

The best is yet to come

Sermon based on the book of Ruth

Introduction

Ruth is one of the female heroes of scripture. It's a story resplendent with themes of loyalty, love, and people making what they think are the best decision in order to take care of each other and go about life in the best possible way. It's a sweet story, only 85 verses long, and the principal actors are ordinary people with hard lives.

Ruth is one of only two books in the Bible named after a woman. Names mean a lot in this story and in the Bible. Ruth means compassionate friend. How and where it's placed in the Bible is as inspirational as the contents of the book of Ruth.

Looking for Greener Pastures

The story of Ruth is a series of setbacks. In chapter 1 Naomi and her husband Elimelech, and two sons were forced to leave their homeland in Judah, the small town of Bethlehem. Bethlehem means place or house of bread. The area was known for its abundance of wheat fields. A drought struck the region and soon there was no bread in the house of bread. So the couple left Bethlehem in search of greener pastures in the land of Moab.

Despite their circumstances immigrating to Moab would have been disapproved by their friends and family. Throughout the Old Testament, there are reports of frequent wars and perpetual animosity with Moabites. There are nearly 200 references to them in the Old Testament and outside of the book of Ruth. Nearly all these passages paint the Moabites in a most unpleasant light. The book of Deuteronomy forbids Moabites from entering worship assemblies (Deuteronomy 23:3). Even if there was Moabite blood in your lineage ten generations back, you still couldn't attend public worship.

Decisions

As the story is presented to us in the book of Ruth, what we see in the first chapter is Tragedy and Death. First Elimelech dies and after his death, the deaths of the couple's sons, Mahlon and Kilyon, follow shortly thereafter. As you can see, **Tragedy and Death** is what we found at the beginning of the book.

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When Naomi finds herself without husband and without her sons, she makes a bold but understandable decision... to go back home. But she has two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah.

Naomi wants to give them both freedom.

Ruth 1:7-13. 7 Therefore she went out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. 8 And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. 9 The Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. 10 And they said to her, "Surely we will return with you to your people." 11 But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters, go—for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, 13 would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me!"

Naomi is clearly saying to them, there is no hope for you where I'm going. Go back to your people.

And then we find Ruth making a decision that will shape her future.

Ruth 1:16-17. "But Ruth said, 'Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.'"

Life is full of decisions—some small, others life-changing. In the Book of Ruth, both Naomi and Ruth face difficult choices that shape their futures and reveal their faith.

Naomi chooses to return to Bethlehem after years away, trusting God's provision despite her losses. Ruth makes a bold decision to leave her homeland and embrace Naomi's people and God. Their choices were not easy—they involved

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risk, uncertainty, and sacrifice.

Ruth's **loyalty** was so great that it is the prime example of this virtue in scripture. Her speech, to this day, is part of some wedding liturgies. Often wedding vows quote the King James Version, "*For where you go I will go.*" It's a wonderful statement, is like saying: "Whatever life may throw at us, I am with you—always, I will be loyal and make my life with you."

Sometimes the bitter experiences are truly awful. But God is always working through other experiences of life to make bitter better. We can't control a lot of what life throws at us, but we can control our attitude. Hardship and pain are inevitable, but abject misery and bitterness are optional.

Boaz, the solution

In chapter 2 Naomi is filled with new hope because Boaz appears on the scene as a possible husband for Ruth. But he doesn't propose to Ruth. He doesn't make any moves. At least that's the way it seems at first. So the chapter closes brimming with excited hope, but also with great suspense and uncertainty about how all this might work out.

In chapter 3 Naomi and Ruth make a risky move in the middle of the night. We find in this chapter what could be the solution. Ruth goes to Boaz on the threshing floor and the Bible shares with us this little introduction at their conversation: Ruth 3:9. *And he said, "Who are you?" So she answered, "I am Ruth, your maidservant. Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a close relative."*

It seems that all is going to be fixed, that Boaz was going to be the solution to Naomi and Ruth lives. Just as the sorrow of Ruth's widowhood appears to transform into a beautiful love story, a massive obstacle suddenly blocks the path of her life's journey. There is another man who according to Hebrew custom has prior claim to marry Ruth. The impeccably honest Boaz will not proceed without giving this man his lawful opportunity. So chapter 3 ends again in the suspense of another setback.

A Wedding

Chapter 4 of the Book of Ruth brings the story to a joyful and redemptive conclusion. Boaz goes to the town gate, the place where legal matters are

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settled, and calls the closest relative of Naomi's late husband to discuss redeeming Naomi's land and marrying Ruth to preserve the family line. When the closer relative declines because of potential loss to his own inheritance, Boaz formally acquires the land and takes Ruth as his wife. Beautiful end... but there is more.

Contrasts

Remember that we mentioned at the beginning that this story starts with **Tragedy and Death**. But it ends with a great contrast that give hope to each one of us as we look at the future. It ends with **Joy and Birth**.

In striking contrast, the book ends with **joy and new beginnings**. Ruth, once a foreign widow with no prospects, is redeemed through her marriage to Boaz. God blesses them with a son, Obed, restoring Naomi's joy and sense of family. The women of Bethlehem declare that this child is a "restorer of life" for Naomi, and the narrative closes with the surprising twist that Ruth, a **Moabite outsider**, becomes the great-grandmother of King David, placing her in the lineage of the Messiah.

This dramatic reversal—from death and despair to birth and hope—underscores a central message of Ruth: God is present and at work even in the darkest times, bringing restoration and unexpected blessings through faithfulness, loyalty, and humble trust. The story invites us to see that God can transform tragedy into triumph, and that our lowest moments may become the foundation for His greatest acts of redemption.

Reflection

What decisions are you facing today? Are you willing to trust God and step forward in faith, even when the path is uncertain? Like Ruth and Naomi, our faithful choices can lead to unexpected blessings and God's redemptive work in our lives.

Prayer

Lord, help me to make decisions that honor You. Give me courage to trust You fully, even when the future is unclear. May my choices reflect faithfulness, and may You use them for Your glory