

The Astonishing Impact of an Unlikely Hero

Book of Ruth

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the fourth chapter of Ruth, Ruth 4, and return to the Gospel according to Ruth as Dr. Mack calls it, for two more Sundays, I believe, today and next week. We'll be finishing up, Lord willing, next Sunday. It's been a delight for me to study and to work and just dig in this book and today the message title is "The Astonishing Impact of an Unlikely Hero." The title for me, at least as I was thinking about what to title the message, I thought about a book and an unlikely person because really what we're going to be seeing is the astonishing impact of an unlikely hero, Ruth, is a most unlikely hero and yet she has incredible impact in the building of God's kingdom.

But sort of the ring of that phrase or the astonishing impact of an unlikely hero, I was thinking about Rosaria Champagne Butterfield who wrote a book titled "The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert," and her story is kind of an interesting, in some ways it's an interesting parallel. She was a tenured professor at Syracuse University in the late 1990s teaching English and she was a lesbian, very hostile to Christianity, in fact, she wrote a letter against the patriarchal system of Christianity. Her ire was raised when Promise Keepers came to Syracuse and you will remember that movement from the late 90s. So she wrote an op-ed for the newspaper in which she just castigated Christianity in general and just Christian men in particular. And a pastor, Ken Smith there at a little small church in Syracuse, a Reformed church, wrote a letter to her and I'm not going to go into the rest of the story except to say that they began a friendship. His wife, Ken Smith and his wife with Rosaria Champagne and they began sharing the word of God with her. And you think about a lesbian professor writing against Promise Keepers and against Christianity, today she writes books, in fact she just wrote a book recently in which she talks about sexual identity and it's basically "More Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert," I think. I can't remember exactly the title. It came out fairly recently, in which she explains how the Gospel and the Bible's teaching about sexuality and gender is right because she came to faith in Jesus Christ and she is now one of the most articulate spokesmen sharing the Gospel in a very sensitive yet clear and bold way to those that are experiencing the difficulty and deception of this world system. I mean, gender issues are real for a number of people. They are struggling and yet the answer is the Gospel, the answer is the word of God, the answer is what God says about it, not what the world says.

So anyway, this lady is an unlikely convert and an unlikely hero and she is truly both for those of us who love the Lord and love his word.

Well, the astonishing impact of an unlikely hero, we're going to focus on Ruth and what we're going to see is that in this passage, and I want to encourage you to remember or to think, I've said this before, but as we read this, think again about the story of Ruth not knowing the end. It's so hard to do that, isn't it? We know how the story ends. We know that Ruth's son, Obed, has a son, Jesse, and Jesse has a son, David, and that's the surprise ending but let's forget that for a moment, wipe that from our minds and just think about Ruth and her circumstances and how unlikely a hero she is. And then to see what God does in her life because it tells us, you may be here today and your life is a mess, you've not given your heart to Christ, you're wondering how you're going to make it. God can do incredible things in your life. Ruth is a testimony to that. But for those of us who already belong to Jesus, who have given our hearts to Christ, there are areas in our lives where we look at our life and we say, "This is a mess," and the God that we serve is a God who loves to take messes like that and use that as a platform, a transformation to then give us an amazing message that can make us, in some ways, in a small way, a hero to others. I don't mean hero in the way the world thinks of it but someone who can say to others, "Listen, I used to struggle in this same area. Follow me as I follow Christ." And our God is a God who loves to do things like that and we see it in this story.

As we look at Ruth, we have noted before that she's really not the main character of the book, Naomi is, and we've spent a lot of time the last few messages before we broke for Christmas and New Year's, we saw how Boaz is the Christ figure, the kinsman redeemer, but we see in Ruth an exemplary Christian life. Before the Gospel has fully flowered, Jesus has not come and yet here she is, our sister in the faith, looking ahead to the coming salvation and she models out for us what a godly life ought to look like, a life of faith, and the incredible impact that we can have if we will trust and walk with the Lord.

I want to begin reading at verse 1 and we'll read through verse 15 of Ruth 4.

1 Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there, and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by, so he said, "Turn aside, friend, sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down. 2 He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down. 3 Then he said to the closest relative, "Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. 4 So I thought to inform you, saying, 'Buy it before those who are sitting here, and before the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am after you.'" And he said, "I will redeem it." 5 Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance." 6 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." 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. 8 So the closest relative said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself." And he removed his sandal. 9 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. 10 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." 11 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. 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." 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."

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you that your word is living and active. We thank you that your word is perfect, that it always accomplishes the purpose for which you send it when empowered by your Spirit. And we pray that you would now have your way in our hearts, in our minds, in our lives by the power of your word, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, for the glory of Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen.

The astonishing impact of an unlikely hero. I want to consider this message under four points and before we get into the points, I want to just kind of give you the basic idea again to make sure that we're seeing this correctly. What I'm focusing on is really verses 11 to 15 and the things that the crowd, the witnesses that Boaz has called 10 men and then there is a larger gathering of people who stop to see what's going on and he has basically had this transaction with the closest kinsman redeemer to establish his right to redeem Naomi's land and Ruth, the Moabitess and at the end of that time, they all acknowledge, "Yes, we are witnesses." So the legal transaction is done properly and in order. But not only that, the people in response to seeing the legal transaction take place, they utter blessings upon Boaz and in these blessings we see some really just over-the-top kind of hopes and expectations.

I mean, think about it, there are basically three things I want to focus on and these aren't the three points, these are three promises, the four points are coming, okay? Extra. No extra charge either. So the three blessings that we see, that I want us to focus on, are how Ruth is going to make an impact. They say in verse 11, "May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel." That's number 1. May this woman be like Rachel and Leah. That is mind blowing. Rachel and Leah together with their handmaids had 12 sons. They gave the 12 tribes of Israel, the founders, those 12 sons came from them. May this woman, Ruth, be like them, the crowd says. That seems just a little outlandish, again, if you don't know the end of the story. We don't know the end of the story, remember, we've erased it. Wow, I mean, hey, that's a nice thought but let's get real. Rachel and Leah?

The second blessing or the one I'm going to focus on related to Ruth is in verse 12, "Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah." May your house, Boaz, be like the house of Perez. Judah had five sons, two sons died because they were ungodly and wicked and the Lord put them to death, the third son, Shelah remember, Judah was supposed to give to Tamar, the daughter of his first son who had died, the concept of Levirate marriage, but Judah didn't do that and so then Tamar tricks Judah, her father-in-law, into having relations with her. She dresses as a prostitute and entices him into a sexual union that results in her conception of twins and the firstborn twin is named Perez. So there were three remaining sons of Judah that the line of Judah would come from: Shelah, Perez and his twin brother, Zerah. Perez became the prominent family. This son born of this astonishing type of union, God blessed his family. Perez is the prominent family in Judah at the time that these words were being spoken. So they are saying, "May your family be like the family of Perez, Boaz, may you who are just marrying this woman, this Moabitess, may your family be like Perez. May you rise to prominence." Again, where is this coming from? I mean, I wonder if the crowd actually wondered as they was saying these things, "Why are we saying this?" They were saying it because God was appointing them to say it but what they are saying is mind blowing and it must've been something for Boaz to hear it. "What?" I mean, you know, sometimes people say things and you're like, "Okay, that was very nice." Maybe he didn't think that long about it, he just went on about his business. And they had a son and they died not knowing about their impact.

So may this woman be like Rachel and Leah. May your house be like Perez, which was really built by Tamar. And thirdly in verse 15, after the child is born, so now a year later basically from what we saw in the first verses, the meeting in the town square that happened in the first 12 verses, now we jump ahead in verse 13. Boaz marries Ruth and she conceives a son and then the son is born and when the son is born, the women come in and say, "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." The phrase "and is better to you than seven sons," these women are saying Ruth is better than seven sons so I'm talking about her impact. May she be like Rachel and Leah. May she have the impact that Tamar had. May she be, she already is

they are saying, better than seven sons. This is a woman of incredible impact. It's really unrealistic even what they're asking.

Now, keep those three things in mind now and let's begin to look at the four points, the four points of the message. The first point of the message, we're talking about the astonishing impact of an unlikely hero because those three promises describe an incredible hero in the people of God in the kingdom of God and she has a place, a prominent place in the kingdom and the unfolding of God's kingdom.

Now, the first point: an unlikely candidate. An unlikely candidate. She, first of all, is a Moabitess. Fourteen times in the book we see "Moab, from Moab, Moabitess," over and over and over again. It begins in the very first chapter when they go to the land of Moab, which we talked about at the very beginning of this study was a problem because they were leaving the land of Israel, going outside the land of promise to the land of Moab. Not just leaving the land of promise which was bad enough, but then going to the land of Moab with all of its ugly associations. Remember, Moab is a people that came from the illicit union of Lot and his daughter. Lot has relations with his daughter. Moab is born. Remember, the name Moab means "where is my father?" You can imagine why a child might have even thought that growing up. "Where is dad? There is granddad." Moab then in the history of Israel basically attacked the people, not physically attacked but sought to destroy them by calling down curses on them through Balaam in Numbers. Balak, the king, calling down curses, he wanted to call down curses from God on Israel. And then used the idea that Balaam had of enticing them into illicit sexual relationships and messing up the holiness of the people of God. So Moab was under the judgment of God. In fact, we saw in Deuteronomy 25 or 23 actually. Is it 25 or 23? It think it's 23:1-6, anyway what we see there and you can see whether I'm right, 23 or 25, it's one of the two. It's not 24. They are told that a descendant of Moab cannot enter the temple area of God for 10 generations. So great is the ugliness of their sin.

Now, this is the nationality of Ruth and the author of Ruth is careful to not let us forget that. I mean, we end up chapter 1, verse 22, "So Naomi returned," this is 1:22, "Naomi returned," summarizing what's happened with them going back to the land of Israel, back to Bethlehem, "Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law." Not just Ruth, her daughter-in-law. We already know Ruth is a Moabitess but the author doesn't want us to forget that. Then chapter 2, verse 2, just two verses later, we read, "And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi." Do you see how the author just keeps reminding us, "Don't forget where she's from." Ruth the Moabitess. I already know she's a Moabitess. "No, don't forget. She's a Moabitess." Then when you have this discussion with Boaz coming in to see his servants and he sees this young woman in the field and he asks them and they say, "She is the young Moabite woman," chapter 2, verse 6, "She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab." Emphasis. Emphasis. Emphasis. And here in chapter 4, Boaz when he says, "You're going to have to marry this woman, you have to acquire Ruth," her daughter-in-law. No, "Ruth the Moabitess." Then after it's all settled, he says, "Moreover," in verse 10, "I have acquired Ruth," not just Ruth, "Ruth the Moabitess." The most unlikely hero.

Then you add to that, not just her nationality but her past. I mean, she basically intermarried with the people of God, something that was forbidden. They weren't supposed to marry outside of their nation and so when Mahlon married her, he violated the word of God. So her past is that illicit union, intermarriage. Her present circumstances continue to say, "How can she possibly be a hero?" She's a widow, a daughter-in-law of a widow. She has no man, no future. A most unlikely candidate to make an impact for the kingdom of God and to make an astonishing impact for the kingdom of God. The passage Jess read earlier from 1 Corinthians 1, "Consider your calling, brethren. Not many of you were wise. Not many of you were mighty. Not many of you were of noble birth. For God has chosen the foolish, God has chosen the weak, God has chosen the things that are not so that he might confound the things that are."

So an unlikely candidate. This means that no matter how unlikely you see yourself, we see ourselves, it doesn't matter, God is the one who is the determiner. You say, "Well, look at the mess I made of my life. How can God use me?" He can do anything. He can use someone like Ruth, he can use you. He can rebuild. He's a God who gives beauty for ashes. He's a God who delights to restore the years the locust have eaten. You say, "Look at the mess I made. Is there any hope that this can be restored, redeemed?" With God, there always is.

One of the beautiful illustrations in Scripture of this is do you remember after the terrible idolatry of the people of God recounted for us in the book of Kings when God then sends them into exile? They become so much like the nations, the ungodly nations around them that the Lord casts them, ejects them out of the land. The land, in a sense, we are told in the prophets, vomits them out. They are separated from their inheritance and for 70 years they are in exile in Babylon. Then they come back, remember, and they begin to rebuild the temple. Then they stop rebuilding the temple and then they start again under the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah. And remember when they laid the foundation of the temple and a great shout goes up? It's a shout we read that is mingled, the young people are shouting with joy because the foundation of the temple has been laid, and the old people that remember the former temple are shouting in agony, they are wailing because the glory of this temple is going to be so much less than the one before. They can just see by the footprint of this temple, it's so much smaller, it's so much less. "We have lost the former glory. It will never be there again!" And that heartbreak and so you can't tell who is shouting for joy and who is shouting in agony, it all goes up. But the prophet goes and he speaks to those older people and he says, "Listen, the glory of this lesser temple will be greater than the former." And it was because it was that lesser temple that God Incarnate walked into, he didn't walk into it, he was carried into it the first time by a young woman and her husband. God will restore and rebuild and he loves to do it in the most unlikely lives and in the most unlikely circumstances.

So an unlikely candidate. The astonishing impact of an unlikely hero. First of all, an unlikely candidate. Second: unrealistic hopes. I touched on this but I want to just unpack it a little more. Those three blessings we were talking about a minute ago that they are pronouncing on her that: you'll be like Rachel and Leah who built the house of Israel. I mean, Rachel and Leah, God says built the house of Israel. That's astonishing in itself,

especially when you go back and you read the story of Rachel and Leah. It's really an interesting story. Remember, Jacob is going to marry Rachel. He loves Rachel and Laban, his father-in-law who God in his sovereignty allows Jacob to run into a guy that's even shrewder and trickier and more of a guiler than Jacob himself. "Yeah, work for me for seven years and then you can have my daughter, Rachel." So he works for seven years and on his wedding night Laban pulls a fast one and he gives Jacob Leah, Rachel's older sister. In the morning, Jacob wakes up beside Leah and he runs to his father-in-law and says, "What have you done?" Laban is like, "Hey, no big deal. It's just our custom to give the older daughter first. You just have your honeymoon week with her, as soon as the honeymoon is over, you can have Rachel too. Two for the price of one." Jacob has been had.

So he waits that week and then he gets Rachel and then they are married and we read that this incredible situation happens and in the providence of God he is married to two women which is not God's ultimate design for marriage, not at all. And the two women have two maids and what you read in Genesis 29 and 30 is basically it's a competitive environment. They are competing for the love of Jacob. So you started with deception, now you have competition and envy and jealousy where God blesses Leah, opens her womb it says and gives her four children, four boys, 1, 2, 3, 4: Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah. Then she stops bearing children. Rachel can't stand it. She is upset. She goes to Jacob and says, "Give me children or I die!" He says, "Who am I in the place of God?" Because her womb is closed. So she takes her handmaid, Bilhah, and gives her to Jacob and says, "If she delivers a child on my knees, the child is mine." Doesn't that sound a lot like something very familiar in the Old Testament that didn't work out so well? Just two children. Then Leah, not to be outdone, says, "I'm going to give my maid to Jacob," and the same thing. So he has two more children with this other maid. So now he has four original, now four more. Then Leah and Rachel, they've got eight boys running around, two of them belong to Rachel because of the handmaid.

One day Leah's oldest son, Reuben, comes home with mandrakes and Rachel says, "I'd like some of those mandrakes." And Leah says, "Well, you can have some if you make Jacob come and sleep with me tonight." Now, the reason Rachel wanted mandrakes is because they were believed to be kind of a superstitious belief in fertility. If you had mandrakes and you ate those, you could be fertile. So she's choosing superstition. So you've got deception, envy, jealousy, superstition and what happens, though, is Rachel eats the mandrakes, Leah conceives again. The one who gave away the superstition gets two more boys and a daughter, Dinah, as well. So you see the circumstance and then finally God grants Rachel the blessing of having a son. He opens her womb and she has Joseph, then she has Benjamin and she dies. So there are 12 sons.

You see, this is kind of an interesting situation but what God says the overall verdict is, these two women in spite of their sin, many of their actions can be called into question, absolutely, they are wrong; in spite of this, what they meant for evil, God meant for good and these two women built the house of Israel and all of the millions of people that belong to Israel at the time of Ruth now, millions of Israelites came from what Rachel and Leah did. So this blessing is may this woman, this Moabitess who, by the way, is

barren. She was married for maybe 10 years without a child. May she be like Rachel and Leah. That's just too much. I mean, not only that, I mean, Boaz is an older man. It's clear he's enough older than her that he's calling her daughter and so that doesn't make sense. That's just too much to expect.

Or the second blessing: may your house be like the house of Perez. And I shared with you how that happened, how Tamar forces Judah's hand to do what he should have done, in some sense, by giving his son to her. She forces his hand and God works even through that sin to continue his plan. God is faithful. Though we are faithless, he is faithful. He cannot deny himself.

And then the idea of being better than seven sons. These just seem to be unrealistic hopes. A Moabitess, after all, who was barren, married to an older man, surely not.

So we've considered an unlikely candidate and, secondly, we looked at an unrealistic hope, thirdly, the third point: unimpressive actions. Ruth takes some steps which really looking from a worldly viewpoint, now looking from heaven, they are impressive but looking from a worldly viewpoint, they don't seem to be going to have a lot of impact, make a big impression on history. So they seem basically unimpressive. There are basically three things that she does in the book that if you just look at them or you take them up and you look at them independently, if you look at them spiritually they are wonderful and yet still they are not going to make that big a difference in history. They are not earth shattering. For her they are but not for the wider people of God surely. And these three reactions, three sub points under number 3, basically the first thing she does is she returns to the land. She comes back with her mother-in-law to the land of Israel and the word "return" is such a key word in chapter 1. Now, think what God is doing in this whole picture, he's giving us a picture of repentance and you can essentially say these are her three great works: she repented, she believed and she obeyed the simple word of God. She repented. She believed. And she obeyed. That's all she did and yet that shaped the course of history.

She made a decision to come back with her mother-in-law. Remember chapter 1, the drama unfolds, Naomi now bereaved of her husband and her two sons walks with her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, toward Bethlehem, toward the land of Israel from Moab, and along the way at some point she says, "Go back, my daughters. Return to the land." The word "return" occurs 12 times in chapter 1. But Ruth decides to return with her mother-in-law. She doesn't return to her former land, she turns around and goes with her mother-in-law. And the word "return" is important because that word, it's actually a very common word in the Old Testament, it occurs almost 1,300 times, sometimes translated "turn," sometimes translated "return," sometimes translated "repent." It's the Hebrew word "shub" and it means "to turn, to return, to repent." It means to be going in one direction and repentance is that, you're going in one direction and you turn around and you go the opposite direction. It's not just a change of mind. The focus of the New Testament word "metanoia" is "a change of mind" and it is that but when you put the words together throughout the Scriptures, it's a change of mind, that leads to a change of heart, that leads to a change of direction, and a change of life. And it seems clear that the

author of Ruth is emphasizing the word "return" and "repent" and "return" over and over and over again in the providence of God to illustrate for us repentance. And what happened is, remember they left the land. This was a horrible thing for them to do. You know, they were under famine. They shouldn't have left the land. They left the house of bread, beth lechem, they go to Moab but now they're coming back and Ruth came back. In fact, she's characterized with that basic statement in chapter 2, verse 6, where it says the servant says to Boaz, "She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab." She returned. She left the land of her father and her mother, she left the land of her youth, she left the land of her ungodliness and she went to the land of God's people.

That's the first thing that has to happen. If you want to see God work in your life, you have to repent. You have to turn and go a different direction. You must ask God for the help to do this because God, by his Spirit, grants repentance and through his word. But you must repent. This is why the Gospel proclamation throughout the book of Acts is, "Repent. Repent." This is what Jesus came preaching, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Repent. Stop going the way you are. Turn from your sin. Turn away from your sin. Turn to God. This is what Ruth did.

It's what's pictured beautifully in her statement to Naomi in chapter 1, verse 16 and 17, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back that way from following you; for where you go, I will go, where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me." She latches onto her mother-in-law and in so doing she is latching onto her mother-in-law's God. God has worked in her heart and granted her repentance. That's the first thing she does, she repents.

The second thing she does is she begins to exercise faith, illustrating obedience. In chapter 2, verse 2, when she says, "let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor," she is basically just obeying a simple little promise. God says, they first of all had no food, they had no future, they had no hope. Here we are and Naomi is not doing anything about it. But she apparently has heard what the word of God says in Leviticus 25, that you as a poor person can go and glean and pick up behind those who are gleaning and you can find a sustenance to keep you alive. And what she does is take the small step, it's seemingly inconsequential. I mean, it's just basically hoping to keep enough food to live hand to mouth. It's a small step but it's what God says. Isn't it often that we find ourselves in a mess, we find ourselves in difficulty, and what we see though is God says, "This is the thing to do." It seems so small. It seems like it's not going to make any difference. It's what God says to do. Do it. Obey. The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step and God is the kind of God that he blesses obedience. To obey is better than to sacrifice, he says. So she takes that step. She trusts God's word. She trusts provision. She doesn't sit and complain, "Why can't it be better? Why can't you have a better welfare system set up, Lord?" And pray for a new welfare. No, God's word is there and she obeys it. She believes it and she obeys it.

And then the last thing that she does is she listens to her mother-in-law and she seeks a Levirite marriage with Boaz. Chapter 3, she goes to the threshing floor and she surrenders herself to Boaz and says, "You are my kinsman redeemer. Please cover me with your covering." She proposes marriage to him and we talked about that. It's a little bit questionable. In fact, it's interesting that the people when they make that blessing and they bring up Tamar, you know, they first of all say be like Leah and Rachel and may your house be like the house of Perez, and they happen to mention again whom Tamar bore to Judah. It's one of those things that , "Hey, let's clean it up a little bit. Let's just forget that part. Let your house be like the house of Perez." Why did they have to say "to whom Tamar bore to Judah"? Because God wanted them to say it. He wanted us to hear them say it. They said more than they knew even. Throughout that whole blessing they did but particularly in that because they had no idea about what had happened at the threshing floor last night when a younger woman approached an older man, in this case with something bordering on an illicit nature. It wasn't as overtly sinful as what Tamar did but God even blessed her heart because she was trying to help Judah do the right thing. That doesn't give us license to be, we need to do what God's word says. They didn't have as much clarity in the word as we do. But the point is that when they said, "May your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah," they had no idea that she had done something just like Tamar had done almost.

Now, Boaz was more righteous than Judah and he did it the right way but the point is for her to do that and when he sees her come, he doesn't chastise her because she's really not doing something bad. He looks at her heart and what she is doing is she is fully identifying with the people of God. She is saying, "I'm an Israelite and I will live by the laws of Israel and the law of Israel is that I have a responsibility to raise up for my dead husband a descendant to dwell in the land, to bless my mother-in-law, and I'm not going to run after other men who might be more attractive and might be able to give me a living, I'm going to do what God says and raise up his name on his inheritance." She was acting in faith. It was a great act of faith and that's why Boaz when he sees her, when he sees her first he doesn't know who she is because it's dark, "Who are you?" "I am Ruth your maid, so spread your covering over your maid for you are a close relative," chapter 3, verse 9. "Then he said, 'May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter. You have shown your last chesed, your last kindness, your last chesed to be better than the first. This is an amazing act of love, God's love, flowing through you, for Naomi and even for me.'"

But think about it though: she repents, she returns to the land, she goes out in the field and gleans and she gives herself to be married to this older man. If you really think about that, that's still pretty unimpressive but that's really what the Gospel is. I mean, if you really get down to it, you know what happened to Rosaria Butterfield, when somebody looked at a person that was a most unlikely convert and they shared Jesus with her, a person who was steeped in a way of thinking and thought that was so foreign from the things of God. You know, you talk to someone sometimes and you feel like, "I can't get there from here. You are so far out there." They're not too far, just tell them about Jesus. Love them and share Christ. Somebody did that to her. This man and his wife met with

her and shared the word with her and she read the Bible and in just the act of reading the Bible, God granted her repentance and faith and obedience and she is a changed woman.

It's that simple. It is the divine hand of God working a miracle that is more amazing than when he said, "Let there be light," and there was light at creation. Yes. Salvation is the greatest miracle in the world because God takes those who are dead and opposed to him, he speaks into their heart and he says in 2 Corinthians 4:6, he looks into their heart and he says, "'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." That's what happens when someone is saved and it is repenting, it's saying to her, "You need to turn from your sin." That's what this couple said. "You need to turn from your sin and place your faith in Christ and obey him." "Really, that can change everything?" Yes. These little ways because repentance and faith are just little ways that you lay hold, you put your hand, you're not doing any work that earns you anything, you're putting, as Luther said, you're putting your empty outstretched hand out to God and you're saying, "Bless me." And God loves to bless the broken-hearted and humble.

So we see an unlikely candidate with unrealistic hopes, unimpressive actions, fourthly, the last point: an unimaginable impact. She never knew in her life what was going to happen. She might have seen her great grandsons. She might have seen David's older brothers. She might have lived long enough to see David, we don't know, but she had no idea what was going to happen with that little ruddy boy, and she could never imagine that her son, Obed, giving birth to a son, Jesse, giving birth to a son, David, would one day be the forefather of the true kinsman Redeemer. That Jesus Christ would come through from her body. Amazing because Mary, the physical descendant of Jesus, the one who bore him, she comes from the line of David and Jesse and Obed and Ruth. How amazing, how good of God. Truly she was, she did build Israel in every bit the way that Rachel and Leah did. They gave 12 sons but all that that was, what are the 12 sons without the one foundation stone, the Lord Jesus Christ? She was even greater. Greater than Tamar. Greater than seven sons, seven sons, the perfect number of sons, seven. Yes.

So what this tells us is that no matter how dark the circumstances we find ourselves in, if you know Jesus Christ and you're willing to repent and believe his word and obey, there is no limit to what he will do. And you look at someone in your life, maybe as a parent you're looking at your children and you're seeing issues and you want to see something change, well, what do you do? Well, you just put the word of God before them. Something as unimpressive as that. We know better but we act like it's unimpressive. And we encourage them to repent and believe and obey and there is no limit to what God can do. Unbelievers around us, the most unlikely people that you can think of in your life that would ever believe, those are just the kind of people God loves to save. I mean, it's just amazing.

You see this over and over again. In the lineage of Jesus in Matthew 1, I mean, think of it, there are four women that appear in the line of Christ. All the men are there but there are four women. They are Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. Four women from various

difficult circumstances that in some way had a grain of faith and trusted God and became heroes.

Our God is an amazing God and so no one is beyond the reach of his grace, no one is beyond the reach of his power. This should give us hope to share with the most unlikely people and this should give us hope because no matter how dark the area in your own life, the area that you've struggled with and that you continue to struggle with, what do you do? Just keep on doing unimpressive things like believing and repenting and obeying. Believe, repent and obey. Just keep doing those little things looking to Jesus, turning from sin, speaking his word. Just keep doing those things and see what God will do because God loves to take...and you say, "Well, look at me. I can't believe this area of my life." God loves to take the weak and make them strong. God loves to take the foolish and make them wise. So your very weakness and your inadequacy, the grip that you feel that sin has in your life, is basically an opportunity for you to give glory and to boast and to boast only in the Lord. May God help us be people who have unimaginable impact because we serve an amazing Savior.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank you for the glory of your plan of salvation. We thank you for how from Genesis to Revelation it all holds together with such elegance and beauty and how it surpasses our ability to imagine how you would do things. Lord, we thank you that you are a God who has compassion on the broken and the lowly and the humble. We thank you that for those that are here today that are broken, that feel a sense of despair almost, that you are the God who will meet them at the point of their need; that Jesus Christ will take their ashes and give them beauty; that Jesus Christ will give more glory to their latter life than ever their former could have ever had. Father, for those of us who belong to you, we just know there are areas of our lives that so many areas that aren't as they ought to be, still so much sin, so many struggles, Lord, help us. Grant us greater repentance. Help us not to despise the small things but to realize that you are a God who delights to work through the small acts, small steps, to do great things. Help us encourage one another not to lose heart and to keep persevering and following a glorious Savior. We pray this all in his name. Amen.