

Ruth Week 4 Downtown

We've made it to the 4th and final scene of the story of Ruth... **Ruth 4.**

While you're turning there I want to remind you of how the story starts because it will affect how we understand some of the main ideas that are being communicated

Ruth 1:1 - "In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land.

So the story starts with the camera lens zoomed all the way out. The situation that God's people, the nation of Israel finds themselves in. It is the days when the judges ruled. And that's a loaded phrase.

The story of Israel during this time was summarized by the author of Judges as

"There was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in their own eyes"

Judges 21:25

God's people are shown as this leaderless, rudderless, selfish people suffering all sorts of breakdown as a result. So the nation of Israel is in a bit of chaos. There is no harmony, no unity, everyone is just looking out for themselves and on top of that, there is a famine. There is a food shortage.

So that's the setting... the time of the judges and famine... it's a dark time for God's people.

And from there, the story zooms in all the way down to focus on one particular family who is in the middle of all of this. I'm pointing this out because at the end, the story zooms all the way back out again and that beginning and ending are critical to gaining everything the author wants us to gain. So hold that thought because we will come back to it.

The family that the story zooms in on is the family of a man named Elimelech and his wife Naomi. They are Israelites in the time of the judges, in a famine. They have two sons, and they decide to leave the promised land and leave God's people and settle down in the neighboring nation of Moab. And these two groups were not particularly fond of each other. Their two sons marry Moabite women. And over time, Elimelech and both sons die. So Naomi is left with her two daughters in law. So she, Naomi, is very vulnerable. No husband, no sons, no place to go, all of which meant no provision and no future.

So one daughter in law decides to head back to her hometown. She is young enough for her parents to still be alive so she has somewhere to go, she could remarry, there is a potential future for her. The other daughter in law, Ruth, does the unthinkable. And instead of heading back home where she has the potential for a life and a future, she commits to staying with Naomi. She says I will go wherever you go and your God, the one true God, will be my God. It's a jarring display of self sacrifice and others oriented love.

Ruth and Naomi head back to Israel, and Ruth is ready to work hard to try to scrounge up a way to provide for her and Naomi so she heads to the grain fields. Thanks to a provision in God's laws, there is leftover grain that is intentionally left behind so that those who are poor but willing to work hard can come behind and collect grain to have something to eat.

So Ruth heads out to get to work and quote unquote 'just so happens' to walk onto a field that is owned by one of Naomi's relatives. A man named Boaz. Ruth and Boaz's interactions culminate in a meeting in the middle of the night where Ruth does something shocking in that time... roughly speaking, she proposes. She asks Boaz to be something they called a Kinsman Redeemer.

If you remember from last week a **Kinsman Redeemer was a male relative who had the privilege or responsibility to act for a family member who was in trouble, danger, or need.**

in this case, through something called "levirate marriage" where he would marry and father children for the long-term safety, security and provision of the family.

And Ruth comes to Boaz and asks, “Will you be this for us?” And for Ruth and Naomi, this is their only real shot for a life. This is a survival scenario, this is the only way their family, their lineage can continue. Ruth is shooting her shot.

And if you were here last week, you know Boaz said yes. It was the moment in the rom-com where everyone smiles and says “awww”.

That he would do it, but there was a slight hiccup... there was another relative who was closer, and that essentially meant had the first right - or dibs, so to speak, for redemption... but Boaz promises – whether it's him or me, we're gonna get this done, you're gonna get your redeemer...

That's where we pick up chapter 4...

1 Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, “Turn aside, friend; sit down here.” And he turned aside and sat down.

The Gate in the ancient Near East was the place where you went to conduct legal affairs and business transactions. It was also the easiest place to find someone in the city, because it was one way in and one way out.

So Boaz does exactly what he says he's going to do. He goes there, waits, the man arrives and he invites him to come sit down and have a chat.

2 And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, “Sit down here.” So they sat down.

Boaz gathers some elders, some of the men who had oversight and ruling authority over the city. Something like government officials. And Boaz wants them to serve as witnesses to what's about to happen.

3 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. 4 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.”

This land, or the legal right to use it, may have been sold to buy food during the famine or before leaving for Moab. Or Naomi may still be in full possession of the land, or of its use, which she is selling out of necessity... In either case, due to their destitute situation, it's up for redemption

This land was God-given family land. This was a part of what the clan of Elimelech would have been given when the promised land was distributed by God to His people. When God brought His people to the promised land of Canaan, He had them distribute out the land by tribe, then by clan, then by family so that each family would be provided for through owning a particular piece of property.

In order to ensure that this property stayed in the family, if someone was in a desperate situation one of the roles of a *kinsman redeemer* was to purchase the land, step in and continue the family lineage, that way the land stayed in the family.

But this offer that Boaz brings up sounds particularly good, because Naomi is past her child bearing years and doesn't have any heirs who have a right to the land. He'll have to take care of Naomi, but when she dies... this land will be his because she won't have any heirs to claim it.

And so the gentleman says, end of vs 4... And he said, “I will redeem it.”

Then Boaz says “But wait! There's more!”

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.”

Oh by the way, one more thing... This piece of land comes with a widow named Ruth. You would have to marry her too, and then fulfill another role of a *kinsman redeemer* which would be to father a child so that her husband’s lineage could continue.

That child under Levitical law would be an heir to Naomi, which means that child would inherit the land. The redeemer and his family would not.

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.”

Which as someone who’s kids are fully out of the baby stage, I get it. I loved the baby stage. Those cuddles are precious. But now I can look back on it and realize there is something that I like better than the baby stage. Sleep. I like where I’m at now and don’t think I’d be interested in starting over.

To be fair, that’s not the reason this guy gives for turning it down. He says it will impair his own inheritance. In other words, when he thought the deal was to take care of an older woman and in return get a field. Easy “yes”. But if it comes with Ruth involved, and then a child, that means he wouldn’t actually get to inherit the field. No benefit to his own children and estate to compensate for all the costs of taking care of Naomi and Ruth. Plus he’d have an obligation to split his inheritance further with more children involved.

“I don’t want it, Boaz. It’s all you man. Go for it.”

7 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. It’s like an ancient version of a contract. Here’s my shoe. I don’t know, it worked for them...

8 So when the redeemer said to Boaz, “Buy it for yourself,” he drew off his sandal. 9 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. 10 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.”

So, Boaz looks at the elders to do what he brought them there to do... be able to give public witness to the transaction. No take backs.

Boaz is stepping fully in. He will be the answer to all of the prayers of Ruth and Naomi.

11 Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, “We are witnesses.

And then the elders are gonna speak a blessing over everyone involved.

May the Lord make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel.

That’s the first blessing

May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem,

That’s the second

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.”

First. They pray that Ruth would be like Rachel and Leah.

Rachel and Leah were the two wives of Jacob. We talked a bit about them a few weeks ago in the Torah series... They are two of the most important women in the history of Israel.

It is their 12 sons that became the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel. They hold an incredible place of

honor in the story of God's people.

And the elders and the people of Bethlehem are asking the Lord to do that for Ruth. Now, don't forget... RUTH IS NOT AN ISRAELITE. She's a Moabite... but the people of Bethlehem pray that she, a foreigner, would somehow have a prominent place in the story of God's people. Which in that moment is highly unlikely to say the least.

Secondly. They bless Boaz - They pray that he would be renowned in Bethlehem.

That Boaz would become well-known for his kindness, compassion, integrity, faithfulness, and sacrifice in this story. That, idk hypothetically, more than 3000 years later a small church in a city and country that didn't exist at that time would preach about his faithfulness and sacrifice for Ruth.

And lastly they bless their Household - House would be like the house of Perez.

Now that's a long story but the meaning here is that the town of Bethlehem came from Perez's line. They exist because he existed. They are who they are because of him.

And so what they are praying would be true of Boaz and Ruth's family is that their family line and descendants would impact Bethlehem greatly. And that kids, is what we call foreshadowing.

So in all of these blessings, the people are praying this little story of Ruth and Boaz and Naomi would actually wind up being bigger than just their little story..

13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. 14 Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! 15 He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him." 16 Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse.

I love that picture.

17 And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed.

Watch this now because this is everything.

He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

That would be... King David.

18 Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, 19 Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, 20 Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, 21 Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, 22 Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

Now. How does the story start? Zoomed out, big picture, all of God's people, the nation of Israel are struggling. Why? A famine and... It's the days of the judges. And the summary of the time of the judges is that the whole nation is in chaos because everyone selfishly did whatever they thought was best for them at the expense of God and others. And the problem was... there was no king.

That's how it starts. There is no king and we've got a huge problem. Then it zooms all the way in to a little family and tells their story. Then at the end it zooms all the way back out and says "oh by the way. That baby on his grandmothers lap? That's the grandfather of King David." The final word of the story explains the whole point of the story.

That's the plot twist. That's the ending that makes you rethink and reinterpret everything you've read. This is Luke finding out Darth Vader is his father. This is discovering Bruce Willis was dead the whole time.

Wait. What?! This was about that?? I thought we were just following along with a family who was struggling and needed some help. You're telling me that this entire time, this story was about God not just providing for a family in need. It was about God working to solve the mess that an entire nation was in?

It turns out that God is an elite multitasker. He is almost never only doing one thing. While he was working in the lives of one needy family, he was also putting the pieces in place to bring his people a King. It wasn't just about Naomi and Ruth, it was also about David.

- David who would kill Goliath.
- David who would unify God's people.
- David who would be called a "man after God's own heart."
- David who would restore the worship of YHWH to the nation of Israel...
- David who would later receive the promise that God would use his line to continue to deliver on his great promises to send... "an anointed one", "a seed of Adam", "an offspring of Abraham", "a lion of Judah", "a Messiah" who would crush the head of the serpent, bless the nations, and bring full and final redemption and restoration as far as the curse of sin is found.

It's a pretty epic mic drop moment. Oh by the way, that baby right there on his grandma's lap? His grandchild is King David. And further down his lineage? The King of Kings.

Let me tell you 3 things that really stand out to me from this book of the bible. Of course there are all sorts of takeaways but I'll just give you 3 that are particularly apparent to me.

1) Nothing "just so happens".

It just so happened that Ruth went to the field where Boaz was. And then King David is their child's grandson and then Jesus himself is his supergreat grandson. Nah, that didn't "just so happen."

There is no such thing as "it just so happened" because God exists.

Now, I'm not saying that so you become weird about it. Because I've seen people do that.

Like if someone says to you "good luck on that project tomorrow." And you say "well actually, because God exists there is no such thing as luck. So I'd prefer you say "good providence" instead of good luck." Don't do that. Don't be that guy. Because whoever you're talking to is gonna say "well I providentially am never talk to you again, I can tell ya that."

I'm also not saying that every circumstance that happens is eternally significant. Because that's not the case.

What I am saying is that nothing "just so happens" because God exists. And he is always multitasking. And we don't always know what else he is working on. But we do know that our lives are not happenstance. You do not "just so happen" to live where you live. To work where you work. To have the neighbors you have. To have the social circle that you have. To have the story that you have.

2 Corinthians tells us that the comfort we receive as we go through hardships is given to us so that we then have something to draw from to help others. That part of why you have gone through whatever you have gone through is so that you can be of better assistance to others who are going through similar things.

The book of Acts tells us that we exist in the time and place that we're in so that God might reach out to people through us. I know you thought you ended up in that neighborhood because you wanted more closet space and it was a good deal. That's all well and good. It's just that God was multitasking. He was hooking you up with more closets and also intending to reach out to your neighbors through your presence next door.

So God's people were struggling and suffering. Ruth and Naomi and Boaz have no clue that God is working through them to bless their whole country. But nothing 'just so happens'. Because God exists. And he's always multitasking.

Here's the second thing that stands out to me. Adjacent if not interconnected to the first

2) As Christians, we have a complicated relationship with tragedy and evil.

If you look at Naomi and her character arc. She experiences horrible tragedy. It happens quickly in the story but can you even imagine watching your spouse die, and then watching your two children die? Brutal. And then she is left with no grandchildren in a society where continuing your lineage was everything. It was your honor and meaning and purpose...to raise up offspring and continue your families participation in the promise of God to bless the world through your people group. She's so crushed she literally starts referring to herself as a "bitter old woman." She's empty, she's devastated, she's destitute. It's an awful thing that she endures. And yet. Somehow. It was the means by which God brought about the human king that united Israel and then eventually the eternal King the world needed. It's complicated.

It reminds me of Joseph's story that we studied a few weeks ago. Where all this awful evil is done to him by his brothers, but later Joseph says "you meant it for evil, But God meant it for good." This thing that was evil, this thing that was wicked, this thing that was horrible...somehow God used it to bring about good things. Things that wouldn't have happened otherwise.

It's complicated. Because there are obvious questions like "Adam, are you saying that what happened to Naomi and all of that death was actually a good thing?" No I'm not. It was a tragedy. It was awful.

"Are you saying that we shouldn't feel bad when bad things happen?"

No, I'm absolutely not saying that. When bad things happen you should feel bad. If you don't feel bad when bad things happen...i'm pretty sure that's close to the definition of a psychopath.

What I am saying is, there is a grandmother with a baby on her lap who is the grandfather of King David, and she testifies that whatever comes our way, God intends it for good. He will work with it to create good from it.

Naomi would join with the apostle Paul in testifying that

We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28 -

In other words, no matter how empty or bitter...you and I have no idea how God might be working it for good. You have no idea of what God might be preparing to put in your lap at the end of all of this.

Which leads right into the 3rd thing that stands out to me from the book of Ruth.

To put it into the words from the gospel song,

3) God is good all of the time, and all of the time, God is good.

The zoom in, zoom out writing style makes it stand out...no matter where you zoom in or out, there's reason to say "look how good God is".

If you think about Ruth herself. You know she's one of two females with a book of the bible named after her. She's the only non-israelite with a book of the bible named after them. She's a racial minority immigrant, as unexpected as it gets to be celebrated or considered significant to a foreign nation. In fact, 5 times in the story she's referred to as a Moabite, like the author really doesn't want you to forget that part. But see God is in the habit of turning outsiders into insiders. Strangers into family. Pagans into his people. Sinners into saints.

And God in his goodness does in fact bless her like Rachel and Leah. Ruth's story would go on to be read every single year as part of Jewish tradition during their Harvest Festival. And every year they would read it and end with that genealogy. It's actually the only book of the bible that ends with a genealogy. It ends by pointing us forward to what is coming. It actually points us forward a few

hundred years to a longer genealogy that has Ruth's name in it.

You know when Matthew sat down to record his biography of the life of Jesus, he started with a genealogy of Jesus's family tree. And there in Matthew chapter 1 vs 5 [5] and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, [6] and Jesse the father of David the king.

And there are a few more generations listed until you come to vs 16. Just a bit further down the Ruth and Naomi family tree...

[16] and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

The story of Ruth is the story of how Jesus came to be born.

Because nothing "just so happens". And somehow, somehow, God is able to take evil and tragedy and use them for eternal good...because HE is good.

This is why pastor and author John Piper famously said "God is the gospel". What you get when you step into faith in Christ, is god. He's the best thing. He's the most important thing. He's the prize.

When you trust Jesus, you get all sorts of blessings. You get the blessing of church family. Of people to share life with. What an incredible blessing.

You get purpose and meaning, without which you cannot have a fulfilling life.

Through Christ and his word we get wisdom for life. Something stable and sturdy and proven upon which to build our lives, so we don't turn our lives into catastrophes. Choosing destruction unknowingly through our choices and lifestyle.

And all of those things are unreal blessings. But they aren't THE blessing. The blessing is that we get God. God himself. We get the assurance that God is with us and for us. We get to know him. We get to experience him. The god who through all time, however far you zoom in or zoom out on his goodness and faithfulness and wisdom and brilliance it's always amazing.

You and I will get another example of this same thing next week. As we celebrate Good Friday and Easter. Zooming out to see the grand plan of salvation to rescue and redeem people from every corner of the earth. Male and female, insiders and outsiders. People of every tribe and tongue. All in part because of God's faithfulness to Ruth, and Naomi, and the family tree that continued through them.

And we will also have a chance to zoom in. To hear individual stories of god's goodness and intervention in individual people's lives as they get baptized as an expression of their faith in Jesus.

For today we're gonna end as we do each Sunday. We're gonna take communion as we remember the ultimate expression of the faithfulness and goodness of god, the death of Jesus for us.

We're gonna sing together. And we're gonna pray together and go to god. If you'd like to come up front we have people who would love to pray with you