

Grace for the Hopeless

Grace in Jesus' Genealogy

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Bible Text: Ruth 1-4

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Let's begin our time this morning with a little quiz. Are you up for that this morning? Absolutely, I know you are. True or false: some families are stronger than others? True or false, some families are healthier than others. That's probably the easiest quiz that you ever had to take, huh? Mark yourself with 100%. Just where you ought to be just before Christmas time, but let me ask you this: how do you make that determination about family strength or family health or family stability? And I suppose there are hundreds of different possible answers to that question but how about this one: you can tell a healthy family in part by how they accept and welcome those who marry into the family or how well they assimilate those who are new. For example, my wife is a McCullough so I married into the McCullough family over 33 years ago. Chris's family lives up in Elkhart and because she has a sister who was paralyzed in an accident many years ago, they've actually been at our church just a few times over the years, but her family has gone out of their way to make me and the other in-laws feel welcome. So when we go to family gatherings and, Lord willing, we'll be doing that on Christmas day this year, there's really no distinction made between who was born in the family and who married in. In fact, if you came with us on Christmas day and you didn't know who was who and just watched the interaction, you wouldn't be able to tell who was actually born in the family and who had married in. We're just all part of the same group. That's a sign of strength, I think. That's a sign of health. Now, some of you are aware of families that aren't like that at all. Those who marry in are never really welcomed. They're told in subtle and sometimes not too subtle ways that they're on a different level than the others and they would be wise to remember their place, huh?

Now, here's another question: which family is God most like? And which family does God want his children to be most like? And would you believe that those questions are answered in part through studying a genealogy? A genealogy. With that in mind, please open your Bible now to two different places in the Scripture: Matthew 1 and Ruth 1. So Matthew 1 which is on page 1 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that, so the very first book of the New Testament. So Matthew 1, we'll start there and then back in the Old Testament in Ruth 1, that's on page 199 of the front section of that Bible if you're using that this morning. So Matthew 1 and Ruth 1, page 1 of the back section and page 199 of the front section.

This month we've been talking about grace in the genealogy of Christ. This is the conclusion to the theme we've been developing all year long on "Finding Grace." Haven't you been delighted in studying all that the word of God has to say on that marvelous subject? So we're looking especially now at the genealogy or the birth line of Jesus Christ and we've already seen that it is unusual for several reasons, isn't it? 1. It just contains the names of five women and that would not have been the norm for Jewish genealogies in Bible times. But secondly and more significant for sure, the lives of the women that we've studied this far, they're just scandalous. It's not just amazing that there are women mentioned in this particular line of Christ, but the names of the women and the lives they represent, it's just amazing. There was Tamar who pretended to be a prostitute and committed incest with her father-in-law and conceived two boys. Then there was Rahab. There wasn't any pretending about her. She was a prostitute who told a series of lies to protect the Jewish spies who had come in to check out the Promised Land. And both of those women on purpose are mentioned specifically in the line of Christ. The message is rather clear: yes, Jesus came as a King and Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience; he's proclaiming Christ as their King, so yes, Jesus came as a King, but as a very unusual King, huh? A very unusual family.

Now, you might say, "Do you know, Pastor Viars, is today going to be any more Christmasy? You're going to wind up on the pastoral naughty list here. Is today going to be any more Christmasy?" Probably not. Probably not. If you just want me to be honest. But I can tell you this: while this woman's story has an incredible number of twists and turns, her inclusion in the line of Christ has several significant lessons for those of us who say we're part of God's family.

So let's start in Matthew 1, beginning in verse 1 where we read, "The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram. Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon. Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth." So the third woman mentioned in the line of Christ was a woman named Ruth. I realize that might not strike you as being particularly significant unless you know that Ruth was a Moabitess and you might say, "Is that contagious?" It's not a disease, it's a nationality and that, too, might not strike you as significant unless you know her story.

So would you please, now, turn back to Ruth 1. Ruth 1, page 199 if you kind of got lost in all of that. Ruth 1 and let's read a little bit about this woman who was specifically named in the line of Christ. Scripture tells us, "Now it came about in the days when the judges governed," note that, "that there was a famine in the land." Note that too. "And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there."

Now, I realize that a number of people who will hear this message today are brand new to studying the Bible and I realize you might also say if you're in that situation, "Do you know what? You just read two verses from the Old Testament and I'm already lost." Well, here's what I want to be sure I've said to you: we're going to walk through this very carefully, very slowly, in a way, I hope, that every person can get this. So if you're brand new, I've tried to prepare this with you in mind so don't feel like we're going to leave you in the dust here. That would be wrong on a lot of different levels. But remember this: this woman is mentioned in the line of Christ and it's important for us to know why and so just to try to keep all of this straight, we're going to talk this morning about Ruth's background. Everybody here needs to understand that and you can. Then Ruth's faith. You'll see that clearly in this text. No question about that. Then Ruth's example, what does this mean to all of us?

So what we learn, first of all, from Ruth's background is this: a bad start doesn't guarantee a bad ending. A bad start doesn't guarantee a bad ending. Verse 1 tells us about the timing of all of this and, frankly, that information serves as strike 1 in her story when we read this, "it came about in the days when the judges governed." That was one of the low points in the history of Israel. If you've studied the book of Judges, you know that there is a repeated cycle of disobedience and then judgment and then repentance and then new leadership followed by disobedience and the whole cycle repeats itself. The book even ends with this sad commentary that, "In those days, there was no king in Israel and everyone did that which was right in his own eyes." So that's strike 1, she's living during the period of the judges.

Then strike 2: the verse also tells us there was a famine in the land. You see, God loves his people and when they choose to disobey him, as they obviously were in the time of the judges, there are going to be consequences. By the way, there's an irony in all of this that doesn't really come through in English but it's very obvious in the Hebrew. The word "Bethlehem," the place they left, means "house of bread." So the point is this man, Elimelech, and his wife, Naomi, and their two sons are leaving Bethlehem. They're leaving God's people, they're leaving God's land, they're leaving God's law to go to the pagan nation of Moab.

Now, again, many of us might say, "Well, so?" Well, that's a major point of this story and it explains why Matthew mentioning Ruth in the line of Christ was so scandalous. It's because of her heritage. Do you know who Moab was? And do you want to know? This is as bad as everything we've studied the last two weeks. If you don't want to know, close your ears, but if you do, turn back for a minute to Genesis 19. You'll find that on page 13 of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that. So Genesis 19. Remember, don't let me lose you: Ruth was a Moabitess so I'm trying to help us understand what is the origin of the nation of Moab and why would it have been so scandalous that she's in the line of Christ.

So I'm in Genesis 19:30, "Lot went up from Zoar, and stayed in the mountains, and his two daughters with him; for he was afraid to stay in Zoar; and he stayed in a cave, he and his two daughters. Then the firstborn said to the younger, 'Our father is old, and there is

not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him that we may preserve our family through our father.' So they made their father drink wine that night, and the firstborn went in and lay with her father; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. On the following day, the firstborn said to the younger, 'Behold, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve our family through our father.' So they made their father drink wine that night also, and the younger arose and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. The firstborn bore a son, and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day."

You say, "What?" What the Bible just told us was Moab was the product of the incestuous relationship between Lot and one of his daughters and the Moabites subsequently became enemies of the children of Israel. In fact, even during the time of the period of the judges, the Moabites had enslaved the Jews for a period of 18 years so they were arch-enemies. Do you get that? Elimelech leaving Bethlehem and going to the Moabites was scandalous. They were the arch-enemies of the people of God. That was so significant that the Mosaic law forbid contact with the Moabites. You read about this in Deuteronomy 23:3, "No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD." Now, just to be sure we didn't lose anybody in all of that, let's put some of that together. It's the time of the judges. That's bad because of this cycle in the nation of Israel. There is a famine in the land. That's bad if you like to eat. We have no indication that Elimelech prayed about this, no indication that he had studied the Scriptures, no indication that he sought counsel. So he leaves God's chosen nation and land with his wife, Naomi, their two sons and goes to live with the Moabites.

Now go back to Ruth 1 and let's read what happens to them next. I'm in Ruth 1 now, verse 3, "Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons." So now Elimelech has died. It's Naomi, her two sons, Mahlon, Chilion. If you can't remember their names, don't worry, you're not going to need to know them much longer. Look at verse 4, "They took for themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth." Ah-ha, there's our woman. "They lived there about ten years. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband." Now, where does that leave us? We've got a Jewish mom with two Moabite daughters-in-law. So we've got Naomi, we've got Orpah, and we've got Ruth.

What happens next? Look at verse 6, "Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that Jehovah had visited His people in giving them food. So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her

husband.' Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept." Now that tells you a lot about Naomi, the mother-in-law, because what she is saying and this will become clear later on in the text, she's not just sending them back to their mother or to their mother's house, she's sending them back to their family's pagan gods. Now, you might say, "Why wouldn't Naomi want her two daughters-in-law to be with her when she goes back to Bethlehem?" Interesting question that's not actually answered in the text. Possibly because she's ashamed her family had gone to Moab to begin with. Possibly because she was ashamed that her two sons had married Moabite women. We don't know.

Look at verse 10, here's the twist, "And they said to her, 'No, but we will surely return with you to your people.' 11 But Naomi said, 'Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of Jehovah has gone forth against me.' And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her." So the daughters-in-law don't want to go back home. They want to go with Naomi to Bethlehem, but Naomi tells them to go and finally Orpah does.

So what are we left with now? We're left with Naomi, a Jewish woman whose husband and sons have died, heading back to Israel to Bethlehem, and Ruth, this Moabite daughter-in-law and widow who nobody seems to want. Now, let's just push the pause button right there. Would you agree this woman has an awful lot stacked up against her? I'm talking about Ruth now. There is not a lot of reason for hope given her family history and the time in which she's living, and I wonder how many people are going to come to our services today and conclude, "You know, there's no hope for me either. I grew up on the wrong kind of home. I've made too many mistakes. I'm estranged from too many people. I've burned so many bridges. I've suffered too many heartaches. I'm like Ruth and Naomi all rolled into one. There is no hope for me." If that's where you're coming from this morning, I can't tell you how thankful I am that you came to church anyway.

That's one of the interesting things for my family and me, we get to work in the Living Nativity out at the end of the walkthrough and just direct people to the hot chocolate. That's our role in all of this, and the Bear does a great job at that, but it's so delightful to see the kind of men and woman especially coming through the walkthrough. I don't know exactly how to say this other than to observe: we attract a different kind of person through the Living Nativity in many cases and that is very, very good. And part of what I've been praying and what others have been praying is that such persons, and it's funny how some will just look me right in the eye and say, "You know, I haven't been in church in a long, long time," as if they shamed me in some way by that. But my prayer in turn is that they would come to the Lord's house and if that's your situation, I'm very glad that you did.

On the other hand, I wonder how often some of us are quickly to write such persons off. They don't have the right background. They're from the wrong side of the tracks. They've

messed too many things up. There's no way they would ever be interested in spiritual things. Do you realize, believers in Jesus can end up looking at the Ruths of the world and essentially piling on another helping of guilt? Or another helping of rejection? Or another helping of despair? And our question, I think, ought to be, "How did a hopeless Moabite like Ruth end up in the line of Christ? And does God want his family, his church, to have open arms for such individuals as well?"

Now, a lot more to this story. We still don't know how did a hopeless Moabite like Ruth end up in the line of Christ? Well, to understand that, we have to learn the lesson of Ruth's faith. You see, God blesses those who choose to believe. You may remember the last couple of weeks as we've studied Rahab, this prostitute who uttered an incredible testimony of faith in God. Well, here's another very similar example. I'm in Ruth 1, beginning in verse 15, "Then she said, 'Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods.'" Now, if you're in the habit of writing in your Bible, I would encourage you to underline that. That's key. Naomi, the mother-in-law, is acknowledging the fact that she was encouraging both of her daughters-in-law to go back to their land, to their gods.

"Return," Naomi says to Ruth, "after your sister-in-law. But Ruth said, 'Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and,' what? Here it is, "your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may Jehovah do to me." Jehovah. A Moabite said that. "'Jehovah do to me and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.' When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her." You see, here's the turning point in this entire story: "Your people shall be my people and," Ruth said, "your God will be my God." You see, somewhere along the line, Ruth made a decision to trust in the God of her husband and maybe he wasn't a good testimony, we don't know. It would certainly appear that her father-in-law, Elimelech, was not. No question about the fact that her mother-in-law, Naomi, is not. But what this teaches us is: every person in every generation has to decide what he or she is going to believe, God has no grandchildren, nor can you blame your lack of faith on somebody else. Every person in every generation has to decide for themselves what they are going to believe and Ruth takes her stand with the God of the Bible. Warren Weirsbe said, "Naomi was trying to cover up. Orpah had given up. But Ruth was prepared to stand up." And, friend, that's an important part of the message of Christmas. This King whose genealogy was delineated by Matthew was not only born in an unusual way, but he would later die on the cross as a perfect substitute for our sin. And every person has to decide will they admit their need and then trust what Christ did on the cross as their only hope of heaven. Ruth believed God. She believed in the God of the Bible. She believed in Jehovah and that was the most important decision that she ever made.

I would just ask you this morning: have you ever believed? Have you ever believed? Christmas is a great time of year and oftentimes people do find themselves drawn back to church and sometimes people are cynical about that. We call them Chreasters, people who come to church on Christmas and Easter and so people get a bit cynical about all of that. I view it as what a great opportunity to proclaim the Gospel. So if you say, "It's been

a long time since I've been here," fine. I'm glad you're here. It's a whole lot better than being bellied up at the bar, and they're not open. So I'm glad. I'm glad that you're here but I do want to ask you: are you going to focus on the babe in the manger and the wonder of it all or are you going to look beyond the manger to the cross and the empty tomb and understand that Jesus Christ came to die? And then make a personal decision just like Ruth did at a point in time that Jesus is going to be your Savior. He's going to be your God. He's going to be your King. You might say, "Well, can anybody believe?" Well, if a pagan Moabite like Ruth can come to the point of placing her trust in the God of the Bible then, friends, so can you. So can you.

You say, "What happens next?" Well, look at verse 19, "So they both went until they came to Bethlehem." Remember, the house of bread. "And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, 'Is this Naomi?'" Remember, they would have known her as a younger woman. "She said to them, 'Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara,'" the Hebrew word for bitter. "'For the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full.'" Really? There was a famine. "'I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty.'" Really? Who is she standing next to? "'Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me.'" You see, that's her view of God. Can you understand why she wanted her daughters-in-law to go to the gods of Moab. "'The Almighty has afflicted me?'" So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest."

Now, what do we learn from that? Naomi comes back, some of the ladies think they recognize her but it's been ten years. They say, "Is that you, Naomi?" An incredible statement, she says, "No, just call me Mara," bitter. Contrast that, the mother-in-law, the Jewish mother-in-law's statement to what we just read from Ruth. By the way, that's what's stopping some men and women from coming to Christ. They've had some difficulty in their life and they've responded like Naomi and their heart has been encrusted with bitterness.

Now, you might say, "Well, what can I expect if I choose to believe in Christ?" Well, what happened to Ruth? She experienced God's marvelous provision. Look at verse 1 of chapter 2, "Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz." Now I realize many of us would read that and say, "Well, so? So?" Well, the Old Testament had a provision in the law for widows called Leverite marriage. If you want to read about that later, you can read about it in Deuteronomy 25:5-6. And what that meant was when a man died who was childless, if he had an unmarried brother, that man was encouraged to marry the widow and raise a family in his deceased brother's name. I know that's pretty complicated. That's the provision of the law. There were also property issues involved. So if that man who had died had any debts, they had to be paid or redeemed by this kinsman. It was the law of the kinsman redeemer.

Well, how are they going to get together, Ruth and Boaz? Are you ready for a love story Old Testament style? Here we go, look at verse 2, "And Ruth the Moabitess said to

Naomi, 'Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor.' And she said to her, 'Go, my daughter.' So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened," I love that, "she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech," her former father-in-law, if you're having trouble keeping this all straight.

Verse 4, "Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, 'May the LORD be with you.' And they said to him, 'May the LORD bless you.' Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, 'Whose young woman is this?'" Have you got the picture? He's seen Ruth. "The servant in charge of the reapers replied, 'She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab. And she said, "Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves." Thus she came and has remained from the morning until now; she has been sitting in the house for a little while.' Then Boaz said to Ruth, 'Listen carefully, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field; furthermore, do not go on from this one, but stay here with my maids. Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Indeed, I have commanded the servants not to touch you. When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the servants draw.' Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, 'Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?' Boaz replied to her, 'All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know. May Jehovah," hear this, "May Jehovah reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.' Then she said, 'I have found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants.' At mealtime," picture this, remember how hungry they would have been, "At mealtime Boaz said to her, 'Come here, that you may eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.' So she sat beside the reapers," the workers, "and he served her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied and had some left. When she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, 'Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her. Also you shall purposely pull out for her some grain from the bundles and leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.' So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley." That's a bunch. "She took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took it out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied."

Now you might say, "Well, how did Ruth know that she would be able to glean in these fields?" Here's the answer: it's because the Old Testament had a provision for poor persons to follow along after a field had been harvested, more evidence that Ruth is believing the word of God and trusting it. Now you might say, "Is Boaz showing Ruth preferential treatment here?" What's the answer to that? You'd better believe it. You'd better believe it. You might say, "Does he like her?" It looks like it. It looks like it. Now, bring Naomi back into the conversation. What was it that Naomi wanted to be called? Mara. Why? Why? She's bitter because she believed God had dealt harshly with her.

Go back to verse 17 again and read a little further. I read these before but let's go further now. "So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. She took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took it out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied. Her mother-in-law then said to her, 'Where did you glean today and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be blessed.' So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, 'The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.'" Boom. "Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, 'May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead.' Again Naomi said to her, "surprise, surprise, surprise, ""The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives.' Then Ruth the Moabitess said, 'Furthermore, he said to me, "You should stay close to my servants until they have finished all my harvest.'" Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, 'It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maids, so that others do not fall upon you in another field.' So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law." Do you think Naomi is learning a lesson? Maybe God has a place of mercy for this young Moabite daughter-in-law and maybe she, the mother-in-law, should have trusted God instead of becoming bitter? Have you ever doubted God and become bitter with him and then he blessed you anyway? He's that kind of a God, you know.

Now, in these next verses, Naomi is going to coach Ruth through the process of the kinsman redeemer. What does it look like for that man to make a commitment to marriage? Look at verse 1, "Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, 'My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you? Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight. Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.'" Men are men."It shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do.' She said to her, 'All that you say I will do.'" Now, nothing sexual about this, by the way. If there was, we wouldn't ignore it, it's just a beautiful picture of provision. That's about to become very apparent.

Look at verse 6, "So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law had commanded her. When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came secretly, and uncovered his feet and lay down. It happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet. He said, 'Who are you?' And she answered, 'I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative.' Then he said, 'May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich. Now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence. Now it is true I am a close relative; however,'" oh-no, ""there is a relative closer than I.

Remain this night, and when morning comes, if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. But if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as the LORD lives. Lie down until morning.' So she lay at his feet until morning and rose before one could recognize another; and he said, 'Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.' Again he said, 'Give me the cloak that is on you and hold it.' So she held it, and he measured six measures of barley and laid it on her. Then she went into the city. When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, 'How did it go, my daughter?' And she told her all that the man had done for her." That tells you a lot about Boaz's character. He's going to follow the law precisely. He had thought all of this through. Yes, he's a kinsman redeemer, but there's somebody who legally has the option because he's a closer relative first.

Verse 14, "So she lay at his feet until morning and rose before one could recognize another; and he said, 'Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.' Again he said, 'Give me the cloak that is on you and hold it.' So she held it, and he measured six measures of barley and laid it on her. Then she went into the city. When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, 'How did it go, my daughter?' And she told her all that the man had done for her. She said, 'These six measures,'" here's what she said, "'These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said, "Do not go to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" Then she said, 'Wait, my daughter, until you know how the matter turns out; for the man will not rest until he has settled it today.'"

I'm going to skip a couple of verses for sake of time, but here's what happens, verse 6 of chapter 4, "The closest relative said, 'I cannot redeem it for myself, because I would jeopardize my own inheritance. Redeem it for yourself; you may have my right of redemption, for I cannot redeem it.'" So the one who was closest says no and that frees Boaz to be the kinsman redeemer.

Now look at verse 7, "Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning the redemption and the exchange of land to confirm any matter: a man removed his sandal and gave it to another; and this was the manner of attestation in Israel. So the closest relative said to Boaz, 'Buy it for yourself.' And he removed his sandal. Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, 'You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place; you are witnesses today.' All the people who were in the court, and the elders, said, 'We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem. Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah,'" remember that name? "'Through the offspring which the LORD will give you by this young woman.' So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her. And the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. Then the women said to Naomi," listen to this, to Naomi, not to Ruth, The women of the city said to Naomi, the mother-in-law, "'Blessed is the LORD

who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel. May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.' Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse." Did you hear that? "The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, 'A son has been born to Naomi!'" What? A son was born to Ruth, for crying out loud. No, no, a son has been born to Naomi. "So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David." Would it be fair to say that God blesses those who choose to believe in him?

Now, here's the \$100 question: why in the world was she included in the line of Christ in the Gospel of Matthew? Here's one answer for sure: God's merciful. God is merciful and he wants his family to be merciful too. I would suggest to you this morning that Matthew would have been especially encouraged by the story of God's mercy to Ruth. Why is that? Think about that statement for a minute. I know I've read a lot of Scripture to you this morning. Why would Matthew, the human author of the Gospel that we're studying who would list Ruth in the line of Christ, why would he be especially encouraged by her story? Well, it's because of his background as a what? As a tax collector. You see, Matthew's story is pretty sordid too. The Roman government often subcontracted their tax collection work and so in that culture, the tax collectors could rob and steal as much as they wanted to as long as Rome got its share. So a tax collector was one of the lowest forms of humanity; they were hated; they were despised. They were kind of like Moabites. Kind of like Moabites and that was especially true of Matthew. The Bible tells us he actually sat in a tax booth which meant he wasn't one of the supervisors who hired other people to do the dirty work, he had to day by day deal with people who absolutely despised him. But he was also in the perfect position to hear the scuttlebutt including the news of Jesus, the Messiah. And you can imagine when Jesus actually showed up, this perfect Savior he had heard so much about, and he goes right up to the tax booth in Matthew 9 and says what to Matthew? "Follow me. There is a place in my plan and program for you. There is mercy available even for a tax collector."

You see, Jesus had been to Matthew what Boaz had been to Ruth, and by the time Matthew writes his Gospel, Jesus had died on the cross, he had been raised from the dead, the supreme price of redemption had been paid. The greatest love story ever had been completed and then that resurrected Christ tells the disciples to go make disciples of all the nations and he tells them the Holy Spirit is going to come upon them, and after that they will be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and where? The uttermost part of the earth to all the nations. So Matthew would have naturally mentioned people like Tamar and Rahab and Ruth because they were people with whom he could easily relate. The fact that God had made grace for them made it easier for Matthew to believe that God had grace for him.

One of the upshots of all of this is people who are more aware of their sin are more likely candidates for the Gospel. Did you know that? That's why I think having a counseling ministry and other outreach ministries to people who are hurting has been so effective for us over the years. It's not generally hard for people whose lives are a shambles to come to the place of acknowledging that they've messed things up and they're in need of help. But

every church has to decide, "Do we really want to be populated with such former misfits?" if you want to say it that way spiritually. "Is there a place," you could say it this way, "Is there a place around here for former Moabites? For former tax collectors?" It gets at the very issue that I raised at the beginning of the message: one of the tests of a healthy family is do they include people who later marry into the family? And you realize in many churches you might as well just hang this sign over the door, "Foreigners not wanted here. Misfits not wanted here. Moabites not wanted here. Unless you've always been part of the family, unless you come from the same religious culture we do, unless you grew up knowing all the Bible stories, unless you say and do things exactly like we do, you're not welcome." The message of the genealogy of Matthew is God's mercy extends much further than many of us think. The turning point in Ruth's story was chapter 2, verse 1, "Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth." Friends, human beings have a kinsman, a man of great mercy.

One of the reasons we're very thankful right now is that God has blessed us with a number of people who have come to trust Christ this year. Are you glad for that? As you think back over this past year, are you glad for that? And many of these persons didn't grow up around the Bible; they didn't grow up around the church; they don't know all the lingo; they're not used to all the customs. I would suggest to you that's exactly the kind of person that we ought to want to reach, but we have to understand even from the genealogy of Christ, God wants his family to be growing in mercy too. And we can either be like the strong family that welcomes and invites others who have just married in or we can have the mentality that those who have not been in the family for a long, long time have to sit in the back of the bus. Mercy says we're going to find as many ways as we can to scream the message, "Repentant Moabites are welcome here."

You might say, "What does that look like in practical terms? What does that look like in practical terms?" Well, for one thing, I think there's some thank yous in order. I know a number of you are tired today. I get that. You probably say, "I hope he'll be short today." Good luck with that. But you've been serving in the Living Nativity. You've served in Christmas for Everyone. You've served in our Christmas musical, our week in, week out ministries in our community centers and our other outreach opportunities. What I like as I just watch some of that play out in front of me is how often individuals are treated with dignity and respect regardless of what they're bringing to the table. I think our church often works hard at holding out a welcoming hand to the Tamars and to the Rahabs and to the Ruths of this world and if you're part of contributing to that kind of a climate around here, thank you. Thank you not just for serving, but thank you for serving in this way.

I also know a number of you have given sacrificially already for this Hartford Hub project. We're taking the Gospel right into one of the neediest areas of our town and I would say to you if you've not yet done so, I want to encourage you to do something. Do something this year. Do your very best and here's why: that's going to become a major project for this church family, Lord willing, next year and a major part of our strategy of trying to win men and women to Christ in this town. I want you to have a part in it. I mean that, because there is going to be blessing, I think, as a result of that ministry. God

blesses people who sacrificially give to find the next Ruth, the next Rahab, the next Tamar. Do you believe that?

We had this week a building was given to this church. A building downtown, from a gentleman outside of this church who likes what we're doing down in the north end. He encouraged us. His desire is that we would liquidate that building as quickly as we can and then plow more resources into accelerating the pace of renovating distressed homes and making them available for low to moderate income buyers. That kind of stuff happens around this church with such frequency sometimes I think we just take it for granted anymore. I hope we never do. I hope we never do but, friends, God blesses those who choose to say, "We want to be just like our God. Bring on the next Ruth. Bring on the next Tamar. Bring on the next Rahab."

I also want to encourage us to end this year well. We've got our last night of the Living Nativity tonight, huh? Let's pray that God brings a bunch of Ruths. God provides the Ruths, we provide the barley, right? We provide the loving grace and let's end well. Then for the teardown, all hands on deck, alright, starting about 9 o'clock tonight. What are you doing at 9 o'clock tonight? So I would encourage you. Nothing good. So I would encourage you. I would encourage you to be with us tonight as we end that well.

Then our Christmas Eve services. Would you pray for that? What a great time of ministry. And bring somebody along with you for that. Those are always marvelous times.

Then our winter break ministries start tomorrow. I'm so glad for our staff who don't look at a break like this as an opportunity to do nothing and so these winter break children's ministries for working parents, what a great opportunity. So especially a need right now is for the afternoon of December 23rd. If you're available that time, contact Pastor Garner or go online and sign up, but what a great opportunity to just serve the Ruths of our community.

Then I would just encourage you, be ready to get after it next year, huh? Now, everybody's going to be scattering. I get that. Everybody's going to be scattering to grandma's house and you should. I hope you get a great time of rest, a great time with your family. Would you be back in the Lord's house on January 3rd because that's when we're going to kick off our annual theme. That's when we're going to talk about what we think God wants us to do in the coming year and we want to get after it for God, do we not? And I realize that's a bit early in the year, normally I'd probably do that on about the 10th but, Lord willing, on the 7th Newton P. and I are heading off to the Dominican Republic and then to Cuba and so I'd like to go and have the, "Why are we here? Where are we going? And how do you fit in?" message before I head off. So January 3rd, we're going to get after it in a big way.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

Father in heaven, thank you that you included the story of Ruth in your word. Lord, thank you that you included Ruth's name in Jesus' genealogy. What an incredible provision at your hand. And, Lord, thank you for this beautiful love story and this picture of the way you treat people. Lord, I pray that you would help us to be the same kind of family where there is always room for someone else that you're drawing to yourself. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.