

Trusting God in to Use Ordinary People

Ruth 1:19-2:12


Trusting God (Ruth)

Prepared by: Matthew S. Black

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“I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God’s hands, that I still possess.” - MARTIN LUTHER

1. WELCOME VISITORS
2. THANKS TO ALL WHO HELPED MAKE THE YOUTH/ COLLEGE FALL FESTIVAL SUCCESS
3. SIGN UP FOR LADIES BIBLE STUDY
4. MAKE PLANS FOR THE **COUNSELING SEMINAR** THIS SATURDAY AT LIVING HOPE, IT BEGINS AT 8:30 AND FINISHES AT 4:30PM. IF YOU MISSED THE FIRST SESSION YOU CAN STILL SIGN UP AND HAVE A LIFETIME ACCESS TO THE COUNSELING VIDEOS AND RESOURCES. FOR \$120 YOU’LL NEVER FIND A BETTER DEAL THAN THAT.
5. WE WILL BE POSTING LADIES’ RETREAT AUDIO THIS WEEK.
6. ANNOUNCE OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

 Open your Bible to **Ruth 1:19-2:3**. We are continuing in a series through the Sermon on the Mount entitled: “Trusting God.” This morning we are looking a message entitled: “Trusting God to Use Ordinary People.”

Ruth is in many ways a wonderful shadow of the Gospel. Here we have this unworthy Moabite woman named Ruth – a Gentile, a foreigner, completely out of place and unworthy, who we will find is rescued by Boaz and brought into favor forever by becoming the great grandmother of King David, and the ancestor of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Spurgeon said “Jesus is our Boaz”. Jesus is our rescuer. Through Christ, we rejects – we untouchables become accepted in the Beloved One. We who were poor and bankrupt and blind become heirs of God and joint heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ. Hallelujah what a Savior!

So this morning we are Ruth is going to arrive in Bethlehem with Naomi and meet Boaz. She has absolutely nothing. But can I just say this: when you have absolutely nothing, when you are at rock bottom, that is when God works the best. This is when He loves to work, because remember, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet. 5:5).

So as we consider that God uses ordinary people we are going to see three things about how God wants to use us.

Outline

- The **surprise** that God wants to use us (1:19-22)
- The **sovereignty** of God in using us (2:1-9)
- The **goodness** of God in using us (2:10-13)

I. The surprise that God wants to use us (1:19-22).

Can God Use Me?

We read about the unlikelihood of God using Ruth and Naomi. So in Ruth 1:19, the story focuses on Naomi, and really, the book of Ruth is actually the story of Naomi. How can God bless an old barren widow? How can God use a woman who has absolutely nothing. It's a surprising thing that God uses any one of us.

You may be asking, can God use me? Perhaps you have had the absolutely worst circumstances that could happen. You've made the most horrendous choices. I'm here to tell you this morning that God can use ANYBODY. And if you don't speak up for Him in your life, He can make the rocks cry out!

The Journey to Bethlehem

Ruth 1:19a, "So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem." Ruth and Naomi make their way back on the fifty mile journey to Bethlehem, the House of Bread. We don't know what they said to each other, but from what is revealed in the rest of the book, they must have had much fellowship and spoken about the Lord.

Naomi knew **Deuteronomy 6:6-7**, "these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."

Naomi probably used that 50 mile journey as an opportunity to continue to mentor and disciple her "daughter" Ruth.

Extraordinary things Happen When You Give Ordinary Moments to God

Can I say this: extraordinary things happen when you give ordinary moments to God. Naomi likely used those moments like she had used all the other ordinary moments in her life. She served and loved God. She seemed to always obey and love God. She served others. She was one it is apparent, that was always talking, instructing about God, praying for others, always using ordinary moments to build the faith of her greatest mission field, which was her family. Naomi was a great missionary mom.

Naomi Creates a Stir!

Ruth 1:19b, "And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them."

Naomi arrived in town, and it was like, Naomi was the first story of the evening news! It was like she was on every blog – everybody had an opinion. "Naomi's back in Bethlehem!" There was a lot to talk about! "You've been gone so long! Your husband and sons died! Who is this Moabite girl?"

It was God's will that Naomi return to Bethlehem. She made a hard decision. She knew there might be reproach and people might not understand. But she made the hard choice to follow the Lord. She was a woman who served the Lord with seriousness and zeal.

For Faithfulness, Sometimes We Get Bitterness

And yet, after having faithfully served the Lord, it seems as if the Lord has not blessed her. She serves the Lord, and things go wrong. She serves the Lord with zeal, and things get even worse. She keep serving the Lord, and things, if they can, get even worse. It seems that the more faithful Naomi is, the more bitter her life becomes.

Extraordinary Awful Things Happen to God's People

So Naomi comes to town and changes her name. Look at verse 19c, “And the women said, ‘Is this Naomi?’” ²⁰ She said to them, ‘Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.’”

Can God use Naomi? Naomi does not think so. Verse 20, “She said to them, ‘Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.’”

We make a mistake when we think that God using us means that He makes our life a bed of roses. You see, God has never promised us that life would be easy.

Peering Under the Loom to See the Tapestry

In fact life is a lot like a tapestry. Looking at our life is like peering underneath a loom, just loose ends of twine and string and yarn and knots of free will and choice, and it just looks like a mess. All Naomi saw was heartache. All she saw was death and devastation and famine. All she saw was the lonely mat she slept on each night.

Yet from above the loom, from God's perspective it's this glorious tapestry as he's weaving together all of the details of our life.

God Was Using Naomi in the Mess

You see God was using Naomi in the mess! What does Isaiah say in Isaiah 55:8-9,

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.
⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Our Mess is God's Masterpiece

Don't you know that God is the Master of the mess? And our mess is God's Masterpiece!! So from the bottom of the tapestry, all we see are tangled knots and disordered colors, but from the top, there is a masterpiece that reflects the goodness and kindness of God. Yet all Naomi saw was the mess.

Why Call Me Sweetheart, Call Me Bitter Old Woman

All Naomi can see is the mess. So she asks Why? Verse 21, “I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?”

So Naomi says, “Don't call me sweetheart, call me bitter old woman.” Call me “Wounded.” “Just let me die. I'll never recover. What can I do for God?”

What Naomi couldn't see was the tapestry God was weaving on the other side. Who is Naomi? Through Ruth, she's the Great great grandmother of the greatest king of Israel – King David.

Naomi's Job Description

What was Naomi's job? To follow the Lord, follow her husband. Did she do those things? Yes! What else was Naomi's job? To live for the Lord, to shine her light. Did she do that? Absolutely! Her job was to bring a Moabite named Ruth to faith in Yahweh. She didn't know that was her job, but that was God's job for her. Even in all her bitter circumstances, Naomi chose to serve the Lord!

Naomi's Theology

Ruth 1:21b, "Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?" Naomi's theology is right. **Amos 3:6** says, "Does calamity come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?"

Calamity shakes things up in our lives. Do not be surprised by it. God often uses extreme and difficult circumstances to bring about His sovereign plan.

- Sometimes He's chiseling you.
- Sometimes He's using you to reach others.
- All the time God is good and sovereign. That's the ingredients of Providence.

The Chief End of Man

Naomi's goal in life was not simply to live a posh life. Her goal was to be faithful to the Lord. But what Naomi was learning is that God doesn't owe us a posh life.

We don't believe that the chief end of man is happiness in the circumstances of life. That is the prosperity Gospel, and it is idolatry! Our happiness is in God. The chief end of man is to enjoy God now and forever.

I like Naomi, because Naomi is a lot like me! Sometimes I am confounded. Sometimes I am confused. I can hardly see God in the pain of life. Sometimes life is bitter. She says, "Don't call me sweetheart, call me bitter old woman." I'm wounded. I'm torn up. God is sovereign. He doesn't do what we want him to do. He doesn't work like we work. He confounds us at times. Sometimes He makes us bitter.

Naomi: The Female Version of Job

Was Naomi feeling the bitter effects of life? There's not circumstances much more extreme than Naomi. Naomi is the female Job of the Old Testament! And this is the amazing thing, Naomi had the bitterest life anyone can imagine. But did Naomi stop being faithful when life got bitter? No! That's the point.

The Need for Brokenness

Naomi is not in sin. Sometimes life is bitter. She's not mad at God. She's wounded, torn up, and broken. And that's ok. God often has to till the ground and break our hearts before he plants the seed and grows the garden. **Psalms 51:17**, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

Naomi was saying: Life is bitter. I am broken! And that's ok. Naomi is the godliest woman in the book of Ruth. Who taught Ruth about Yahweh?

The Big Surprise

So here is the big surprise. In many ways, Naomi is the central character of the book of Ruth. Ruth doesn't come to Bethlehem without Naomi's evangelism. God uses us in ways that we often cannot see. If we could see them, we might become proud.

Who Reached Charles Spurgeon?

Do you know who reached Charles Haddon Spurgeon for Christ? He tells the story of his conversion, that one wintery day he could not make it to church because of the blizzard. So he went to a tiny Methodist church. The pastor wasn't there because of the weather, so a deacon preached from **Isaiah 45:22**, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." We don't know who that deacon was, but God used that snow storm so he could give that simple message to a 15 year old boy who would turn the world upside down!!

Barley Harvest

Verse 22, "So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to **Bethlehem** at the beginning of barley harvest."

Just a little detail here. It's about time to harvest the fields. Naomi and Ruth just happened to be there at barley harvest. Barley harvest, what is that? That, dear saints, is hope. The famine is gone. God's providential hand of kindness and hewed blessing has arrived. It's a whole new season in **Israel**. Maybe it's a whole new season in the life of Naomi and Ruth. We have to continue, by faith, to see what God might do.

Pregnant with God's Blessing

So we have a ton of imagery here. Naomi and Ruth are barren widows with no hope, but Bethlehem is pregnant with barley and fruit and harvest! This is a picture of God's blessing on them. They may be barren, but they are now pregnant with God's blessing on them.

What a surprise!

II. The sovereignty of God in using us (2:1-9).

Introducing Boaz

2:1 Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a **worthy** man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz."

Introducing Boaz... Boaz is a worthy man – what does that mean? He's worthy of respect. He's worthy of trust. He's worthy of imitation.

Who is Boaz?

Yes he's worthy, but he's less than ordinary. His mother, do you remember her? Her name is Rahab, named after an Ammonite God. She's a Canannite from Jericho. Her name means "Fierceness." She was fierce in the world when she was lost. And she became fierce for the Lord. She was on fire. She married Salmon – who was a leader in Israel.

But here is a half Canannite living among the Israelites. So he's rich. He's worthy, but he's single!

Now, furthermore, when it says that he's a worthy man, that phraseology, used elsewhere in the Old Testament, sometimes refers to a man of war – so he could fight. He's a man of war, a man of wealth, and a man who is worthy and godly. He's got everything going for him, but he's single. He's a Canannite. Perhaps there's some racism going on in Israel.

Gleaning- A Kind of Welfare System

² And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."

Gleaning is the equivalent to social services, food bank, homeless shelter, soup kitchen, food stamps. That's the Hebrew equivalent. And the way it works is this. God, in the Old Testament, he told his people, "The land belongs to me. So if you own a piece of land, actually I own it, too, and when you work the land, harvest what I give you for food, but don't take all of the food. Leave a little bit so that the poor, the widow, the orphan, the alien, the oppressed, the immigrant, the needy, can work" – not just get a handout, but work – "come to the field, and take some of the food home for themselves and their family." This was the Hebrew welfare system.

Naomi and Ruth have hit rock bottom. The equivalent would be one of you young ladies, moving to Chicago, only knowing one person, and being flat broke, out collecting aluminum cans to scrounge together a few bucks, sleeping at the mission, eating at the soup kitchen, I mean, these are women who are in a devastated, very difficult place.

Providence

³ So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.

Verse 3, "she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz"

You might wonder, "Why does the Bible say it that way?" It says it in an ironic way to get our attention. This isn't happenstance, circumstance, fortune, chance.

Here comes Boaz, stepping out of the Escalade, coming to check out his field, to see how things are going at the business. A very important man, a very rich man, a very successful man. And Ruth "happened" to choose that field.

Murphy's Law

There is no Murphy's Law for the Child of God. Everything that can go wrong will go wrong. That's not true for the Christian. Everything that can go wrong might, but it will be made beautiful in God's time.

Boaz is a Godly Man

⁴ And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, "The Lord be with you!" And they answered, "The Lord bless you."

How many of you, this is not your employer? Boaz is a godly man. He knows the Lord. He wants his employees to know the Lord. He's extremely eligible. But he's half Canannite. Can God use Him?

Jesus Our Boaz

You know who else is half Canannite, so to speak?

Boaz notices Ruth's Godliness

⁵Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?"

Now on the scene comes Boaz. And he sees Ruth for the first time. Now what does Ruth look like. Can you imagine, when you meet that man of your dreams? He didn't even give her notice. And what does Ruth look like?

She's gathering food from Boaz's field, like his "soup kitchen". She's poor, she's all dirty with no makeup just working hard. What does Boaz notice? I'm sure he saw her beauty. But what he noticed was her character!

⁶And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. ⁷She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.' So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest."

The First Encounter

So this is Boaz' first encounter with Ruth! Wow! She didn't have time to do her makeup. She didn't say, "Why didn't you call?" Some of you need four hours to get all ready. This is one of the greatest encounters of the Old Testament, and Ruth is without makeup.

Ladies, you don't need make up

Ladies, you don't need make up. In the Hebrew Bible, you know what's after Proverbs? The book of Ruth. Proverbs closes with what great wisdom? The Proverbs 31 woman. Who is the Proverbs 31 woman – Ruth is! Proverbs 31:30, "Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised."

Boaz Protects Ruth

⁸Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. ⁹Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn."

So Boaz doesn't know this is going to be his wife. He has an ethic. He loves Jesus. He has a job.

"Keep close to Ruth." He tells the women. He gives Ruth companionship with other godly women.

"Have I not charged the young men not to touch you?" He had the right view of women. Women were not an object to Boaz. He says to the young men – "Hey if you touch her, you see that field over there – we'll take care of you! Not really, but you know Boaz was Old Testament. Regardless, those who love God will protect women. Boaz was that kind of man.

A Job and Jesus

Ladies, if a man is interested in you, you need to ask him if he has a job and if he loves Jesus. In that order.

III. The goodness of God in using us (2:10-13).

A Hebrew Custom

¹⁰ Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?”

Ruth fell on her face which was a sign of respect. She didn't say, “My ring is a size 6”. She didn't say “Give me your tux size.” She simply asked him a question. He wanted to know his motives. Ladies, be careful not to give your heart to a man. You must know that he loves Jesus and that he has intentions for you.

Boaz Like Ruth's Testimony

¹¹ But Boaz answered her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before.”

Ruth was a woman of character. Ruth is the Proverbs 31 woman. This is the first encounter between Ruth and Boaz, and Ruth's not all dolled up. She's grimy, sweaty, and without any makeup. Boaz notices Ruth's character.

Boaz Prays for Ruth

¹² The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!”

Boaz prays and then he answers the prayer he prays. God wants us to not simply pray, but be willing to be the vessel God will fill to answer the prayers we pray! He basically prays, God will bless Ruth in every way possible. He prays a very big prayer. And how does God answer that prayer? Through Boaz!

He uses the analogy that God is like a great bird protecting his daughter. Ruth had come to trust God and to rest under the refuge of God as a baby bird would rest under the wings of the father bird.

Ruth Has a Humble View of Herself

¹³ Then she said, “I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants.”

Ruth is unassuming. She doesn't say, “My ring is a size 6!” “What size is your tux?” She views herself as a servant of Boaz. She's content to be his servant.

Conclusion

Who does God use in our story? An old forgotten widow woman and a Gentile Moabite woman. God uses ordinary people. Sometimes we are quite less than ordinary, but that is just who God calls. Think about what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no

human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

God calls the weak, ordinary people so that we might boast only in the Lord! Let's boast in Him! Amen.