either make you bitter or better. I think that is generally true, but Naomi is an illustration of a person who was made bitter by trials, but later was made better when she saw God at work through the trials. A poem turned into a hymn, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" by William Cowper is a hymn that beautifully illustrates the book of Ruth. One verse says this:

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

- William Cowper

II. Ruth's Response (Chapter 2)

How were two widows going to feed themselves? They were destitute and humanly speaking, without hope. In chapter two, we begin to see God's smiling face through His providential workings. Verse 1 introduces us to a key character in the book [Read 2:1]. Ruth is not aware of Boaz. By mentioning Boaz here, the writer is simply telling us to keep an eye on him because he is a really important person in this story. Ruth does what people need to do when they find themselves in need – get to work [Read Ruth 2:2]. Let me explain what Ruth was speaking of. In the Law of Moses, God gave a perfect welfare plan in meeting the needs of the poor without taking away their sense of human dignity. Oh that our government could learn from this. **Leviticus 19:9-10 (ESV)** ⁹ "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. ¹⁰ And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God." When the landowners harvested the grain (here it was barley), they were to leave the grain on the edges of the field and not pick up what fell as the harvesters did their work. The poor were allowed to harvest the grain on the edges of the field and pick up what the workers had cut and dropped on the field. The poor had their needs met, but it was not a handout; they had to work for it.

In verse 3 we see the amazing providence of God at work. I love the old English in the KJV translation of **Ruth 2:3 (KJV)** "And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field *belonging* unto Boaz, who *was* of the kindred of Elimelech." In 1611 when the KJV was translated, that made perfect sense. [Read Ruth 2:3 (NKJV)]. Let me stop here and make

sure we understand this word “providence” that we have been talking about. The word comes from the Latin. “Pro” means “before” and the last part of the word comes from “video” – “to see”. Providence means to see before. Because God is all knowing and all powerful, He works in what seems like chance circumstances to bring about His sovereign plans. With God there is no such thing as chance or luck. He is at work in all the circumstances of life because He sees beforehand what needs to be done to get us to where He wants us to be. We choose, but He then works through our choices and what seems like chance to bring about His purposes. This is one of the most amazing things about our God. When we understand His providence, it changes the way we look at life. His providence is the daily outworking of His sovereignty in accomplishing His ultimate plans.

Ruth probably had several reasons that she chose to glean in the field of Boaz. Perhaps it was the closest to their place of temporary shelter; perhaps it was a suggestion from someone she ran across; perhaps there were fewer gleaners here. We don’t know all the means that God used, but even though Ruth chose to go into Boaz’s field, it was exactly where God wanted her to be.

As Boaz came to check on the harvest, he saw Ruth and inquired of the workers as to who she was. Bethlehem was a very small town and he would have immediately recognized Ruth as someone not native to Bethlehem. When he was told, Boaz had heard of the character of this foreigner who was the widow of one of Boaz’s relatives. Boaz gave instructions to his workers to help Ruth [Read 2:15-17]. An “ephah” was 22 liters and would have fed two women for a month. When Ruth came home with this much grain, Naomi knew that something was up. When she hears where Ruth has been, her bitterness and hopelessness turns to joy and hope [Read 2:20]. The last part of verse 20 says in the NIV, **Ruth 2:20b (NIV)** "That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers." I must take a moment to explain what Naomi was referring to when she spoke of Boaz as their “Kinsman-redeemer”. When the Promised Land was divided up under Joshua between the tribes and the families of the tribes, there were some special instructions. The land was to always remain in the family it was given to. When tough times came, a family could temporarily give the use of their land to another. They could not, however, sell their land. Here are the provisions God gave to keep the land in the family. Every 50 years (the Year of Jubilee) all land reverted to the family to whom it was originally given. If it was 40 years till the next Year of Jubilee, the price for the use of the land would be much more than if it was 5 years until the Year of Jubilee. There was another way however that the family land could be gotten back before the Year of Jubilee. A near kinsman to the one who had given up the land could pay a redemption price and get the land back for its original owner. That near kinsman was called the kinsman redeemer (used 13 times in Ruth). This explains why Naomi got so excited over Ruth “by coincidence” ending up in the field of Boaz.

III. Ruth’s Request (Chapter 3)

From our viewpoint, it seems that Naomi is getting nosy and pushy in chapter 3. That is not the case. She knows that Ruth doesn’t know the Jewish laws and customs and she is simply showing Ruth the proper thing to do with Boaz, the kinsman redeemer [Read 3:1-5]. Another duty of the near relative was that when his relative died childless, this near relative was to (where appropriate) marry the widow and raise up a child to perpetuate the name of the relative who had died (Deuteronomy 25:5-6). Naomi sees in Boaz the potential for the return of her husband’s land, a husband for her daughter in law, and a grandchild for her.

What is all this drama Naomi is talking about that is to take place in the dark of night at the threshing floor? Naomi’s strategy here was risky, but doesn’t hesitate. After a hard day’s work and a nice meal, Naomi knew that Boaz would sleep at the place of the harvest – where the grain was threshed (nugget from the chaff). Naomi’s strategy seems at first to have sexual connotations, but it doesn’t. What Ruth was asking Boaz to do was to carry out the responsibilities of the kinsman redeemer and marry her [Read 3:6-9]. Other translations, such as the NASB, say in **Ruth 3:9 (NASB)** “... spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative." The covering is literally wing and it speaks of protection as when a mother bird spreads her wings over her babies to protect them from danger or the elements. That same

picture is used in Ezekiel 16:8 of God taking Israel for His bride. All seems well, but there is a complicating factor. Here comes another opportunity for Ruth to trust God and look to His sovereign plans. The complicating factor is that there was a nearer relative. OH NO! [Read 3:12]. It is interesting that Boaz had already been planning this moment. He had already checked it out and knew of the nearer relative.

Learn from Ruth – do it the right way. There was no seduction of Boaz though at the threshing floor would have been the perfect place. Ruth was committed to purity. I pray that you will be also. God’s ways are not the quickest, but they are the best! God’s ways involve trusting Him, waiting on Him, and then seeing Him work.

IV. Ruth’s Reward (Chapter 4)

[Read 4:1] At the gate of the city was where legal matters were dealt with. Boaz wastes no time to do whatever is necessary to settle the matter and gain his bride in a just way. To be the kinsman redeemer, there were three requirements. First, the redeemer had to be a relative. Second, the redeemer had to have the ability to pay the price for the land and support the relatives. Third, the relative had to be willing to perform the duties of the near kinsman. Boaz met all three requirements, but the problem is that this nearer relative had first chance to redeem. When Boaz lays it all out, the nearer kinsman (who is focusing primarily on the property) wants to be the redeemer [Read 4:4]. Boaz is ready for this response. Now he gives the rest of the picture to this nearer relative [Read 4:5-6]. Boaz’s pulse must have gone to 140! They then went through a legal ritual that said before witnesses that the nearer relative was giving up his right as the kinsman redeemer and had no right to set foot on the land. [Read 4:13-17].

CONCLUSION

A sad story that started with 3 funerals concludes with a wedding and soon after a child and a bitter woman who sees the providence of God and rejoices in His work. What lessons for life we find in Ruth. I long for you to trust in and rejoice in and rest in the sovereign providence of God. God is at work in your life to bring you to glory. It won’t be a smooth route or certainly the easiest route or even the route that makes the most sense to you, but it will be the best route. Even when you fail Him, disobey Him and choose your own way, while He chastens you and allows you to suffer earthly consequences, He will not abandon you. When you come to yourself and repent you will find that even sinful things are a part of “all things” and He promised in **Romans 8:28 (NASB)** “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.” [3033]