

Ruth

Sunday 6/27/2004

I will talk to you about the book of Ruth. As I said, we started to come through the Bible book by book. My goal is to get you to the point where, when we are done, you have some kind of operational understanding about the Bible. You are able to look at the Bible and see it in its entirety.

Remember, I told you this before. Yesterday, I told the folks down there where we were that the Bible is a picture book. When you understand the Bible, you see the picture. The picture is what God is doing from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. We talked about how it all kind of goes together.

The book of Ruth, to me, has always been a book that I have enjoyed because it is really just a story. To me, I have always enjoyed stories. I can remember I was not very good in high school, but my best class was English. We had a class in there which was called Literature Appreciation. I do not know what they call it today. All that meant was you got to read a lot of books, and then you had to stand up and tell what the books were about. I think that class probably helped me more than anything else to get myself prepared for the Bible down the line, because that is really what the Bible is.

When you learn the Bible, you learn that the Bible is nothing more than stories. I told you that. But when you come to a book like Ruth, you have one book with one story. When you get into the book of Genesis, you have twenty-eight thousand stories. They are all good; they are all important. But I like the fact that you have one book with one storyline that really gives you everything you want, because I am just like a child. Jesus said that is the way we are supposed to be. I never knew a child who did not like stories. A child likes to sit down and be told a story. They make millions of dollars off storybooks for kids, Christian and non-Christian, like Goldilocks and the Three Bears, and the Three Little Pigs.

I like stories. The book of Ruth is a great story. Ladies, you are going to love this one because it is a love story, and women love love stories. Women love to watch movies that are about the love of their life. That is why all these reality TV programs, where these women get to pick the bachelor or the women get to pick, are so popular. They paint a dream picture of a perfect world. You think because they buy everything and set it all up, and everybody is lovely and nice, that that creates a dream scenario about love. That is really not true. Those things are all fabricated to give the illusion that that is what love really is. No, if you want to really get a love story, you have to come to the book of Ruth.

I. Reading of Ruth Chapter 1

Now, I want to read chapter one for you, and then we are going to talk about it and make some observations. Here is what we have.

Ruth 1:1-22

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 Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.

And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.

And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons.

And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.

And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread.

Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.

And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.

The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.

And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.

And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?

Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons;

Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.

And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.

And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?

And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.

I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

Now, Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus, and we love You. We come to this great book today. We look forward to what You have for us. Truly, Lord, there is so much here that needs to be talked about today. I pray, Father, that You will give me the clarity of thought and mind to be able to not only extract it all but to put it together in an understandable way that these, Your people, would be edified and be encouraged.

Lord, the preaching of the Word of God does no good if people do not understand it. Preaching and teaching of the Bible by any pastor is of no avail if he has not had the ability to break it down where his people can grasp it, digest it, and then use it in their own personal lives. Help me, Father, to be that preacher today. Help these, my people, to be that kind of Christian today that will take in the Word of God to apply it to their hearts and their lives. Father, we thank You and praise You. In Jesus' name, for His sake, we ask it. Amen.

II. The Storyline of Ruth

That is the beginning of the story of Ruth, and I want to kind of give you the storyline here, and then we are going to look at our cast of characters in this great book because they are incredible.

Chapter 1, which we already read, says this: The story begins with a famine in the land of Israel. Elimelech and his wife Naomi, with their two sons Chilion and Mahlon, all from Bethlehem, make the journey down to Moab. In the process of time, the Bible says Elimelech dies, and Naomi is left with her two boys, who in time also marry two women of Moab, Orpah and Ruth.

After about ten years, in Ruth 1:5, those two men also die. Now it is just Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah. Naomi hears that the famine is over in Israel, and she decides to go back to her people. She tells her daughters-in-law, "Look, I am old. I cannot give you husbands, and even if I could have a child tonight, you do not want to wait to get married until they grow up. You need to stay here and find a husband right here among your own people, but I have to go back to Bethlehem to my people."

The Bible says that Orpah leaves our story at this point. The Bible says she goes back to her people and her gods. But the Bible says that Ruth, around Ruth 1:16, cleaves unto Naomi, and she makes that great statement that "thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God, for whither thou goest, I will go."

You are probably understanding now how many times you have been to a wedding where, when the bride and the groom come down, you see this thing. This is how it all plays in as a beautiful love story. The bride and groom come down, and everybody is in attendance, and everybody stands up, and the pastor does his opening remarks. Then everything gets quiet, the lights come down, the music comes up, and she looks at him and sings that beautiful song. I do not know the name of it, but it comes right out of here. She looks at him and says, "Whither thou goest, I will go," and everybody is just going, "Oh!" He looks at her back and says, "And whatever thou spendest, I know I will." That is how it starts. That is not what they say, but that is what is going on.

Naomi says, "I am not leaving." Ruth says, "Your people are my people, whither thou goest, I will go," and all that you do, "your God, where you die, I am going to die." So Ruth and Naomi go back to Bethlehem, which is called in the Bible the House of Bread. Everybody is happy to see them, and she tells them how God has dealt bitterly with her and how the hand of God has been against her. In fact, she says, "Do not call me Naomi anymore; call me Mara," because God's hand has been against me, and God has dealt with me bitterly.

The Bible says that when they go back, it is the beginning of the time of the barley harvest. Ruth, not having a husband, has to find a job, so she finds a job gleaning in the fields. Ruth 2 tells us that one day Ruth is working in the fields, and she works her way into a field that belongs to a man by the name of Boaz. Boaz is a rich guy; he owns a lot of land. He is kind of like somebody that in our own society would be, he has people that work in his fields. He owns a lot of land, kind of like the Ben Cartwright type from the old Ponderosa days.

He is out there surveying what is going on, and he sees Ruth working out there in his field, and he says to his servant, "Who is that woman working over there in my field right there?" The servant says, "Well, she is the woman that came up with Naomi from Moab. She is a Moabitess." Boaz begins to talk with her, and he begins to recognize some great aspects of her life. He had already known about Naomi and the loss of her husband, and he had known how Ruth had worked to take care of not only herself but Naomi, and this moves him. Because she is not an Israelite, she is not a Jew, she is a Moabitess.

Because of that, and because he sees how hard she works, and probably the fact that she was good-looking had a little bit to do with it, he says to her, "Stay in my field." He says, "I am going to put a clause of protection around you," because back then, working in the field for a woman was a very dangerous thing because roving bands would come in and carry the women captive, and it was not always the easiest job. So he says, "I am going to put a clause of protection around you. You stay in my field because I have men who guard my workers, and nobody will bother you." She is overwhelmed to find grace in Boaz's sight.

Boaz is a near kinsman to Naomi. That means he is a blood relative. He is a blood relative through the husband, Elimelech. He is related. Ruth goes back at the end of the day, and she tells Naomi all that happened and how she met Boaz and all this. Naomi tells her, "God is in this. You found favor with God, and God is doing something in your life."

Then Naomi begins to give her instructions. Naomi, her mother-in-law, begins to tell Ruth how to get with Boaz and to deal with Boaz. In fact, as the process of time goes on, she tells Ruth to go down to the threshing floor where they threshed the wheat, and she says, "Boaz is going to be down there." So Ruth goes down there that evening. Ruth 3:1-7 says Naomi tells her, "Before you go, wash yourself, anoint thyself, change your raiment." Then she goes, and while he is asleep, she slips in and nestles down at his feet, and she sleeps at his feet.

He wakes up in the middle of the night, and he is startled. When he sees that it is her, he is struck by the fact that she has such an unbelievable servant's attitude. He says to her in Ruth 3:11, "You are a virtuous woman." As all love stories go, from watching her in the field, talking with her, seeing her character, seeing all that she is, Boaz falls in love with her. He comes to the point where he wants to marry her. Why wouldn't he? She works all day, he does not have to do anything, she does whatever he commands, and when she sleeps, she sleeps at his feet. My kind of woman!

So he goes to town. He takes ten witnesses with him because as a kinsman redeemer, he has the right to redeem all that Naomi has. We will talk about that a little bit later. So he goes into town, he takes the witnesses, and he goes through the process there. Then he makes the statement, "I have bought all that was Elimelech's." Boaz pays the price and redeems Naomi and Ruth, and then he marries her.

The Bible says in Ruth 4:13 that she conceives. You see that thing? There is always the conception listed where the birth is. We talked about that a couple of Thursday nights ago. The Bible says they have a son; she conceived. They call his name Obed. Then the Bible says that Obed in time grows up and begets Jesse. Then the Bible says Jesse grows up in time and begets David the king. So we see historically an incredible concept: how Ruth, a Moabitess, is yet the great-grandmother of David.

From a historical standpoint, the book forms a historical bridge from the book of Judges into the book of Samuel. The book forms a historical bridge from the apostasy that is taking place in Israel to the greatest king the nation of Israel has ever seen. That is the storyline from the book of Ruth. With that, most churches, and unfortunately most pastors, would now tie it all together, put a nice bow on it, wrap it up, and send you home. But the book of Ruth is much, much more than that. We are nowhere near the end. In fact, we are just in the beginning because that is a historical application, and that is all true.

III. The Romance of Redemption

Keep in mind now, I told you this, and I tell you this almost every week. I told you from the time we began to study the Old Testament, I took you over to 1 Corinthians 10. I told you that the

Bible says that the things in the Old Testament that happened to the nation of Israel were for our New Testament examples and ensamples.

1 Corinthians 10:11

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

In other words, the book of Ruth, like every book we have studied so far, has something in it that applies to your life and my life by example, by ensample, that shows us and admonishes us as a New Testament believer.

For me personally, and I cannot claim this for you, but for me personally, the two most intimate books in the Bible for me in the Old Testament are the book of Song of Solomon and the book of Ruth. The book of Song of Solomon shows me my attitude should be toward Christ and my wife, but then it also shows the attitude that Christ has toward me and the attitude that my wife should have back toward me. So to me, the book of Song of Solomon is a great book, but the other great book that goes along with it is the book of Ruth.

My own title for the book of Ruth, in my own heart, my own mind, is simply called "Romance of Redemption" because it pictures my salvation. Not only does it show what Christ did for me in redeeming me, it does something that no other book of the Bible does. If somebody would ask me, I would not even know where to begin to tell them to go to figure this out other than here. But it begins to show me that before I was saved, while I was still lost in my sin, while I was still on my way to hell, God looked down and saw something in me that was worth redeeming.

I do not know how to explain that. I do not know why you can put fifty people in a room and go with them all through life, and some will get saved and some will get lost and die to go to hell. I know that God does not intend for that to happen. I know that that is not what God wants. I know that when God died, He died for everybody, but how come some people will trust Christ and some people will not?

I will tell you this, women in the Bible are something to study, especially in the New Testament. You realize that when you study Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and you find that Christ is coming to the women and talking to the women, you realize that in the New Testament, there is not one woman that rejects Him. Of all the women that come to Christ or He has contact with in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, not one woman rejects Him.

The book of Ruth does more than just show me my Redeemer. It begins to help me understand what Christ saw in me, and obviously in you, that made Him pursue us to the point that in time, we came to Christ when others do not. You know what? You have in this world today a lot of heresy, and one of the heresies you have is predestination, the fact that God predestined some people to be saved and some people to be lost. The problem with a predestination guy is, he does not have any sense. He does not understand the book of Ruth. There is no way you can believe in predestination if you understand the book of Ruth, because the book of Ruth shows you that God died for everybody, and it is your choice. It is so clear in Ruth. But a guy that believes in predestination, he is not going to want to study the Bible. He wants to believe in his own deals.

To me, the book of Ruth really fulfills Deuteronomy 29:29 for me, because Deuteronomy 29 says something like this:

Deuteronomy 29:29

The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

When I read the book of Ruth, the first thing I want to draw your attention to is in Ruth 1:1. It says this: "Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled."

IV. Ruth and the Age of Apostasy

This book and this story took place during the time of the judges. Remember last week, I showed you the book of Judges. The week before that, I showed you the book of Joshua, and I showed you how one of the ways that God shows you the Bible and teaches you the Bible is by contrast. We contrasted last week the book of Joshua and the book of Judges and showed you a tremendous amount of information on the concept of contrast.

I also said that God also teaches you by association. That is the book of Ruth. God teaches you great concepts about your own personal life with Ruth in association with the book of Judges. Do you know what it teaches? I will tell you what it teaches. It teaches very clearly and plainly that you and I can have a relationship with God that works in an age of apostasy of religion. Because that is the book of Judges.

I told you last week that the book of Judges, the whole key was, "there is no king in Israel and every man is doing what is right in his own eye." The book of Judges is a picture of the Laodicean church period. It is a picture of the time that you and I are living in right now. Preachers do not preach the Bible. Churches do not teach the Bible. They have no protocol for the people that they have. All they want to do is get from them everything they can, and there is nothing that they give them that sustains them, that will help them. All they want is, "Do not tell me what I did for you yesterday. Tell me what you can do for me today." That is the mindset.

In the midst of the apostasy of Judges, in the midst of the apostasy of this time, here is a little book and a little story about a woman who is a virtuous woman, who finds grace in the sight of Boaz, who builds a proper biblical relationship with him in the midst of an age and a time when it is total apostasy against God. You have heard me say it from the time we started our church. I say it every time I say it, which is a lot. Scott, what are you looking at me for? I want to build a Philadelphia church in the Laodicean church period. I want to build Philadelphia men and women, Philadelphia moms, Philadelphia dads, Philadelphia couples, Philadelphia young people. I want to build Philadelphia character in the age of apostasy. The book of Ruth shows you it can be done.

The book of Ruth is my model for building something that is associated with God, biblically with God, scripturally with God, in a time period where the apostasy of this world and religion has taken over and killed every decent concept of God Almighty in our lives.

V. Cast of Characters and Their Spiritual Significance

Now, we have to look at our cast of characters here because it is in the cast of characters that God uses to paint this incredible picture. This story is one of the most incredible stories. Not only historically does it form a bridge, like we already talked about, but what it gives you and me to help us understand how to build the intimate relationship we have with God.

- Elimelech: A Type of God the Father
- Mahlon and Chilion: A Type of the Old Testament Law
- Naomi: A Type of the Nation of Israel
- Boaz: A Type of the Lord Jesus Christ
- Ruth: A Type of the Believer