



Ruth

A story of Kindness and Redemption

General

I've been making my way through the pages of the Old Testament in chronological order, so we were up to looking at the book of Ruth back in .

I was inspired by Phil's approach to the book. He said in his paper that we need to do the biblical theology ... but we shouldn't let that strip the text of meaning. It is a book about God's kindness ... firstly to these 2 women ... but ultimately about God's kindness to his people Israel.

Purpose of the book of Ruth

The setting for the events of the book is clear – during the time of the Judges.

But the setting for the original readers the book (for my money) was some time during the monarchy. I think that the purpose of the book was to offer support to the Davidic monarchy.

One of the issues that has to be addressed is the trip to Moab at the beginning of the book. Was this disobedience that met with punishment from God or was it a wise move for a man looking to care for his family? I have opted for the “wise man looking after his family”.

I have found myself unconvinced by the idea that their move to Moab was a disaster and that God was judging them for moving out of the promised land.

If Moab was a bad move then surely bringing a Moabite back to Israel was also the wrong thing to do (Deut 23:3).

I think there have been some other notable movements out of the promised land. The move by Jacob and his family during the time of famine seems to be viewed favourably in the book of Genesis.

But the move that I find intriguing is that David takes his parents to Moab for protection when Saul is trying to kill him (1 Samuel 22:3)

But in the end I am not convinced that the move was wrong or resulted in God's judgement because the text doesn't say that.

It seems to me that Ruth is a beautiful reminder that in the midst of the chaos in Israel God is at work to raise up a saviour for his people.

Resources

The things that I found helpful were:

- **Phil Campbell's** preaching Guide on the Perspective web site.
- **Barry Webb's** Five Festal Garments
- **Frederic Bush's** Word Commentary (Ruth & Esther)

The Talks

I had worked at one time on titles using the word “A Series of ???”

- Ruth 1 – A Series of Unfortunate Events
- Ruth 2 – A Series of remarkable Co-incidences
- Ruth 3 – A Series of Remarkable Provisions
- Ruth 4 – A Series of ???

But in the end I went with the Kindness theme:

- Ruth 1 – The Famine – God's Kindness in Hardship
- Ruth 2 – The Harvest – God's Kindness in
- Ruth 3 – The Gathering – God's Kindness in Relationships
- Ruth 4 – The Fullness – God's kindness in Redemption

Ruth 1 – The Famine

God's Kindness in Hardship

1. Choosing a Movie

- o What kind of story is this? A wonderful love story. But what undergirds the story is God's great kindness.

2. What's In a Name?

- o Clear setting for the events – the days when the judges rule (Ruth 1:1). Blackest time in Israel's history. Incredible unfaithfulness on Israel's part.
- o Lots of names in the opening verses (Ruth 1:2):
 - o **Bethlehem** (house of bread) but the irony is there is no bread.
 - o **Elimelech** (my God is king) certainly not the case for Israel at the time.
 - o **Mahlon** (sick) & **Kilion** (failing) ... boys who are about to live up to their name.

3. Moving to Moab ... a Series of Unfortunate Events

- o Famine forces them to move. Elimelech dies. The sons marry Moabite women ... and 10 years later they die. Compounding the tragedy the sons don't have any children in the 10 years.
- o Situation looks more hopeless than the opening verses.
- o What options are open to Naomi?

4. Coming Home ... the Hard Way

- o Glimmer of hope (Ruth 1:6)
- o Ruth ... who stands to gain nothing ... insists on going with Naomi (beautiful statement Ruth 1:16-17)
- o Coming home after things not working out is hard. Told the story of some friends who moved away with the hope of a business deal that all failed and they lost their house.
- o How would Naomi have felt when she walked into town and heard the whispers?
- o She asks for her name to be changed to Mara (bitterness) (Ruth 1:20-21)

5. Kindness in Hardship

- o The word that sums up the book of Ruth is "kindness"
- o Naomi thinks she is feeling anything but God's kindness. She feels God's hand is against her.
- o But she is not seeing things clearly. And she is not seeing the whole picture.
- o Think about God's kindness:
 - o Verse 6 – come to the aid of his people.
 - o Safe passage back from Moab.
 - o A daughters-in-law who loved and cared for her in the hardship.
 - o Ruth – who is devoted to her – better than 7 sons (4:15)
- o Naomi is wrong. She has not come back empty. She has come back with Ruth.
- o If you want God to take the blame for the tragic things then you have to be willing to let him take the credit for the good things.

- o Naomi can't see that ... not yet, anyway.

6. God's Kindness to Us

- o These chapters should be a WAKE UP CALL for us.
- o Contrast Ruth & Job.
- o Job responds to tragedy with complete confidence in God (Job 1:21 & 2:10)
- o Job & Naomi both acknowledge that God is in control of all things. Things don't happen by chance or accident. JOB and NAOMI have MORE in COMMON than just their FAMILY TRAGEDY.
- o We need to make sure we are not bitter in the face of hardship.
- o The Christian life is not just trusting God when things are good.
- o We are going to face times when we are tempted to be bitter. When do you feel tempted to feel bitter:
 - o Work – where things don't go how you want.
 - o Home – where there are strained relationships
 - o Church – where you have difficulties with others
- o God has shown incredible kindness to us in Jesus.
- o Read Romans 8:35

Ruth 2 – The Harvest

God's Kindness in Providence

1. Six Billion to One

- o Radio segment where they discuss amazing coincidences
- o God rules over the smallest details of our lives.

2. The Story So Far

- o Recap the main events of the story so that the coincidences make more sense.

3. Introducing Boaz

- o The narrator introduces the readers to Boaz.
- o We are told 3 important things (Ruth 2:1 & 4):
 1. Boaz is a close relative – close relatives had a responsibility to care for the extended family
 2. Wealthy man – not only is he a close relative ... but he has the means to be able to help. Conceivable that he could be a close relative ... but unable to help post famine. But Boaz can help.

3. Godly Man

4. "As it turned out ..."

- o Gleaning laws (Deuteronomy 24:19-22) gives a great insight into God's heart for the outcasts & disadvantaged.
- o God is concerned to look after the widows (Naomi) & aliens (Ruth).
- o Ruth 2:2 ... this is probably where Naomi's life hits its lowest point. She is admitting her poverty in a most public way.
- o "As it turned out..." (Ruth 2:3). Almost seems a bit tongue-in-cheek. This is no coincidence or 6 billion to one. God has ordered these events. Naomi acknowledges it by the end of the chapter (2:20)

5. Boaz's Kindness to Ruth

- o Borrowed Phil's illustration about the young girl auction the cow.
- o Boaz shows great kindness:
 - o Gets Ruth to glean in his fields (2:8)
 - o Offers her protection (2:8)
 - o Offers her water (2:9)
 - o Provide her with lunch (14)
 - o Gives her food to take home (18)
 - o Tells the workers to leave stalks for her (2:15-16)
- o And why the kindness? Boaz tells her (2:11-12). The irony is that Boaz is praying that God will bless Ruth for her devotion to Naomi ... but he is in fact the source of blessing for both women.

6. All the Pieces Come Together

- o Naomi is stunned when Ruth comes home with all the grain. She asks the obvious question "Where did you glean?" Ruth explains.
- o This is not luck or co-incidence ... and Naomi knows it (2:20). All the pieces fall into place.

7. Conclusion

Kindness

- o Kindness is what under girds the book.
- o Why were Israel to show kindness to the widows & aliens? They were to remember God's kindness to them when they were slaves in Israel. They were to act with kindness to outcasts because God acted with kindness toward them.
- o God has show his kindness, love and forgiveness to us in Jesus so we should show those things to others.

Providence

- o We need to be convinced that God rules the events of this world.
- o Did you notice that nothing miraculous happens in Ruth:
 - o There are no angels that appear to guide people.
 - o God doesn't speak audibly to anyone.
 - o No prophets comes with a message from God
 - o No-one performs any signs
- o God is at work in the ordinariness of life to bring about his purposes.
- o We should live lives of confidence ... no matter what the circumstances (Philippians 4:12-13)

Ruth 3 – The Gathering

God's Kindness in Relationships

1. Will You Marry Me?

- o Got people to think back to their marriage proposals.
- o Talked about a few unusual marriage proposals.

2. Naomi's Plan

- o Quick recap of the story.
- o Naomi has turned the corner (3:1). She is now wanting to demonstrate kindness to Ruth.
- o Ruth didn't go with Naomi for what she could get.
- o But Naomi is determined to find a husband for Ruth.
- o Boaz is the prime candidate. (Deut 25:5)
- o Boaz was the next of kin.

3. "Will you marry me?"

- o Naomi's plan is for Ruth to woo Boaz (3:1-3).
- o Boaz & workers celebrating the harvest.
- o Story of a bizarre marriage proposal on the Channel 10 news one night.
- o Ruth makes her proposal (3:8-9). May not look like a proposal ... but Boaz knows it is (3:10).
- o She could have gone after a younger man ... but she is happy to marry Boaz.

4. The Twist in the Plot ... Another Redeemer

- o Then comes the twist. There is a closer relative than Boaz. He will have to be consulted before the wedding can happen. Boaz knew what the law said and was happy to let the Israelite Social Security run its course (3:12-13).
- o This is not indifference from Boaz. It is a willingness to trust that God has it under control.

5. God's Kindness in Relationships

- o God's kindness in this story is woven in the fabric of relationships: A daughter-in-law to a mother-in-law. Boaz ... a new relative. Finally .. the relationship of a husband & wife – Boaz & Ruth.
- o God cares for people through relationships. That is how God has wired us.
- o There is something that the NIV obscures: Ruth 3:9 - "Who are you?" he asked. "I am your servant Ruth," she said. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer."
- o We have exactly the same words as Boaz has already used: Ruth 2:12 - May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.
- o Ruth has come to take refuge under God's wing which is under Boaz's wing.
- o God shows kindness to these people by giving them each other.
- o The greatest moments of joy ... and heartache ... in our lives will be with our family. Our family will give us more moments of happiness ... and more tears ... than anything else.
- o When relationships don't go right it is a painful thing.
 - o If your house burns down it is just stuff.
 - o But if a child dies it is a sadness that will last for a long time.
- o Relationships are how God has wired us.
- o In this life we have the privilege of being part of another family ... God's family.
- o We have brothers & sisters in Christ who will care for us and love us.
- o How can you be showing greater love and kindness to the members of your family this week?

Ruth 4 – The Fullness

God's Kindness in Redemption

1. Ordinary People

- o Bryson's Texas Instruments Pocket Calculator illustration.
 - o When they developed it they said they could see "no practical use".
 - o The events in Ruth may seem insignificant ... but they are part of a series of events that will change the world.
 - o Ordinary people and ordinary events that God will use to solve the world's greatest problem.
- 2. Boaz and The Other Kinsman Redeemer**
- o Recap the story ... kinsman redeemer ... another closer relative. What will happen?
 - o Boaz meets the nearer relative at the town gate ... the place for business to be transacted.
 - o (Funny that we never find out this man's name).
 - o Boaz outlines what looks like a good deal to the nameless relative.
 - o But then he throws in the catch (4:5). He will not only be buying the land ... but he will be getting "the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead man with his property".
 - o Suddenly the deal doesn't look that good.
 - o The nameless relative says to Boaz "You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it".
 - o Boaz does the deal (4:9-12)
 - o Verse 13 - the scene jumps ahead one year. Ruth gave birth to a son.
 - o The women of Bethlehem are abuzz (4:14-15)
 - o God has worked to rescue this family from tragedy.
- 3. God's Solution to Israel's Problem**
- o The genealogy at the end of Ruth is not just a filler.
 - o King David is God's solution to Israel's problem.
 - o Remember the opening verse (1:1) "In the days when the judges ruled..." (cf Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1 & 21:25)
 - o Israel had no king.
 - o God is giving them David.
 - o Decca signed Brina Poole and the Tremeloes rather than the Beatles. They had 2 demos and chose Brian Poole. We don't know the name of the man who chose not to sign the Beatles. But we do know the name of the man who did - Sir George Martin.
 - o We Don't know the name of the man who chose not to marry Ruth. But we do know the name of the man who did - Boaz.
 - o The unnamed man is worried about his own estate and misses the chance to be part of God's plan to rescue the nation of Israel.
 - o This is God's ultimate kindness ... to rescue Israel from Chaos and appoint a King to lead God's people ... a king after God's own heart..
 - o But it doesn't end there.
- 4. God's Solution to OUR PROBLEM**
- o Cango caves (South Africa). On the tour they show you what the man who discovered the cave would have seen with his oil lamp. But then they turn on the flood lights.

- o Genealogy shines the light ahead to David. But that is like looking at it with an Oil Lamp.
- o Matthew 1 - Genealogy that turns on the floodlight.
- o He is a king who will not just rescue Israel ... but us as well.
- o Ordinariness is at the heart of Ruth.
- o Ordinariness is at the heart of the story of Jesus.
- o Matthew 1 mentions 42 men ... and 4 women.
 - o TAMAR (vs 3) - The mother of PEREZ ... the 1st person in the Ruth GENEALOGY
 - o RAHAB (vs 5) - BOAZ'S MOTHER
 - o RUTH (vs 5) - BOAZ'S WIFE and
 - o BATHSHEBA (vs 6) - the woman through whom SOLOMON would be BORN.
- o The Skeltons in the cupboard ... the SHADY LADIES of the Old Testament.
 - o TAMAR - gave birth to PEREZ by falling pregnant to her father-in-law
 - o RAHAB - she was a prostitute.
 - o RUTH - was the Moabite not even an Israelite
 - o And BATHSHEBA - the woman with whom David commits adultery.
- o Matthew is wanting to stress something ... God has chosen the unexpected person ... the outer ... the unlikely one ... to fulfil his plan.
- o It SAYS SOMETHING about the WAY GOD DOES THINGS.
- o 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 ... those verses seem to SUM UP the book of RUTH.
- o But the place where we really see the foolishness of God is in the cross.
- o Jesus ... born of a virgin ... in a cow shed ... unrecognized by all but his mother ... working with fishermen & tax collectors ... misunderstood by religious leaders ... arrested, treated shamefully and put to death. It really couldn't look any weaker or more foolish.
- o But that is how God has shown his kindness to us. That is how he has rescued us.
- o That is how he has made it possible for us to be his people.
- o It is little wonder that the world sees the message of Christianity as being foolish ... but it is still the message our world needs to hear.
- o The cross is the message of God's kindness and redemption.

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Pearl Beach - 2006*