

Finding Glory in the Midst of the Mundane

Book of Ruth

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Bible Text: Ruth 4:18-22

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Ruth 4. We'll be looking at verses 18 to 22. This will be our last message from the Gospel according to Ruth. The title of the message is "Finding Glory in the Midst of the Mundane." Ruth 4:18-22. The title of the message has sort of a double meaning. First of all, the text this morning is a genealogy. We read one earlier already and so genealogy is not the kind of thing that when you open up your Bible and that's where you're supposed read that day if you're on a reading plan, that your heart thrills to read a genealogy, especially as challenging as they can be. As Jess was reading earlier, I was sympathizing with him as name after name after name and you wish you could see Jim and Ted and Steve and stuff like that, things you recognize, but all these different Hebrew names. But genealogy has great importance in the Scriptures and rightly interpreted, they are rich in the things they teach us. So finding glory in the midst of the mundane, we hope today to find glory in the midst of what appears to be mundane in this genealogy. And the double entendre, the double meaning is that ironically it is this genealogy which helps us and continues to crystallize the meaning of all of the mundane things that happened in Naomi and Ruth and Boaz's life. It's this genealogy that helps us to find glory in the midst of the mundane things of their life.

So finding glory in the midst of the mundane. Let's begin reading, we'll begin reading at verse 13 but we're going to focus on 18 to 22. Ruth 4:13,

13 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. 14
Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed is the LORD who has not left
you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel.
15 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." 16 Then Naomi took the child and laid him
in her lap, and became his nurse. 17 The neighbor women gave him a
name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi!" So they named him Obed.
He is the father of Jesse, the father of David. 18 Now these are the
generations of Perez: to Perez was born Hezron, 19 and to Hezron was
born Ram, and to Ram, Amminadab, 20 and to Amminadab was born

Nahshon, and to Nahshon, Salmon, 21 and to Salmon was born Boaz, and to Boaz, Obed, 22 and to Obed was born Jesse, and to Jesse, David.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank you for every word that you have caused to be inspired and we pray that even now you might bless us richly from this passage. Surprise us, O Lord, by the glory of your truth. Our eyes are upon you as the maidservant looks to her mistress, Lord, our eyes are upon you until you bless us. Thank you for the promise of your Spirit and the glory of Christ. We pray in his name. Amen.

Finding glory in the midst of the mundane. We're going to talk about this passage under three points and the first point is the significance of genealogies in Scripture. I'd like to ground our proper interpretation just when you see this in light of the whole of Scripture, the significance of genealogy in Scripture.

There are two subpoints to this first point that we see helps us see the significance of genealogy in the Bible. Two subpoints, the first: why are there genealogies in the Bible? Two answers. First, genealogy grounds us, actually grounds the Bible in history. It grounds the Bible in history. We're talking about, as we read the pages of Scripture, the story of salvation, we're talking about the lives of real people who lived in real places at specific times. This is not just a fanciful mythology that could be taken and moved around wherever you are. No, it's not that. This is the acts of God in history in the lives of real people. And genealogy proves that and the Bible is filled with genealogy.

It is significant. The reason we read from Matthew 1 is, is it not astonishing that the New Testament, the announcement of Jesus Christ as Messiah begins with 17 verses of genealogy? It starts there. We've seen an easy way to lose an audience fast, "I've got some wonderful things to tell you. I can't wait to tell you. Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac was the father of Jacob. Jacob..." But that's what God does. God doesn't make mistakes so the problem obviously whenever we see a problem with how he has done something, the problem is always with us and we have to understand why he's done what he's done. And part of it is he is grounding his real life events, the coming of Jesus is grounded in history.

Further in Luke 3, you have another genealogy. Matthew and Luke are proving that Jesus is the son of David, showing that God had to be consistent with his word and that the one that we proclaim is the one who has been anticipated from the beginning.

The Bible has genealogies at numerous places. You find a genealogy in Exodus, you find genealogies in Numbers, you find genealogies, extensive genealogies in 1 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, but the book where you find the most genealogies is the book, the first book of the Bible: Genesis. Again, God starts telling his word and what does he do? There is a lot of, "And Adam had a son named Seth. And Seth had a son," and so on and so on and so on. In fact, the word "genesis" itself is an English transliteration of a Greek word, "ghenesis," so genesis. And that Greek word was used in the Greek translation of

the Old Testament to translate one of the keywords in Genesis which, "tolodoth" actually, which means "the generations of." So genesis, the title, when the Septuagint, the translators of the Septuagint gave the first book of the Bible the title Ghenesis, what they were saying is, in a sense, the book of genealogies. So important are the genealogies in Scripture.

Now, it grounds the Bible in history. That's the first answer to the question that we are asking, again, the significance of genealogies in general in Scripture and we are saying that first genealogies ground the Bible in history. Secondly, genealogies not only ground us, they guide us. They guide us toward the one person to which all of Scripture and all of history points. That's the purpose of genealogies. They are leading us ever closer as we read through the Old Testament, ever closer to the one to which all of our hopes point and depend, the Messiah.

Now, we see this, it begins and I want you to turn back over to Genesis. Let's look at this a little bit because basically the story of the Bible is the story of creation. Everything is good, man falls into sin and then God begins the plan of redemption and from Genesis 3 all the way to Revelation 22, he is carrying out the glorious plan of salvation but the first preaching of the Gospel is in Genesis 3:15. This is the first preaching of the Gospel and ironically it is preached by God directly to Satan, the serpent. It's not good news for him, it's good news for those who were hearing what God says to him. Genesis 3:15 as he says to the serpent, well, look at verse 14, "The LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this,' because you have deceived Eve and Adam, "because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life," and here's the Gospel, "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel." God is giving the Gospel, the good news of the way of salvation out of the destruction that has just happened, the death that has just happened, the calamity that has just fallen upon mankind and the world in general. The hope is that one day a descendant of this woman and this man will come and he will do battle with the serpent, and in that battle, he will have his heel bruised but he will crush and bruise the head of the serpent.

That is a picture of the cross of Jesus Christ prophesied there at the very beginning and all of history continues to, as Scripture unfolds, to point toward that one who will come. So the question is: when is he going to come? Where are we to look? Where do we look for the Messiah? Where do we look for the Christ? Where is he? And what you see then is this focus becoming more and more clear throughout the Old Testament, what the Messiah will do and who the Messiah is becoming clearer and clearer. And one of the ways that you see it is through genealogy because we're told that Adam had many sons and daughters, particularly we're told about three sons by name. Remember, he has Cain, Abel and Seth along with many other sons and daughters but we are told about those three, and the question is if it's going to be a descendant of Eve, if it's going to come from Adam and Eve, where is the son? He has three sons. One of the first things God does is tell us in Genesis 5 it's not going to come through Cain, it's not going to come through Abel. Abel might have had some children before he died, it's not coming through them.

It's coming through Seth. The Messiah will come through Seth. Genesis 5:1, and here is that key word, the generations of, ghenesis, tolodoth in Hebrew. "This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created. When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth." Then Seth becomes the father of Enosh, as you read on down. Enosh becomes the father of Kenan. All the way down in chapter 5 to Noah in verse 30, Lamech becomes the father of Noah. So Adam had three sons but it's Seth. Follow the line of Seth, God says, when you look for the Messiah.

Noah has how many sons? Three: Shem, Ham and Japheth. But the significance, again, of this phrase, "these are the generations of," happens again in chapter 6, verse 9, "These are the records of the generations of Noah." Now, what happens here is it's not just a straight forward genealogy like chapter 5 and like some of the other genealogies, here is the story of the genealogy, chapter 6 basically to 9. You're going to hear about Shem, Ham and Japheth and you're going to see that it's Shem that you're to follow. And it becomes even clearer again when in chapter 11, we're told in chapter 11, verse 10, "These are the generations of Shem."

He's told us about Japheth and their generations, he's told us about Ham and their generations, but what he focuses on is Shem because Shem, you follow from Shem all the way down to a man named Terah who also had three sons: Nahor, Haran and a son named Abram. And here we follow Abram who becomes Abraham and what you see throughout the rest of the book of Genesis is, now, how many sons does Abraham have? Well, he has a number after he finally starts having kids but remember at first he has two, two main sons: Ishmael and Isaac. And the question is through whom does the promise come? Chapter 21, verse 12, makes clear, "through Isaac will your descendants, will the seed come."

Then Isaac has how many sons? He has two. Who do we follow? Which one do we look at? Not Esau but Jacob.

Jacob has 12 sons but it's the nation of Israel and really it becomes a question: is it Joseph or is it Judah when you look at the end of Genesis as you follow the story of, "these are the generations of Jacob," chapter 37, verse 2. That refrain continues throughout the book of Genesis. "These are the generations of," and the story of Joseph's sons. We find out in chapter 49, verses 8 to 12, particularly verse 10, that the Messiah will come from Judah. Surprisingly not Joseph. He will come from Judah for we read there that, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Until Shiloh [the Prince] comes." And the imagery there is beautiful. You see the imagery of blood on his robes, the wine. The Messiah is coming from Judah. The King, the scepter, the one who's going to defeat the serpent in the kingdom of darkness, bring the kingdom of God, will come from Judah.

So you see how we followed it down. All mankind comes from Adam and Eve but we're looking at Seth. Then from Seth, he had other sons and daughters but the one we're

looking at is Enosh and we follow it all the way down to Noah. From Noah we follow it from Shem. From Shem down to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah. Now, we technically don't know, Judah has five sons in Genesis, two die, Er and Onan, three survive: Shelah and the two twins by Tamar, Perez and Zerah. There are three candidates for the Messiah to come from. Is it Shelah? Is it Perez? Is it Zerah? That would be what a godly Jew would be looking for as they consider the history. The Messiah is coming from Judah.

Now, they would be confused about it some because other people would try to argue different Bible verses but it's clear when you look at it carefully it's coming from Judah and the question is which one of those three? Now, what's really neat is then the flow of redemptive history, David comes on the scene and becomes king and, like I said, it's not a universally accepted thing that it's going to come from Judah. People are arguing the king should still be somebody from Saul's tribe of Benjamin. But David is a glorious king. Solomon follows in his train. And the book of Ruth apparently written some time after David reigns to sort of fill in the gap of the genealogy.

Now, I'm actually getting ahead to point two. Let me wrap it. Go back to point one for a second. The whole story of the Bible is the inexorable plan of God unfolding toward the Messiah. He has determined to send forth his Son into the world to save sinners and his Savior will be a man, will also be God, we find out later, the prophets begin to tell us that. He will be called Mighty God. His goings forth are from the days of eternity, Micah 5:2. But the question of the fact that the Messiah is coming through this line, it actually helps us understand a lot of the flows of history and the things that seem almost random that happened in history.

Revelation 12:4, the last book of the Bible, there is an image that helps us understand something of this importance of the coming of the Messiah and his physical lineage when we're told that the dragon who is the serpent, waits beside a woman, who is Israel, who is about to give birth to devour the child when the child is born. Then we're told that when the child is born, it is Christ. So the point is Satan has been trying to stop the line all the way through history. He's wanted to devour the line of promise. He wants to stop the one from coming who will bruise his head. This is why, this is what makes sense actually of Genesis 6. No matter how you interpret "sons of God and daughters of men," what is happening there is the godly line of Messiah is being assaulted. It's being corrupted so that God has to take decisive action to keep it alive through Noah and Shem. What's happening in Esther, the story of Esther when Haman, the Amalekite, incites the King of Persia to kill all of the Jews, to allow for all of the Jews to be killed, they're trying to exterminate the line of the Messiah. You see it again when Jesus is born when Herod sends his soldiers to Bethlehem to kill every male child under two. What's happening? The serpent, the dragon, is trying to devour the coming King.

Now, that said, the significance of genealogies in Scripture, they guide us to look to the right one. That's why Matthew says, "Listen, I'm telling you Jesus is the Messiah. I'm going to tell you all kinds of things about him but I want to tell you first off, he meets the criteria. He comes from where we were supposed to look. He comes from the line of David." And Luke says the same thing. Apparently both genealogies, one gives us

Joseph, the legal father of Jesus, his lineage; and the other gives us Mary's lineage, the fleshly, one who bore Jesus from her own body.

Now, that said, the significance of genealogies in Scripture, now we move to the significance of this particular genealogy in Ruth, Ruth 4. The subpoints are going to be just like the first two subpoints: grounds and guides on all three points. The significance of this particular genealogy in Ruth, at the end of Ruth, the last three verses, this genealogy grounds this particular story of what happened in Naomi's life and Ruth's life, it grounds it into the larger story of what God is doing in history.

Now, I want to say this because, in a sense, we were already grounded into something bigger than what was happening by verse 17. Look with me at the text. When verse 17 said, "So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David," the book could have ended right there. It could have. Now it didn't because God didn't want it to but it could have because that's the surprise ending, isn't it? This whole story we've been looking at, when you haven't read it and you read it as if it's the first time, Naomi, her struggles, Ruth, the Moabitess, the romance between Boaz and Ruth, finally a child is born, Naomi's emptiness has become fullness. Wow, look at God's hand. Look at God's chesed, his lovingkindness being revealed. Isn't this amazing? And yet mind-blowing, these seemingly meaningless events or random events are a part of something much greater. David would not have been born, David would not have been born if Naomi had not suffered the agony she suffered. So what that says is, that itself, verse 17, called up the events and gave them great meaning and significance. "What I have suffered has resulted in greater glory than I ever could have imagined."

And the book could have ended there, but it didn't, it went back to the genealogy and what this does, if verse 17 took Naomi...remember, Naomi and Ruth never knew about what was going to happen. They had a son named Obed. Ruth might have lived long enough to have a grandson named Jesse and maybe even a bunch of great-grandboys too, including a little ruddy guy named David. She might have known that but she surely was dead by the time he became king and had no idea that this was changing the course of history. So they never saw it. Keep that in mind. We, the reader, see. That's the way life is. The true impact of our lives and the things that we go through, the lion's share, the overwhelming majority of it, we will never see. We see only a small part. God is doing something much bigger. So they didn't see that.

Now but why the genealogy? The genealogy grounds their events not only in what God is doing in the future, it grounds in what God is doing in the past. It turns it around and says, "Look at this." This goes all the way back to Judah. Remember I said earlier, Judah had three sons, which son is it? This fills the gap. This is the place that we're first told that it's Perez. Now we know because the gap is filled that the Messiah will come from Adam, Seth, Noah, Shem, Terah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Perez, Hezron, Ram, Aminadab, Nashon, Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, David. Now it's put together so it grounds their real experience in this magnificent plan of God that spans the ages forward and backward. God is not making things up as he goes along. He's not responding to things that happened.

Some people have a quasi view of God's sovereignty that, "Okay, he's really powerful and he's just responding to what happens." The Bible presents a God who decrees whatsoever comes to pass; that he has ordained all things that happen, even the things that are done that are evil. Though he is not the one who does any evil nor does he tempt any man to evil. His sovereignty is so great, his wisdom so perfect, that he ordains by allowing certain things to happen, knowing temptations and how men will respond, he has foreordained everything that happens. This is why Joseph could say, "You meant it for evil when you sold me into slavery, but God meant it for good." God had actually orchestrated those things, even the sin of our father, Jacob, in favoritism, unreasonable favoritism. Even the sin of jealousy and the collusion of jealousy. You know how a mob can do things that an individual won't. Those ten brothers talked themselves into a frenzy as they watched Joseph walk across the field in the distance. A murderous rage. But God didn't allow them to kill him because God was working out a glorious purpose.

So this is what we see here, that whatever is happening in our lives, the God who inspired this passage, that worked in these, remember, apparently meaningless events. "We're just two widows." Two unfortunate women. Hapless. Helpless. Not that important, seemingly, and yet God is doing something in their lives. He is supplying, if you think about it, the link in the chain of salvation. Without them and what they went through, the chain is broken.

Now, it not only grounds us, the significance of this particular genealogy, our second major point, the significance of this particular genealogy in Ruth grounds, as I said earlier, this partial story and this particular story in the larger story. It also guides us. It guides us. It can't guide them because they didn't really know. They didn't have the genealogy. But it begins to guide us. I'm going to show you a couple of things that are really interesting about the genealogy that really speak to us and show us some things we need to understand.

The first thing is: the genealogy is ten names. Perez to David, there are ten names. Now, what we see is that in genealogies in the Bible, that the Hebrew mind is different than the way we think as Western; we're more affected by sort of Greek, you know, Greco-Roman thought. So we think in terms of more like, "Well, I'd like to know every single name of every person that was between X and Y." Apparently we have a shortened, a truncated list because if you do the math, we start off with Perez and his son Hezron were alive at about 1850 BC as approximate time when Jacob and his sons go into Egypt. For purposes of round numbers, 1850 BC. They come out 1450 or so, 1445, 400 years later. Then 400 years after that, around 1040 AD, David is born. So between Hezron and David is 800 years. This basically means that seven guys cover 800 years. That's not, we don't have everybody. There are some gaps and the reason there are gaps is because in the Jewish mind, to be the great-grandfather of someone is to father them because if you didn't father their granddad, they are not here. Impossible for them to be here. If you're the grandfather, you are the father of your son and your son's son and your son's son's son and so on.

So he can say, "The father of," and skip a generation and the reason he did is because, the author did, is because ten names in a genealogy was a recognized number for royalty. This is a royal genealogy. The king, David. And in particular, it seems that it was crafted that way because there are some missing in different places, apparently, and I think the last four there in rapid succession. Here we are really getting close to David: Obed, Jesse, David, Boaz, those four, boom, boom, boom, boom. But in between there are a couple of places where I think we're missing some people because the Lord wanted this number, ten. And he wanted the number ten because Boaz in a ten name genealogy, the seventh position is one of special importance and honor. It has the point of saying, "What happened here with this man was tremendously important," and Boaz is the seventh name out of ten. So it's emphasizing the impact of Boaz in the genealogy from Perez to David

It's underscoring what we've already seen in the story. It was Naomi and Ruth and Boaz's decisive actions that have brought about this amazing outcome. What happened here is of tremendous importance so it's be like Boaz. Remember, we saw he's a man of action. Be like Ruth. Look at her, the chesed that she shows and the action. She doesn't sit back. Be like Naomi who encouraged her to go and propose marriage to Boaz. And like Ruth who then went and did it. One of the things that you see in this passage of Scripture is there should be no such thing as complacent Calvinists. We can believe in the sovereignty of God because the Bible teaches it. You just read the Bible and you come to that conclusion. He is sovereign. He has mercy upon whom he will have mercy as he told Moses on the mountain, "I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy," and the mystery of that and how it works together with our free will and our responsibility to respond in repentance and faith. But the Bible teaches absolute sovereignty of God and it teaches full responsibility of man at the same time. They apparently, they look to be contradictory but they are not because God teaches them both is true and therefore they are true.

It's like Spurgeon was asked one time, Charles Spurgeon was asked, "Pastor Spurgeon, how do you reconcile divine sovereignty and human responsibility?" And he said, "Reconcile them? Why would I reconcile friends?" No need to reconcile friends. There is no fight there. The only fight there is in the foolish mind of man. We can't comprehend what God has said and why would we expect that we could? Isn't that stupid in itself? The infinite God who is beyond our ability to comprehend the majesty of his glory, his ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so far are his ways above our ways and his thoughts above our thoughts.

So he has chosen to reveal himself in this way but he's telling us through this position that, "Be people of action." You can believe in the sovereignty of God but don't be complacent. Act. And in fact, a second point of this guidance, a second thing about, this is actually like a point 2B2. Isn't that helpful? Aren't you glad I did that? 2. The significance of this particular genealogy in Ruth, it guides us, that's 2B, and 2B1 was the seventh position in ten, and 2B2 is the beginning with Perez.

What does that mean? Why does the genealogy begin with Perez? Well, you say, "Well, they offered a blessing of Perez and it ties together." Yes, I think that's part of it. It ties

together with the blessing. But if they had started with Judah, there still would have been Perez in there. Is there something more? And I think there is. The blessing that they pronounced upon him in verse 12, this is the elders and all of the people at the city gate who were in the court, they say in verse 12, "Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the offspring which the LORD will give you by this young woman." The fact that "whom Tamar bore to Judah" brings to mind for those who hear and for those who are reading this text, it's fresh in our minds that Perez's birth, circumstances, were quite extraordinary.

We've talked about how Tamar did what she did, how she forced Judah's hand because Judah was failing to act, to do what God had called him to do, giving his third son, Shelah, to Tamar. He should have done that and you read about it in Genesis 38. He did not and Tamar dresses as a prostitute, seduces him, bears two children, two twin boys, Perez and Zerah. We read in Genesis 38 that when they were being born, the woman, Tamar, is coming to the moment of birth and the midwife, one of the children's hands comes out and she ties a string, a scarlet thread around it to say he's first, Zerah's hand. Then for some reason, Perez is able to come out of the womb first, is born first, and the midwife exclaims, "What a breach you have made! You have broken through! How did you do that? How did you get ahead of him to get the right of firstborn?" So they named him Perez which means "breach." His name means breach. And the word "breach" means "to break through; to force one's self through like an army breaches a wall or like a river breaches its banks."

So Perez, the very name Perez itself speaks of action. It speaks of laying hold, pressing toward. Then you add that to Tamar who had already done that, he was really just exhibiting the character of his mother, laying hold of the blessings of God. She knew the promise of God and the commandment of God though it wasn't written down at that point until Moses hundreds of years later. She knew God had ordained the rules of Levirate marriage and she took the promise of God and laid hold of it and it wasn't done in the right way but her heart God honored in spite of her sin. Isn't it good to know God honors his word in spite of our sin?

So Perez, the sense, what this genealogy is telling us, it starts with Perez but it could have started with Judah and still covered it. In fact, I think that's more natural. "Hey, tell us about Judah." Well, the people there are in Judah, yes. They are in the land of Judah and they know the various sons of Judah, but for those that it's written to, we are reminded to look at Perez, to look at Tamar in this passage. And I think what we're seeing is, "Be like Perez, be like Tamar, who are like Ruth and Naomi and Boaz. Who aren't complacent but who are pressing for the blessings of God." That in the midst of the mundane circumstances of life, in the midst of suffering and pain, what do you do? You don't sit there complacent, you press on to know the Lord. You lay hold of God by his promises. You seek him fervently in prayer. Seek his face.

We're told that in one of the beautiful passages in Jeremiah that probably many of you have committed to memory, verse 11. Jeremiah 29, this is after Jerusalem is in ruins and the people are wondering, "Has God abandoned us forever? He has judged our sin and

look at the devastation that has happened." This is what God says in verse 11, "For I know the plans that I have for you, plans not to harm you but to give you a future and a hope." Two verses later he says, "Seek Me with your whole heart and you will find Me." Verse 14, "'For I will be found by you,' declares the LORD." Seek me with your whole heart. That's what this genealogy is telling us, "Be like Perez. Breach. Be willing to breach decorum, breach your comfort. Break through and seek God."

Now, that's the second point: the significance of this particular genealogy in Ruth. Thirdly, the significance of this genealogy in your life. And we started into it even there but let's look at it a little more fully. The significance of this genealogy in our lives. Again the two subpoints: grounds and guides.

This genealogy is given by God I think at the end in this surprise ending. I mean, usually genealogies occur at the beginning like they do in Matthew. They are establishing the credibility of the claim that Jesus is the Messiah right up front. And usually a genealogy is told like the one that's told about Shem, from Shem to Terah is to legitimize Terah's son, Abram, right at the beginning, before Abram is even introduced. The genealogies normally come at the front, not the back.

This is the one place it comes at the back and it's for the surprise impact, yes, and it's really, I think, to teach us this reality because we have walked through the suffering. If you remember, we talked about trying to read this as if you had never read it before and you read the suffering of Naomi losing her husband. First of all, experiencing famine, leaving the land, losing her husband. Her two boys marrying daughters who are unable to bear children for whatever reason. And ten years in the land, she has no grandsons, no granddaughters. Her two sons die. She is left with two daughters-in-law. To be a woman without a man is to have no future and no hope. It's threefold no future, no hope. It's like no hope, no future to the third power. We hear her agony as she comes back to Bethlehem and they say, "Look, here's Naomi." She says, "Don't call me pleasant one," which is what her name means in Hebrew. "Don't call me pleasant one, call me bitter, Mara. Call me Mara, bitter, for the Lord has dealt very bitterly with me." We see her lethargy where she's just all wrapped up in her pain and her agony but God begins to do some things that at the first look very small. Ruth goes out and gleans in the field and she brings back an extraordinary harvest that first day because of how Boaz's kindness is manifested. Two weeks of food for one day of work, basically. Then she also experiences, Ruth experiences Boaz's kindness. Then in chapter 3, Naomi kind of wakes up and hatches the plan. "Boaz is our kinsman redeemer. God has promised that when you're displaced from the land and you have no male heir, he has promised in his word in Deuteronomy the principle of Levirate marriage to give you a redeemer." And she lays hold of that promise and she sends Ruth on the errand and God does something extraordinary through that.

And what we see is their suffering has meaning and it's shown to have meaning after you went through all of that suffering, never seeing it had meaning, and yet look how much meaning it had. Had her husband stayed alive, she would never have come back to the land. Had her sons stayed alive, Ruth's husband, they would have never, they might have

come back to the land but Ruth wouldn't have married Boaz. Obed would not have been born. David would not have been born. Jesus would not have been born. But God held all of that together. He was working something miraculous.

What does that mean? It means that your suffering and my suffering, no matter how apparently random and meaningless, is caught up by God into his ultimate plan of salvation that spans the ages from eternity past to eternity future. It is not an accident. Whatever we're going through, everything is precisely measured out by a God who is all wise, infinite in wisdom, perfectly good, filled with lovingkindness, abounding in lovingkindness, working a plan and not only good and wise, but powerful, able to do whatever he needs to do.

Now, it seems like our lives, wouldn't it be neat to be able to be like Ruth and Naomi or Boaz? Whenever you read the Bible, don't you kind of feel like that at times? "I wish I could have it like they had it." And they had an amazing place. I mean, it would be really neat to meet them in heaven when we get to meet them in heaven and to talk to them about it. But you can say to yourself, "You know, I can't be in the genealogy of Jesus. He's already come." Is that really true? You see, Jesus came, he died and he rose again, and he began to beget sons in his likeness. So you and I, if you know Jesus Christ, if you've repented of your sins and placed your faith in Jesus, you have done so because he's given you a new heart and he's made you to be of his own, given you his Spirit, and Christ is in you, and he is going to work through you and is working through you things that span the ages. So that when you share Christ with someone else, you're in their genealogy. When you minister love and kindness, you may be a part of what brings the unbeliever to Christ even if you didn't have the opportunity to be there when they got saved. You shared. You sowed. You loved. You served. You'll never know until heaven because we're not going to have a book written. Well, we would be dead anyway just like Ruth and Naomi. We'd be with the Lord, but we know when we get there. And we have an opportunity, you know, they were a part of making Jesus come physically into the world but you and I have an opportunity to make him come spiritually into the world every day. Not just in seeing other people saved but in our own lives.

This is what God's purpose is. I mean, think about Romans 8:28, "for we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him." He's talking about suffering in that passage. In verse 18 it said, "for the sufferings of this present age, I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to compare with the glory that is to be revealed in us." And he talks about the subjection of the creation and its suffering, the futility, the corruption, the groaning, the suffering that we experience in this world. Then he says in verse 28, "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." So our suffering has a purpose and what is that purpose? He tells you in verse 29, "for those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son." That's his purpose, so that we would become, so that he would be the firstborn among many brethren. God has purposed to bring people to himself and then through their suffering, through their difficulties, to make them more and more and more like Jesus, so

that we look more and more like Jesus, so that Jesus becomes visible in a multitude of lives spanning the globe.

So you and I when we experience suffering, we think it's meaningless, it's random, "Why did this happen to me? Really, this on top of this on top of this? Isn't that too much, Lord?" But God is perfecting us. That's what his word says in so many places. James 1, "count it pure joy when you encounter various trials for the trials produce perseverance and proven character." Romans and James 1 both say that, Romans 5. Hebrews 2:10 says that "the author of our salvation was made perfect through sufferings." In chapter 5 of Hebrews, verse 8, he says, "Jesus learned obedience through the things He suffered." So that somehow in the things that he suffered, the temptations he experienced, the agonies of soul that he experienced, he became a perfect Savior. First of all, he lived out a life of perfect righteousness in all those circumstances. Tempted in every way, not in most ways, in every way yet without sin. So he offers a perfect record of righteousness and he had to be tempted in all those different ways, to suffer all those different circumstances so that he could offer a perfect record of righteousness but also that he could have a perfectly tender understanding heart. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us in our weakness, but one who has been tempted in every way." He can understand. He comes alongside the believer who's in agony and he understands what you're going through. He can feel what you're feeling.

Isn't it amazing when somebody that you talk to, another believer who has really experienced, I mean, it's wonderful we're to comfort each other whether we have experienced it or not, we have to. But isn't it a special treasure when someone is able to give you the comfort which they've received from God in the same circumstance? You can always get that from Jesus. Every circumstance.

So even the suffering that we go through, one of the ways that purifies us and makes us like him is it makes us run to him. It makes us know that we have no other hope but Jesus. Suffering weakens the hold of the world on our hearts. It redirects the affections of our heart to know that this is not what I want, this is meaningless. All that matters is Jesus. And in doing that, when we go through suffering, God is writing this glorious plan of the ages. It's happening. We can't see it but it is certainly happening because he says it is.

This means not only what's happening in us individually is glorious, but it's also happening corporately. You know, Ephesians 4:11-16 talks about how the body of Christ is being built up and one of the things that's happening in that passage is the Apostle Paul is telling us that there is a corporate sense, there is a way in which, a sense in which the people of God in a local church as they are built up as a body, we are the body of Christ. We're called that not just because it helps with the helpful thing of we're all connected, right? Like the body, the finger can't not care that the toe is hurting. I mean, the finger might think he can but the way we're made when you think about our physical body, if my toe is hurting, my whole body knows about it, if it's hurting bad enough, right? And everything cares about that and so this finger might help bandage that toe to get that toe to stop hurting, to make that toe well. Then he says this is what we are, we're the body of

Christ. We're all whether we're the foot or the hand or the eye, the ear, we need one another. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, that when one suffers, all suffer. God has ordained it this way. Why? So we'll need each other.

So when we suffer, what happens? We serve one another. We go and sit with somebody when they're hurting and we don't know what to say. Maybe we haven't been through what they've been through but the very presence of being there does something, connects. And what is happening as you minister the word to one another, we minister the word to one another, the body is being built up and as he says in Ephesians 4:12, "to the building up of the body of Christ," the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ; "until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." He's saying as we exercise our gifts and serve one another, we're growing up to look like the mature man of Jesus.

Corporately. This means that no matter what's happening, like I said, the random apparently meaningless suffering of other believers, you know, I find myself tending to say that probably quicker for other people, "I can't believe this happened on top of this, on top of this. Wow." And you just, you know, what is that? That's simple unbelief in my heart. God knows what he's doing. I can be sorry that it's happening but not really wonder why. Obviously, Lord, you know better. But to take that opportunity to go and serve that believer, that brother, that sister, you are doing something that has eternal significance. You are building up the body, representing Jesus. It's as if you're standing in the gap in the same way that Naomi and Ruth and Boaz did. There is an opportunity to make Christ visible and when you seize that, don't think it's a small thing. It is a big thing. It will have eternal significance.

Isn't that amazing how good God is? The glory of his Gospel? That he would save us from our sins, cleanse us through the blood of his Son, bring us into his family, and then let us become and more and more one? And when we are one as Jesus prayed on the night before he was crucified, "Father, make them one." He kept saying that, "Make them one even as We are one, that the world may know that You sent Me."

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we stand in awe of you and the glory of all that you have done. We pray that you would help us to obey and apply the things that you've taught us. Help us to be more broken over our unbelief. Help us not to complain and murmur against you but to, as your word says, rejoice in the Lord always, in everything to give thanks, to trust you and take you at your word and to be like Ruth and Naomi and Boaz and even Perez, to press in, to seek you because you're a God who blesses those who believe that you are and that you reward those who diligently seek you. Pray that you will help some in this room today to press into the kingdom. Help them to repent, to turn from sin and living for themselves and to place all of their hope in Jesus and his finished work at Calvary, to surrender to him as Lord, as their King. And Father, help all that belong to you already to treasure such a glorious Savior more and to make him known every moment of every

*day, delighting in his glory and sharing him more faithfully. We pray this in Jesus' name.
Amen.*