

# Ordinary People

**Bryson Smith offers a preaching guide to Ruth. - a book about ordinary people, ordinary events and a God who's able to do something out of the ordinary.**

Television advertisements are full of them! No longer are the ads the exclusive domain of young, beautiful people with clear complexions and wonderful figures. More and more advertisements are being filled with ordinary people who appear a little over weight and don't have those classic Hollywood looks. More and more advertisements are being filled with ordinary people - people just like us.

And that's the whole point. It seems that the marketing gurus discovered that many of us just can't relate to those beautiful people who usually appear on our screens. So in order to rectify the matter they're now using more ordinary people to sell their products. They call it real person marketing.

In the same way the book of Ruth in the Old Testament might well be described as real person theology. Ruth is an extraordinary book precisely because it is about the ordinary. Ordinary people in ordinary life circumstances that you and I can relate to. Gone are the larger than life figures of Samson, Gideon and Samuel who also shared the same period of history. Gone are the epic battles with a cast of thousands that also shared the same period of history. Instead we have a short account of two widows struggling to make ends meet in a time of recession.

It's from this perspective that I recently preached through the book of Ruth. The title of the series was *The God of the Ordinary* because it seemed to me that that really is what the book is about. It's an account of how God is not so big that He is disinterested in apparently insignificant people. Indeed the great treasure is that it is precisely by using ordinary people that God brings about extraordinary events. That's a good message because it gives us ordinary people a positiveness with which to approach life. It's a great message because it points us to Jesus.

Let me explain how I approached the book.

## Dividing Up The Book

Like many of the narrative Old Testament books we really do need to read large sections at a time in order to see the message come through. I actually think that Ruth could very well be dealt with in one sermon. The draw back is the sheer amount of reading that would have to occur during the service. (One option could be to promote the sermon in advance and rely on people to have read through the book beforehand.)

I chose to deal with Ruth in two sermons dividing the book in the middle. Sermon 1 dealt with chapters 1 and 2. Sermon 2 looked at chapters 3 and 4.

## Sermon 1

This sermon essentially set the scene of the book. The congregation were taken back into the time of the Judges. In particular, the plight of a childless widow in this period of history was drawn out. I attempted to bring out the inner tension of the story by only having chapter 1 read prior to the sermon. The first half of the sermon dealt with the tension raised by Naomi's question of whether or not God would show kindness to this Sinai family (1:8). Will God involve himself with these ordinary people? Or perhaps God is too caught up with the big things that are happening with Gideon and Samson and the other Judges.

Having raised the question chapter 2 was read in the middle of the sermon. By doing it this way the key verse in the chapter (2:20) stood out like a sore thumb! Yes! God will continue

to show kindness. Indeed the word translated "kindness" in our NIV is pregnant with Old Testament meaning. It's the word often used to speak of God's covenant love. In other words God is committed to his people. Yes, even the apparently small and ordinary people. And that's great - because most of us are pretty ordinary.

The first sermon, therefore, aimed to do two things. Firstly, to set the book up for its conclusion and main lesson the following week. Secondly, to comfort people with the knowledge that no matter how insignificant we might feel we are nevertheless of value to God. The death of his son is evidence enough of that!

### **Sermon 1 - Outline**

*Too Small To Notice?*

*Question: Will God Show Kindness*

*Answer: He Has Not Stopped Showing Kindness  
God, Jesus and Ordinary People*

## **Sermon 2**

This sermon brought out the grand finale of Ruth. It eventually comes in the last 6 verses. Twice we are told that King David was a descendant of Ruth. Here we see that nothing is impossible for God. What started as a hopeless situation of two widows on the edge of extinction God uses to bring about the birth of a person who would change the entire fabric of the Israelite nation.

This sermon spelt out God's enormous commitment to his covenant people. We are being pointed to Jesus - but even more than that. The story of Ruth shows us that God can use ordinary people and the ordinary circumstances of life to bring about an extraordinary event. Here, too, we are being pointed directly to Jesus.

From a humble beginning in an animal sheker God uses the death of a carpenter's son to save mankind from sin and death. From a seemingly ordinary beginning God did a most extraordinary thing.

And why would God do this sort of thing? The book of Ruth even provides us with some tantalising hints because in the book key words are used of both Ruth and Boaz - words which elsewhere in the Old Testament describe God. For example, Ruth is described as "kind" (3:10). This is the word mentioned in chapters 1 and 2 - a word used frequently in the Old Testament of God. We are meant to see that just as Ruth clung to Naomi (1:14) God clings to his people. Just as Ruth was committed to Boaz, even though he was apparently somewhat unattractive (3:10), God is also committed to his people.

In the character of Boaz we are also given a glimpse into God's character. This time the key word is "kinsmen redeemer". It is a word repeated so often in the last couple of chapters you almost get sick of it. Yet it too is a word often used of God. Just as Boaz sacrificially redeemed Ruth and Naomi, even though he had no legal obligation, so too, God sacrificially redeems his people out of sheer compassion.

Roll all this up and Ruth gives us a grand picture of God - a God committed to redeeming ordinary people. I tried to bring this out with the following sermon outline.

### **Sermon 2 - Outline**

*From Small Beginnings*

*What Can God Do*

*Why God Does It*

*Ruth as a picture of God*

*Boaz as a picture of God*

*Ruth, Jesus and Us*

## **Closing Remarks**

So there you have it. My attempt to do justice to a great little Old Testament book. As far as the commentaries are concerned I quite liked David Atkinson's Bible Speaks Today commentary. It's not all that technical but it nicely captures the drama and tension of the book. More importantly Atkinson does well at drawing out the line between Ruth and Jesus. And after all, that's what good Old Testament preaching is all about!

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