

# Ruth: Experiencing God's Hand In Your Life

## "Part 5: God's Hand in our Setbacks"

Ruth 4:1-12

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on June 26, 2016

### INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Please open your Bibles to Ruth 4.
- After so many setbacks I was not sure we would ever get to Disneyland. We were driving from Central Oregon to Portland to catch our flight. But I had hit a curb with my tent trailer and the rear wheel, bent the axle, and the trailer tire was riding on its inside edge.
  - We stopped at a mechanic. He said he could fix it but 45 minutes later said he couldn't. We limped our way along the highway to the next mechanic. The same thing happened about 5 more times.
    - Meanwhile the tire was riding on its edge and we were losing rubber fast. It was a stressful day. We faced setback after setback. Finally we arrived in Portland. But let me tell you, every setback was worth it when we finally walked through the gates of the happiest place on earth.
- The book of Ruth teaches us that although the road of life is filled with setbacks, the Christian will ultimately arrive in the happiest place of all. The Bible is honest about suffering. Life is not a leisurely drive. It is a hard drive. It is a long drive. At times you can feel the rubber wearing off your life. Some setbacks like sickness, depression, financial trouble, marriage problems, or losing a loved, are so big that you are not sure you can keep going.
  - But the book of Ruth is a big road sign that says, "**Keep going this way. Disneyland is ahead.**" The book of Ruth fills you with hope in the midst of setbacks because it teaches us that God's invisible hand has mapped out your road and he is not leading you off a cliff. He is leading you to glory.
    - So in order that you might be filled with hope and encouragement amidst the setbacks of your road let's do two things today. Let's unfold the story and then unpack the lesson of the story.

### UNFOLDING THE STORY

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Let's begin then by unfolding the story. This entire story is filled with setbacks. Setback #1 involves a famine. Naomi and her husband Elimelech move to the neighbouring country of Moab to escape a famine. Setback #2: Elimelech dies in Moab. Setback #3: Naomi's two sons get married but for ten years they cannot have any children. Setback #4: Her two sons die. Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth are widows. They are starving and the family line is on the brink of annihilation because there is no heir.
  - In chapter 2 things start looking up. The invisible hand of God miraculously leads Ruth to glean in the field of Boaz – a relative who could marry Ruth and save the family line.
- Will it be smooth driving from now on? The end of chapter 2 reveals setback #5. When the harvest ends we find that Ruth and Boaz have not progressed in their relationship. "**Things started so well but now he never calls.**" Naomi and Ruth's very lives hang by a thread.
  - In chapter 3 Naomi comes up with a risky plan. Ruth goes to Boaz at midnight and they have the DTR talk – the 'define the relationship' talk. Ruth professes to love Boaz and to our joy Boaz professes to love Ruth.
    - The marriage is certain. The two widows will be saved. But then they hit a curb. Setback #6: Boaz reveals that there is a kinsman redeemer who is closer to Ruth than he is. As a man of integrity, Boaz will not marry Ruth unless this man is given an opportunity first. So as we enter chapter 4 everything hangs in the balance.

## THE MEETING IS CONVENED

- Chapter 4 begins with a meeting being convened in verses 1-2.
  - **READ 1a** - *Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there.* The town gate is the ancient version of our city hall and courts. It is the place where legal transactions took place. The drama begins immediately.
- **READ 1b** - *And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by.* The English cannot capture this but it has the sense of surprise. *“And behold, as luck would have it, just then the man showed up.”* It is the same type of expression as when Ruth just happened to happen upon the field of Boaz.
  - Here again we see the providence of God. The providence of God refers to the fact that all things, whether good or bad, comes to us not by chance, fate, karma, or luck but from the fatherly hand of God. What comfort there is for you in the providence of God. When you are facing great setbacks you must never despair because God’s invisible hand is working a thousand things that you cannot see or imagine.
- **READ 1c** - *So Boaz said, “Turn aside, friend; sit down here.” And he turned aside and sat down.* Now notice that the narrator hides the man’s name from us. Up to this point the narrator has shown great concern for names. Even Orpah is named along with her dead husband Chilion (which is a very cool Star Trek name). But this man’s name is hidden. He is literally ‘Mr. So and So’ or ‘Mr. what’s his face?’ Why would the narrator do this?
  - Here is the reason: by refusing to name the man and calling him ‘Mr. So and So’ we are told that he is not worth knowing. We will see why in a minute.

## THE NEGOTIATIONS BEGIN

- **READ 2** - *And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, “Sit down here.” So they sat down.* The meeting has been convened. Everything is in place. Now the negotiations begin in verses 3-10.
  - **READ 3-4** - *Then he said to the redeemer, “Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. So I thought I would tell you of it and say, ‘Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people.’ If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you.” And he said, “I will redeem it.”*
- Land in Israel was very important. God gave the land to the people and had it divided so each family had a piece. The family farm could never be totally sold. If it was sold it had to be returned to the family in the 50<sup>th</sup> year - the year of Jubilee. Now we are not really sure on the background with Naomi and Elimelech’s family farm.
  - On the one hand Naomi may own the land but is so destitute she is selling it. In that case, you remember that it was the duty of the closest relative to redeem it - to buy it back - so that it would not move outside the family.
  - On the other hand she may have already sold it when they moved to Moab. If so she still retains the right of redemption but is dependent on a relative to redeem it for her.
    - Whatever the case the land needs to be redeemed and Boaz says to Mr. So and So, *“as the closest relative you have the first right to redeem.”*
- Mr. So and So must have thought he won the lottery. *“If I just take care of this old woman for a little while she will soon die. Since she has no heir the field will quietly be absorbed into my estate.”* There is no risk in this investment.
  - Mr. So and So answers immediately, *“I will redeem it.”* I am sure Boaz let it sink in for a minute and then he played his trump card in verse 5.
- **READ 5** - *Then Boaz said, “The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance.”*

- Boaz is saying, ***“There is one other small matter. Since this Moabite woman named Ruth married into the family you will need to take her as your wife and make babies with her so that her kids can grow up, own the field, and live there.***
  - That changes everything. Now Mr. So and So has to pay for the field, care for two women, change diapers, drive the kids to soccer practice, and pay for their university tuition. To top it all off, when Naomi dies the field will be returned to the Elimelech’s family through these kids. It will cost Mr. So and So a great amount of personal time and wealth. This action will require hesed – loyal love, sacrificial kindness, gracious generosity. There is great cost with little return.
- At this moment the whole story hangs by a thread. What if the man has character like Boaz and will do this for Ruth? The wedding of Ruth and Boaz will be off. We don’t have to wait long for the answer.
- **READ 6** - ***Then the redeemer said, “I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it.”***
  - To our relief Mr. So and So suddenly backpedals from his earlier declaration. Mr. So and So is more concerned about his finances and preserving his family name than he is with saving two destitute widows and their family from annihilation. This is another of the great ironies in this story. The man who sought to preserve his name lost it, but Boaz, the man who was prepared to lose so much to save Ruth and Naomi, is remembered forever.
    - This is the great lesson that Jesus taught us. ***“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.”***
- The shrewd plan has worked and now they sign the contract. **READ 7-8** - ***Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. So when the redeemer said to Boaz, “Buy it for yourself,” he drew off his sandal. Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day.”***
  - Boaz is shown to be the man of hesed. He will buy the land at cost to himself. He will care for Naomi. He will marry Ruth. He will honour the dead man by continuing his line.

## THE BLESSINGS ARE GIVEN

- The meeting was convened in verses 1-2, the negotiations took place in verses 3-10 and now the blessings are given in verses 11-12. **READ 11a** - ***Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, “We are witnesses.”***
  - This is the legal part of the wedding. Boaz is making a covenant before this legal council to marry Ruth. There is something very important for us here. Over the years I have met numerous Christians who move in together. When confronted they say they are fine with sleeping together because they are married in the eyes of God and have made a private commitment to each other. The Bible will have nothing of this.
    - A marriage is a covenant. Covenants in the Bible always require public witnesses. The man publically leaves his father and mother. Together they enter into a public ceremony of celebration. The vows are made publically so that the community can support, encourage, and help you uphold those vows when you don’t feel like it anymore.
- Now watch the blessing that happens. **READ 11-12** - ***May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman.”***

- This is a threefold prayer for Boaz and Ruth. Before we get into it there is another great application to draw out at this point. Have you noticed how much this book is filled with prayer?
  - Naomi prays as she travels. Naomi prays for marriage partners for Ruth and Orpah. Boaz and his workers offer prayers in their workplace. Boaz greets Ruth with a prayer. Naomi prays a prayer of thanksgiving when God provides. When Ruth declares her love Boaz doesn't sleep with her and pretend they are married in the eyes of God. He prays for her. And now all the people at the gate respond with prayer.
    - Oh let every aspect of your life from misery to joy, to the routine to the extraordinary, from daily work and relationships, to the very private moments, be saturated with prayer.
- Let's quickly look at this three-fold prayer of blessing.
  - First there is a prayer for Ruth as the future wife. **READ 11a - *May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel.*** Like Ruth, Rachel and Leah had also been barren but God opened up their wombs and their children contributed to making the nation of Israel. The council is asking that God may use Ruth to become the mother of a great people who are used by God.
    - As we will see next week this prayer was answered. God gave Ruth a son. Ruth became the grandmother of King David through whose line came Jesus, the Saviour of the world.
  - The second prayer of blessing is for Boaz as the husband. **READ 11b - *May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem.*** They are saying, "***Boaz, may you be the father of a dynasty.***" This was answered in that David's line was a dynasty.
  - The third prayer of blessing is for the family to be. **READ 12 - *and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman.*** Why the mention of this man Perez and Tamar? Tamar, like Ruth, was a foreign woman who was not a Jew. Through her Perez was born and Perez was the ancestor of the people in Bethlehem.
    - The meeting is over. All the setbacks are have been dealt with. I bet that Boaz went to Naomi and Ruth's house. When they opened the door he threw his arms around them and said, "***I have redeemed you.***"

## UNPACKING THE LESSON

- We have unfolded the story. **(SHOW SLIDE)** Let's wrap it up now by unpacking the lesson.
  - What is the lesson? **(SHOW SLIDE)** The book of Ruth teaches us that although the road of life is filled with setbacks, the Christian will ultimately arrive in glory.
    - I opened this series by saying that one of my greatest desires as your pastor is to prepare you for suffering, for learning how to deal with all the setbacks of living in a fallen world.
- The book of Ruth has taught us that the key is understanding the providence of God deep in our minds and souls. It is not just that God shows up after the trouble in your life and cleans it up. No, God is plotting out your road with all its setbacks so that they will accomplish all his good purposes in your life.
  - The hand of God was at work during the dark days of the judges and his invisible hand is at work during the darkest periods of your life. His work in your life may involve serious setbacks but they are all designed to get you to glory.
- All of this is not just academic theology. It is only way to sustain the soul in the setbacks of life. The greatest saints have always testified to this. I think of Joni Eareckson Tada. As a seventeen year old she struck her head in a diving accident. She became an instant quadriplegic. As a result she grew very depressed. She then met a friend name Steve Estes. Together they started studying the Bible and she learned about God's providence.
  - She writes, "***[Before my accident] I was heading down a path of self-destruction...I was checking out a birth control clinic to get some pills, because I knew I'd be sleeping with my boyfriend in college. Somewhere in that mess of emotions and regrets and falterings and***

*failings, while making a sham of my Christian faith, somewhere in that desperation I said, 'God, rescue me.' And he did. I believe my accident was a direct answer. Some people might want to say indirect, but I lean toward the old adage that God draws straight lines with crooked sticks."*

- As she and Steve studied she was told that many supposed Christians did not even believe that all things ultimately come from God. They would say, as most do today, that God would never do that. So she asked Steve, ***"How in the world can you say this accident was God's will?"***
  - He responded by saying, ***"Let me answer that question by asking you a question. Do you believe that when Jesus died on the cross, that was God's will?...Well, think about it for a minute, because Jesus was handed over for 30 pieces of silver, drunken soldiers pulled his beard out, then beat him mercilessly in that back room. The mob screamed, 'Crucify him.' How can that be God's will? Torture, injustice, murder, treason. How could any of that be God's will?"***
- Joni writes, ***"He had me. Because I knew that God the Father's plan was for his Son to go to the cross."*** This led her to understand the providence of God over all events, even the evil ones. She then writes,
  - ***"there are more important things than walking...maybe death is supposed to be hard. Maybe it's supposed to be a taste of hell...Oh, thank you, thank you for this wheelchair! By tasting hell in this life, I've been driven to think seriously about what faces me in the next. This paralysis is my greatest mercy."***<sup>1</sup>
- Do you see it then? Joni Eareckson gained a vision of God's absolute supremacy over all things including evil. This is what sustained Tada and what will sustain you in suffering. God is great *and* God is good. God's providence may taste bitter but its end goal is sweet. Although God ordains your road to be filled with setbacks, you will ultimately arrive in glory.

## THE GOSPEL IN THE BOOK OF RUTH

- Oh but let me strengthen you further because when you are living in Ruth chapter 1 and the providence of God tastes bitter the only thing you can cling to is that God is still for you, that despite what your circumstances may say He still loves you. How can you know that deep in your soul? You must go to the gospel – to the good news of what God has done for us in Jesus.
  - The book of Ruth reveals so much of the gospel to us that enables us to trust God in trials and suffering. **(SHOW SLIDE)**
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** First, just as Ruth needed a Redeemer, we need a Redeemer for our sin. To redeem means to be bought back. We need to be bought back to God.
  - We were cast out of God's presence and like Ruth were foreigners to God. We were enslaved to the sin and Satan. We cannot buy ourselves out of this terrible state. We need a redeemer to purchase us back to God.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Second, just as Boaz was able to redeem Ruth, Jesus was/is able to redeem us. Boaz could redeem Ruth because he was a kinsman. In order to redeem us Jesus became our kinsman. God took on human flesh.
  - He became our kinsman so that he could redeem us.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Third, just as Boaz was not obligated to redeem Ruth but did so out of love, Jesus was not obligated to redeem us but did so out of love.
  - We were not God's friends so that he owed us. ***"God demonstrates his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."***
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Fourth, just as Boaz paid a great price to redeem Ruth, Jesus paid a great price to redeem us.

<sup>1</sup> This section taken from John Piper, *A Sweet and Bitter Providence*, 117-119.

- I Peter 1 says, *“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb.”*
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Fifth, just as Ruth could only receive her redemption as a gift, so we can only receive Jesus’ redeeming work as a gift.
  - A Christian is not someone who just lives a moral life and goes to church. A Christian is someone who admits that they have nothing to purchase their redemption but accepts Jesus’ gift. Have you done this? Have you humbled yourself and said, *“Jesus I receive your free gift of forgiveness of sins.”*
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Sixth, just as Boaz took Ruth to be his wife and loved her, so Jesus takes his people to be His bride.
  - If a mere human man like Boaz could love an outcast, redeem her, and love her then how much can you trust that God will love you who is the bride of his Son.
    - This is hope in times of suffering. Although the road of life is filled with setbacks, the loving hand of God will ultimately guide you to glory.