

# God's Message to Us in Ruth 1-4

Halifax, NS

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## Introduction

Today, in our sermon series in which I am preaching a sermon on every book of the Bible, we come to the little book of Ruth.

- The best chronologies conclude that the events in this beautiful account probably took place from 1282 to 1271 BC—about 135 years into the time of the Judges.

Last week, my sermon was on the book of Judges.

- Over this 323 year period (1418-1095 BC), we saw the ugly cycle that Israel fell into of rebellion, leading to misery under God's chastening hand, leading to repentance and deliverance by a judge that God raised up.
  - It is a vivid picture of how Christ has to continually rescue His people today, and of how ready (and able) He is to restore them when they return to Him.
- While it is encouraging to see His mercy, it can be disheartening to see such widespread apostasy among God's own people.
  - But in the book of Ruth, we get to see a window into the life of a godly man named Boaz who serves as a reminder that God always has faithful people, even in the darkest times of history.
  - It is a beautifully written beautiful story of beautiful family that was in Christ.

I want to begin this afternoon, by telling you the story.

- Then we will look at the lessons that are here for us.

## The Story of Ruth

It begins with a typical family (Elimelech and Naomi, and their two sons) in the time of Judges that like so many had drifted away from the LORD.

- God has chastened His people with famine to bring them repentance...
- But instead of repenting, Elimelech takes his family to Moab for ease (Ruth 1:1-5)!
  - **Ruth 1:1-5: "Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. <sup>2</sup> The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there. <sup>3</sup> Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons. <sup>4</sup> Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years. <sup>5</sup> Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband."**
  - Their sons even marry Moabite women—a thing strictly forbidden!
  - God chastens them severely—
    - Elimelech and both sons die, leaving Naomi and her two daughters-in-law.
    - One is called Ruth, the other Orpah.
- Naomi decides to return to Israel, not because she repents, but because she hears that there is bread there again.
  - She strongly advises her daughters-in-law to return to their people, for they have no future with her and little chance of obtaining husbands.

- The custom was that a near relative of the family (called a kinsman redeemer) would take Ruth in a levirate marriage to raise up sons to her and her dead husband and to provide for them, but Naomi had no other sons and her own husband was dead.
- Orpah takes Naomi's advice and returns to her people, but Ruth absolutely refuses...
  - Look at what Ruth says in 1:16-17:
    - **Ruth 1:16-17: But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. <sup>17</sup> Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."**
  - She has hope in God.
    - She wants her future with God and His people, not with Moab.
- So Naomi brings Ruth to Israel, and Ruth goes out to glean in the fields.
  - Gleaning was a way of providing for the poor. God instructed land owners not to harvest their grain so as to leave nothing behind... so that the poor could come and gather what was left (the gleanings).
  - Ruth just *happened*, (in God's marvellous providence) to come to the field of Boaz, a man who is living for God in a beautiful way.
    - He shows great kindness to her, and ends up serving as her kinsman redeemer.
    - He marries her and then they bring forth a son who turns out to be the grandfather of King David...
      - And of course it was through David that Jesus Christ came!

## So what are the lessons for us to learn from the book of Ruth?

### I. First, that bitterness, not blessing, comes when we turn to the world.

#### A. Naomi says it all when she returns to Israel (Ruth 1:19-21).

- **Ruth 1:19-21: Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them; and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" <sup>20</sup> But she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. <sup>21</sup> I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"**
- 1. She went out full (thinking she was empty)—she came back empty.
  - She had so much in the Lord—even in the Lord chastening her.
  - But she could not see that—her husband could not see that.
- 2. She went out Naomi (pleasantness)—she came back Mara (bitterness).
  - When she returns, she still does not see the riches she has in the Lord.
  - She has no hope. She is feeling the misery of her sin.

#### B. God chastens us when we try to find life from the world instead of from Him.

1. Elimelech took his family to Moab—a lush land of vineyards.
  - He wanted to find an easy life there—Moab was a place of ease... lots of vineyards.
  - What do you turn to for comfort when God chastens you?
    - It is a call to turn to Him... to find all in Him.
    - But too often we turn to the world for comfort—an easy life, acceptance of friends, pleasures of sin...indulgence in lust, in food, drink, porn...whatever...
    - We make idols of such things—we go to Moab for happiness and peace.

- But what did it bring to Elimelech?
  - 2. It brought *death* to him and to his sons as it will to you.
    - If we try to save our life by turning from Christ to the world, we will lose our life.
    - It is much better to have Christ in famine than the pleasures of the world for a season only to perish.
  - 3. Idolatry promises pleasantness, but it leads to bitterness and death.
- C. But God showed grace to Naomi!
- 1. He broke her—then blessed her and restored her.
    - Through the whole process, she comes crawling back to the Lord, still not really repentant, but hearing of bread, at least she comes back.
    - But then the faith of her daughter-in-law begins to bear fruit and Naomi is the beneficiary of this dear Moabite girl's faith.
      - She comes to praise the Lord, and find that life is found with the Lord and not in the world.
      - God is very gracious to restore those who go astray.
  - 2. But don't be presumptuous—
    - Don't walk away assuming that you will be restored.
    - Naomi was, but her husband and her sons died in Moab.
    - If you depart from Christ, you have no promise of ever coming back.
      - It may betray in you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.
  - 3. How you should thank Him if you have been restored!
    - If He has brought you back—when He might have left you and hardened you in your unbelief.
    - And if you are away from Him now—then come back at once!

TRANS> The first lesson is that bitterness, not blessing comes from turning to the world.

- What is the second lesson?

## **II. Second, that Christ continues to have a people even in times of apostasy.**

- A. We have seen the deplorable condition of the people in the time of the Judges.
- 1. Elimelech's family represents Israel at this time.
    - It is a people forgetting God.
    - It is a people marrying pagan women when God said not to.
    - It is a people turning to idols.
  - 2. Idolatry makes for an ugly society
    - In Judges, we saw Micah—stealing from his mother, using the money to make an idol, taking a Levite to be priest, as if that were a charm, and having other Israelites from Dan come and steal his idol and take his Levite.
      - What an ugly society to live in!
    - And then the Levite and his concubine.
      - She leaves him and he goes to find her at her daddy's house...
      - Then returns home and stops over in the territory of Benjamin only to be sexually pursued by vile men—
        - Then he gives his concubine to them and they rape her until she dies.

3. You can see this ugliness in our society today.
  - There is so much selfishness, so many broken homes, so much strife.
  - Abortion is horrible thing—but so is the very fact that a mother would conceive a child and not want it—such selfishness is ugly.
  - There is strife and rioting—so little beautiful living.
    - We have nothing to worship higher than ourselves.
    - We have no morality higher than our own shifting sentiments.
    - We have no hope.

B. But with Boaz we see that God has His people even in the darkest times.

1. Westminster Confession 25:5 reminds us that He does:
  - WCF 25:5: The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated, as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a Church on earth, to worship God according to His will.
2. What beautiful living we see with this man Boaz!
  - Ruth 2:3-16: Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field *belonging* to Boaz, who *was* of the family of Elimelech. <sup>4</sup> Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, “The LORD *be* with you!” And they answered him, “The LORD bless you!” <sup>5</sup> Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, “Whose young woman *is* this?” <sup>6</sup> So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, “It *is* the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. <sup>7</sup> And she said, ‘Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.’ So she came and has continued from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house.” <sup>8</sup> Then Boaz said to Ruth, “You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women. <sup>9</sup> *Let* your eyes *be* on the field which they reap, and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.” <sup>10</sup> So she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I *am* a foreigner?” <sup>11</sup> And Boaz answered and said to her, “It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and *how* you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before. <sup>12</sup> The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.” <sup>13</sup> Then she said, “Let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you have comforted me, and have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants.” <sup>14</sup> Now Boaz said to her at mealtime, “Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.” So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed parched *grain* to her; and she ate and was satisfied, and kept some back. <sup>15</sup> And when she rose up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. <sup>16</sup> Also let *grain* from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave *it* that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.”
3. Oh that we might have beautiful gospel culture like this!
  - He is a man who finds delight in pleasing the Lord.
    - He finds delight in helping others to find God’s blessing.

- What a beautiful world it would be if only we would live for the Lord.
    - If only we would learn to put Him first.
- C. Boaz is a picture of Christ and His redemption.
1. Christ delivers His people and fills the empty with blessing.
    - We come empty and He fills us—we find life in Him, we find all in Him.
    - That is what Boaz does for both Ruth and Naomi.
      - He gives them life.
  2. He protects them and makes them fruitful.
    - Now Ruth could bring forth a son... and what a son...
      - A son from which the Son of God would come, the Saviour of the world.
      - We are able to bring forth children who, in Christ, live forever, blessing God and serving Him.
  3. We could say with Christ that in a way He brings forth Himself in them.
    - We bring forth children in His gracious covenant in Him He lives and to whom He gives eternal life that they might be members of His body.

TRANS> So you see that even in the ugliest times of apostasy, the LORD still has people who are in Christ, living for His glory.

- They are always there, and if you should want to be among them, there is always grace for any who will come to Him—just as Ruth came to Boaz.
- And that brings us to a third lesson here...

### **III. Third, Gentiles are saved, even in the times when God's people rebel.**

A. Naomi was incapable of leading her daughters-in-law to Christ.

1. She was not rejoicing in the LORD...
  - She had run from him with her husband and now she was cold and bitter.
  - She had not hope and she spread the poison of her bitterness to her daughters-in-law.
2. Orpah went back to her people at Naomi's advice.
  - Naomi told her there nothing for her in Israel and she believed it.
    - What a sad thing it is when professing Christians talk like that!
    - When we tell people that they have a good life in the world and would find nothing much in the gospel.
      - We must not do that—idols are lies—serving idols will never be good.
      - So Orpah believed the lie—she did not love the gospel.
3. But the Holy Spirit had gotten hold of Ruth.
  - She has hope in God alone.
    - That is the reason she refused to leave.
    - She knew that emptiness of idols, but even from the disobedience family of Elimelech, she saw the truth about the LORD.
  - When the Holy Spirit gets hold of you, you can't say no.
    - You see that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.
    - You want to come to the Father through Him.
      - Nothing else can satisfy you again.

B. God calls Gentiles to impact His people in times of apostasy (Rom 11)

- In Romans 11:11, Paul speaks of Israel and he says:
  - **Rom 11:11: I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.**
  - When we and our children are too blind to see what we have in Christ, God brings new people to Himself to show us how good it is.
- 1. Their love, faith, and joy in the gospel make the lapsed jealous.
  - We resent that they should come and have such joy in the things that we have rejected.
    - It loads us with a mixture of feelings—jealousy being among them.
    - How can they be so happy and so full in these things? They are my things!
- 2. But their love, faith, and joy greatly encourage the faithful.
  - Those like Boaz who love the Lord, see their joy in the gospel and it warms their hearts—they yearn for people to see the glory of the gospel.
    - If their own people won't, at least there are some who do.
- C. And of course it is a tremendous blessing to the Gentile himself (or herself) who is saved.
  1. Moabites were not God's people, but Ruth showed herself to be a true Israelite.
    - Like Jacob when his name was changed to Israel,
      - Ruth would not let go of the Lord until He blessed her.
      - And that He surely did—and gladly did!
    - She had faith in Him and He blessed her.
  2. No matter what your background, turn to God and He will receive you!
    - No one has ever come to Him and been cast out.
  3. And if you are one who was born in the covenant, let the zeal of those who did not grow up in Christ but now come and are so full of joy wake you up.
    - The blessing of God is rich and good.
      - Return wholeheartedly to Him and your joy will be made full.