
Final – Of Stories and Bigger Stories

The Book of Ruth⁵

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In the great cycle of stories of the *Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, the narrative always brings us back to the Shire and there the stories are retold. Oh, they may not be the very same words, but the great movement that carried the narrative forward through dangers that brought victory out of seeming certain defeat is repeated.

And so, this morning. As we begin the Advent season with its emphasis on the birth of Jesus, the Christ, I thought we would once again recall and relish the sweep of this sweet story in the book of Ruth. Yes, it is a review. But there is something engaging and encouraging about this story. We will linger around the fire once again to listen and we will find ourselves here.

This is a story about Ruth...

The story is told and written in both a verbal and a visible framework.

A - The Devastation of Naomi's Family

Sadness and hardness were the dominant themes of Naomi's life. There is famine and moving and a husband's death. There is the marriage of her sons to women of Moab. Then sorrow upon sorrow as her sons also die. God's hand was heavy upon her. While Ruth has avowed her love for Naomi and her loyalty to God, Naomi sinks deeper into her misery. Their return to Bethlehem is greeted with joy, yet all Naomi can do is express her own bitterness over the hard chastening of God. She who went away full (of husband and sons and hope) has come home empty. But she has come home just in time for harvest.

B – Decisions by Naomi's Relatives

News of bounty in Bethlehem stirs Naomi to go back home. Her daughters-in-law seek to follow her but are sent back to their families and their idols. One turns away, grieved but going. One entreats to return with Naomi. While Ruth has avowed her love for Naomi and her loyalty to God, Naomi sinks deeper into her misery.

C – Return in Bitterness and Emptiness

Their return to Bethlehem is greeted with joy, yet all Naomi can do is express her own bitterness over the hard chastening of God. She who went away full (of husband and sons and hope) has come home empty. She who was pleasant, is now returned home bitter. From fullness to emptiness and bitterness, God's Fatherly love has directed His severe providences to bring two widows home at harvest.

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D – Meeting of Ruth and Boaz

In the midst of destitution and neediness diligence and faithfulness are guided by the hidden providences of God to the fields of a kinsman-redeemer whose godliness and maturity is on grand display. His kindness and generosity provide fullness while his affections begin to attach themselves to the young maid from Moab.

C – Presentation in Hope and Fullness

But the case must be presented to this humble man, so a carefully planned program is put into motion. In the midst of the night, the maid presents herself and her need to the man, to his great surprise and joy. While there is the problem of a nearer kinsman to redeem, Boaz commits himself to see that all is well. In his great wisdom, he sends Ruth home, her garment full to remind Naomi of a fullness to come through this maid and man.

B – Decisions by Ruth’s Redeemers

With all haste and humble, diligent wisdom, Boaz sees God’s providence bring the nearer redeemer at the gate of the city where the elders are convened, and a crowd of witnesses stand near. When the nearer redeemer sets aside his claim, Boaz joyfully secures his right. He is now the nearer kinsman-redeemer and chooses to take the land and the lady.

A – Restoration of Naomi’s Family

A marriage follows with the blessing of a son. This child of the union of a believing Gentile and a godly kinsman-redeemer is a bundled blessing laid to fill Naomi’s lap. Generations later, the great king of Israel, David would be a direct descendent.

But this is also...

This is a story about God...

There is an amazing sweetness in this story of Ruth. But there is an even greater wonder in this story about God.

In Futility, the Episode of There and Again

This has been about the God who was not trusted during a time of hardship, during a famine. He whose promises and provision and power had brought them into this land and sustained them there.

This has been about the God who was not obeyed in the matter of marrying and giving in marriage. He whose holiness and righteousness demanded separation in marriage and union only with God’s people.

This has been about the God in whom Gentiles may trust and commit their lives to loyal faithfulness, regardless of the cost. He whose grace casts wide and whose glory is most magnified when men and women from all over His world acknowledge Him as Lord and acclaim His worth.

This has been about the God whose Fatherly love chastens and disciplines, whose hand moves against and smites His people for their good. He whose love is not soft to allow sin or even distracting weights, but whose disciplines move to correct and train.

This has been about the God whose people should be called pleasant, but whose spirits are often bitter. He whose delight in His elect should call forth from them a solemn joy yet so often is met with deep resentment at the bitter providences.

This is about the God who brings home His wandering people just in time for harvest.

In Faithfulness, the Episode of Grain and Good

This is a story about the God who is sovereign over all, whose providences are working to serve the pleasures of His will and purposes of His glory.

This is a story about the God who is full of kindness and mercy, whose love takes the initiative to save His people and to shape them by His character.

This is a story about the God who is full of care and concern, whose righteousness protects and provides those who find favor with God.

This is a story about the God who gives hope to the bitter, whose bitter providences are the soil in which anticipation may attach itself to the evidences of His goodness.

This is a story about the God who delights in His people, whose will is working towards the marriage of His Son.

In Finding, the Episode of Maids and Men

This is a story about the God who provides for His people, whose wisdom ordains a way for those whose heritage in land and family is lost to be restored. He knows that devastation and death are the common lot of fallenness and arranges in His law for the perpetuation of life and property.

This is a story about the God who reveals Himself, whose revelation is often in models and types and analogies so that we will understand and in understanding, desire and delight in this God.

This is a story about the God who redeems His people, whose very life was given to pay the price and meet the penalty for their sin. He sent the great Kinsman-Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, our heavenly Boaz, to live a sinless life and die a substitutionary death and rise again in a vindicating resurrection.

This is a story about the God who plans good for His people, whose glories and treasures and wonders are all laid up for the day when His people all come home, no longer empty, but with unimaginable fullness. And that day is called, rest.

In Fullness, the Episode of Redemption and Restoration

This is a story about the God who is to be glorified in everything, whose greatness and gladness give significance to the ordinariness of life. He is ever working to show us His glories in deaths and in births, in hardships and harvests, in hard work and in resting, in love and romance and marriage, in sons and daughters. There is in all these things something and Someone greater than ourselves.

This is a story about the God of surprises, whose will and power are bent to bring about the man after His own heart, King David, through the unexpected kindness and mercy of a Moabite maid, Ruth.

This is a story about the God who redeems, whose only beloved Son came as the kinsman-redeemer of His people. He paid the price and penalty for their sin, not with silver or gold or human wealth, but with inestimable treasure of His life in His blood.

This is a story about the God of wonders, whose plans and purposes are served by His power for good of His people and glory of His Name. He moves through the bitter and sweet providences to transform the emptiness of our sin into the fullness of our salvation.

This is a story about Jesus

This story brings us to Jesus...

At His Advent (Matthew 1:1–18)

Genealogies are important. They are not for speculation about things they were not intended to serve. But here is an example of one that is so very, very important.

¹ The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

² Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴ and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵ and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷ and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, ⁸ and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹ and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰ and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹² And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³ and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴ and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵ and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Did you see it? Did you see all the Gentile ladies who are in the line of Jesus? There was Tamar who was married to Judah. There was Rahab who was married to Salmon. Who was the son (possibly grandson or great grandson) of Salmon and Rahab? **Boaz**. Wait. Really. No wonder Boaz knew well the saving work God can do in a Gentile heart who confesses the God of Israel. Boaz's mother or grandmother was... Rahab from Jericho. His wife was Ruth, from Moab. And so on to David, the king of Israel. Fourteen generations later Israel goes away into the Babylonian captivity. Fourteen generations later, Jesus comes. At just the right time, just as was ordained by God's eternal decrees, Jesus was born of a woman, born a Jew under the Law. He was born to save us from our sins.

As our Redeemer (Luke 1:67–75)

⁶⁷ And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

⁶⁸ "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,

⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies
 and from the hand of all who hate us;

⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers
 and to remember his holy covenant,

⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us

⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
 might serve him without fear,

⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

Boaz was a kinsman-redeemer. He was able to protect, provide and eventually to redeem Ruth. Boaz is a type of Christ in many ways. His humility, wisdom, discretion and love all point us to our Redeemer and the One who is our Betrothed.

Christmas is often about so many things little related to Jesus. Yes, Christians try hard. But it is incredibly easy to be sucked into the sentimentality of the season and forget the sweet wonder of the our Savior.

Reflect and Respond

This is a story for us:

We learn of God's amazing love for sinners. He has provided a salvation for His people from all languages, tribes, people groups and nations. Does your heart long to see the gospel reach deeper, wider and further from our own church?

We are challenged by the fierce love and loyalty of a daughter-in-law. She forsook her idols and left her family to follow Naomi. But what drove her even more was her commitment to the Lord. Ruth's deep commitment foreshadows the discipleship called for of New Covenant believers. Does your life reflect such selfless and sacrificial follow of Jesus?

We are warned about responding with bitterness to God's hard providences and loving chastening. Naomi's heart became bitter even as she returned home in the time of harvest. Over and over again we are warned about our responses in the midst of God's loving, parental chastening. Have you become bitter over what God has done in your life? Are you ready to return?

We are humbled by the character and conduct of Boaz. With consummate godly skill he had built holy wisdom into all his life. So, when the great moment came, he simply did who he was. Have we established such deep roots of habitual godliness that we will please God in all we do?

We are awed by the casual and the intentional providence of God. What appeared often to be happenstance, chance events were guided by the sovereign hand of God. His purposes and plans were being worked out. Each step and each stop followed the path of God's hidden will. Our lives are no less so. God's providence is working in every moment, every event, every engagement, every struggle, every hardship, every joy... everything in your life.

We are thankful that God has worked down through the long ages of history to bring us to Advent. And not just to Advent, but on the long trajectory toward the fullness of our redemption.