

Genealogy

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. (Matthew 1:1 ESV)

Ruth

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The Book of Ruth

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Introduction:

Good morning! We are now in week 3 of our celebration of the incarnation. What a miracle this is! God with us, Emmanuel. Interestingly the idea of the incarnation came up this week in a Biblical Counselling workshop I attend. One of the attendees pointed out the incarnation is the ultimate empathic move. God the Son, who did not who,

“though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Phi 2:6-8

He knows all it is to be human. He knows pain. Believe it or not, he knows it better than we do. He suffered disappointment, false accusation, miscarriage of justice, betrayal. He has lived it and felt it. And so he can walk you through your pain and suffering, because he knows what it is to endure these things. This is our God. A God who is in charge of the cosmos. And yet, a God who chose to live among his creations. A God who can empathically connect with us like no other. A God who lovingly works through seemingly insignificant people and insignificant matters. No cause is too small for our God, just as no problem is too big for Him. We are going to see this today in the life of Ruth – God does great things through ordinary people.

We have chosen to worship our way through the genealogy in Matthew's gospel this advent season learning that Genealogies are separate literary genre. Like narrative or apocalyptic or poetry, there are different rules and purposes to depending on the genre. In ancient Middle Eastern literature, genealogies serve a unique purpose. They are true and historical, absolutely. But they are more. They exist to lend support to specific ancestral claims, but also are meant to recall the adventures and lessons of the people listed in them – they teach and recall. Matthew's genealogy, in particular, was written to prove Jesus' descent from the line of David and therefore Jesus's eligibility to be the long awaited Messiah. But Matthew, like other ancient writers is doing double duty. In this genealogy, he includes five women – these five curious footnotes as Levi has called them – in a genealogy that only NEEDED to include men. Why did he do that? What does he mean for us to see? What stories and principles does he want us to remember while he tells us the Story of Jesus? Those are the questions we are asking this advent season. We're going to jump back into that genealogy this morning and you can read along with me on the screen. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today:

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

² Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴ and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵ and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by **Ruth** (Matthew 1:1-5a ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

This morning, we are turning our attention to the third woman in Matthew's genealogy: Ruth. Please turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Ruth.

As you do, let me just say a quick word about how we will approach the text this morning. The story of Ruth spans four chapters so we won't be able to read all of it. We

will need to do a quick forest-level survey of the story before we will be able to see what Matthew intends for us to see. I'm going to function as something like a tour guide this morning. We're going to walk through the main points of this story and I'll stop and explain what we're seeing along the way. We're going to explore the story of Ruth this morning.

Exploring the Story of Ruth

At this point, I hope you have your Bibles open to the book of Ruth. We're going to begin in chapter 1 and we'll read all the way to verse 9. Here we will find a young Moabitess and her Israelite mother-in-law in a desperate situation. Let's read:

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. ² The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there.³ But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, ⁵ and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

⁶ Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food.⁷ So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. ⁸ But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May 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 of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. (Ruth 1:1-9 ESV)

Let's stop here. These three women are in a **dangerous situation**. These women had very few possibilities for income. There was no formal social support. There was a real danger of starvation. Misery and childlessness was the most likely outcome for these women. Naomi's only hope is to return to her home and hope that someone will show compassion to a senior widow. Ruth, however, is still young enough to have re-marry. If

Ruth wants to succeed in life and the legacy of children, she has every reason to leave her mother-in-law behind. This brings us to a scene in which we catch a glimpse of Ruth's tremendous character. Flip ahead with me to Ruth verse 16 where we will catch a glimpse of **Ruth's character**:

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." ¹⁸ And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more. (Ruth 1:16-18 ESV)

Let's stop here. Orpha has left, but Ruth remains. She will honour the mother of her deceased husband. The connection of the bloodline is lost, but Ruth and Naomi now have a relationship that is deeper than blood. In this way, Ruth and Naomi provide a little foretaste of the New Testament community of faith – a family that stretches across the boundaries of ethnicity, economic status, age and gender!

I like to think there was more than personal loyalty at work here. Ruth had years to observe Naomi, and somehow Naomi's life and character and *worship* were compelling to her. Notice what Ruth says: "your God will be my God". What a witness, pray church we would have the same! Like the Christian spouse Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 7, our household witness can be tool God uses to save our loved ones. Does our love for our family, our character, our life, our worship inspire that kind of loyalty?

The two widows return to Naomi's hometown – the city of Bethlehem and what we see next is Ruth's character. She immediately gets to work. Widows and the poor were allowed to go after the paid harvesters and pick remaining grain. It was hard work, with less to show for the effort than standard harvesting. The Bible is pretty real here. There is no police. One was at the mercy of the character of people. The text states plainly with gleaning there was a risk of sexual harassment at the hands of sinful men. The work was hard and unrewarding. And Ruth bravely proceeds. Collecting not only for her needs, but the needs of her widowed mother in law. Ruth's actions are noticed and

gossiped about by others. Soon it reaches the ears of the owner of the land she is gleaning from, Boaz. The inner-beauty of Ruth – her loyalty towards her mother-in-law, her hard work and her integrity are described by Boaz in verse 11 of chapter 2:

All that you have done for your mother in law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you have left your father and mother and native land and come to a people that you did not know before. The Lord repay you for what you have done. (Ruth 2:11 ESV)

Perhaps this is a bit of an excursus, but bear with me for a moment. Remember a few weeks back when, in our study through 1 Timothy, we considered Paul’s instructions about modesty? The consistent testimony of Scripture is that – while outer beauty is a gift that is worthy celebrating – INNER beauty is what godly women should strive for. “What does that even look like?” you ask. It looks something like this! Here in the story of Ruth, we find an example of a woman who had a tremendous inner beauty! John Piper says here:

“There is no doubt that the writer wants us to admire and imitate Ruth. She takes *initiative* to care for her destitute mother in law. She is *humble* and *meek* and does *not put herself forward* presumptuously. And she *works hard* from sunup to sundown. Initiative. Lowliness. Industry. Worthy traits.” John Piper

Now, not everyone included in this genealogy serves as a good example. Judah – for instance – was certainly NOT included in this list because of the positive example he laid. But unlike many of the others, Ruth really DID leave a positive example! She was beautiful – not the kind of beautiful that instagram, tiktok and our culture compel our daughters to strive for, but the kind of beautiful that God delights in!

Boaz saw her beauty. He wasn’t simply drawn to her appearance – he was drawn to the beauty of a quiet and gentle spirit – a beauty that is of much worth to God! Can I put on my “dad hat” for a minute? Young girls remember that! A fisherman catches what he baits for. If you bait men with only a worldly, physical beauty, then you will most likely catch a worldly, shallow man – a man who leaves you when your physical beauty is no longer novel enough to keep his interest! But, if you entice a man with godliness, you will most likely catch a godly man!

That's what Ruth did. Later, Boaz says of her "You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether rich or poor" (Ruth 3:10) – it appears Ruth had options!! But she was wise. She looked for a godly man. She attracted him with her integrity. And she was rewarded richly.

This brings us to a passage that highlights **Ruth's initiative**. Much like the story of Rahab that we studied last week, the story of Ruth presents us with a woman of ACTION – a woman who is not passive with her faith but who reaches out to lay hold of God's blessing. We see this most clearly in chapter 3, verses 6-9. Look there with me now:

So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. ⁷ And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. ⁸ At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! ⁹ He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer." (Ruth 3:6-9 ESV)

Let's stop here. If you're reading through this for the first time today, I imagine you're feeling a bit confused. What does it mean that Boaz is a redeemer? Why is Ruth laying at his feet? What is going on here? A redeemer (often translated Kinsmen Redeemer) was one of the ways God enshrined provision for widows in OT. Similar to the situation with Tamar, widows usually married into the extended Kin group. The process was called Levirate marriage and is detailed in Deuteronomy 25. Levirate marriage was designed to protect vulnerable women and ensure the family name of the deceased was carried on. So in our story today, Boaz is an eligible Redeemer, one who can rescue a widow from hard times, and help perpetuate the legacy of the family name.

The detail of Ruth laying at Boaz's feet is an unusual one. One commentator helpfully explains:

"The context makes it clear that this describes a way whereby Ruth signified to Boaz her desire to marry him. Ordinary methods of approach were no doubt

difficult and this provided a suitable medium. But why it should be done in this way we do not know. Nor do we know whether this was a widely practised custom or not.” Tyndale OT commentary

Ruth takes the initiative and she is the one who proposes marriage! She boldly approaches her Redeemer. She positioned herself in the place of blessing! Do you see that? **She followed God’s instructions.** She found the kinsman redeemer. She laid herself at his feet, and she trusted that God would provide. She took action. How often do we sit on our hands and await God’s blessing? How often do we have a problem, and God has prescribed a process to deal with it, but we remain passive? We are prescribed the common graces of prayer, church attendance and Bible reading but we neglect them. Or we are given the method and mandate of forgiveness, but we ignore God’s clear instructions either because we are lazy, or we actually don’t have Faith, we don’t believe that God’s instructions are enough to deal with our plight or problem. Ruth was not like that. She how she takes God at his Word in faith and does it!

And it worked! There were some details to be sorted out, and you can read all about those in chapter 4 today when you go home, but ultimately it worked! Flip ahead to chapter 4. Look at verse 13. Let’s listen to how this story ended:

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. ¹⁷ And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. (Ruth 4:13-17 ESV)

Thus concludes the story of Ruth. It was a story that had all the makings of a tragedy but that resulted instead in a triumph! A young, courageous Moabite widow was grafted into the family of God. She was blessed with a son – a son who would grow to become the father of King David! But even more wonderful, as Matthew reminds us, the family tree

of Ruth would go on to include the Greater David – the Saviour of all the nations – the Godman Jesus Christ! What a Legacy for faithful living! This is the story that Matthew has chosen to draw our attention to with his curious footnote. We're going to conclude this morning with the same question we've been asking each week: What are we meant to see here?

What are We Meant to See Here?

First, I think that Matthew wants us to see that:

1. God uses and blesses ordinary faithfulness

God uses the ordinary, the little things we do in righteousness. One commentator helps us see this.

“In one way it is a tale of two women. It relates how one of them, Naomi, underwent much hardship, but eventually won through to peace and security. It tells how the other, Ruth, attached herself firmly to her mother-in-law and to her mother-in-law's God and how she received the blessing of that God. But most of all the book is a book about God. It deals with unimportant people and unimportant matters. But it deals with them in such a way as to show that God is active in the affairs of men. He works his purpose out and **blesses them that trust him.**” Tyndale OT

God has a great plan, and really the story of Ruth, is actually the Story of God in Ruth's life! But Ruth has choice. She has agency. Her actions done in faith, position her to be blessed beyond measure! The great great Grandmother of the MESSIAH! What a blessing! We have no idea how God will use our actions for his Glory and plan. Think of the men and woman who contributed to the conversion of preachers like Billy Graham, or Spurgeon? Did not those people have a lasting spiritual lineage and family tree? We know not how God will multiply our kindness, our acts of compassion and mercy, our obedience, our Gospel pleas in the ears of unbelievers. We water, we plant, but God gives the growth. This is partly the Joy of Christian parenthood. It is also the Joy of Christian Mentorship. Christian brother, Christian Sister, what legacy will come from your faithful investment mentoring another? Ask yourself, will you be an uncle or ante in

the faith to someone, and then mark how God will multiply that blessing! Could Ruth or Boaz conceive of what the Legacy of faithful living could be!

2. God has a plan and a future for the “outsider”

Secondly we need to see God has a plan to save the outsider. God’s family was bigger than the Jews. There is no doubt that one of Matthew’s intentions with the Genealogy of Jesus is to remind the early Jewish Christians of this fact. Look carefully at the names in Genealogy. Tamar, likely a Canaanite. Rahab a Canaanite prostitute from Jericho. Bathsheba, a Hittite. And here Ruth a Moabitess. All are grafted into God’s chosen people, so much so they are part of the line of David, and more importantly the line of the Messiah! Here’s the point: God desires all to be saved –

“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”
2 Peter 3:9

No doubt Matthew is poking at Jewish Ethnocentrism and he is pointing to these foreigners in Jesus family tree as proof of the truth that Isaiah sings about in chapter 56

“And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD to minister to Him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be His servants—all who keep the Sabbath without profaning it and who hold fast to My covenant— 7I will bring them to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on My altar, **for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations.**” Isaiah 56:3-7

In the NT, the apostle Paul says it this way:

“For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Rom 10:12-13

Therefore the church to must be marked by its multiculturalism, and its racial plurality!

To quote Toby Mac The Kingdom of Heaven is a DIVERS-CITY! God loves it.

Diversity of age, race, culture, social status – all unified under the Lordship of Christ. O Lord in Heaven, even now, in this place, make it so!

Notice also that God saves those who call upon him in faith. In many ways the Story of Ruth is the Story of every Christian. It can legitimately be read typologically. Naomi is the original chosen people. Ruth symbolizes the Gentiles, and Boaz the Redeemer. In this way Boaz is the type of the future Messiah. I am convinced Matthew intends us to see this. God is the God who takes the outsider and makes them an insider! And as his people, and as His Church, we must be marked by the same impulse. Matthew insists we see that at Christmas. How will we, as individual families make time and room to invite the outsider into the graces of Christ?

What we need to notice here is that not everyone in this story ends up in the family of God. At the end of the story there are still outsiders. There were 3 widows at the start, but only Naomi and Ruth are grafted in. Orpah, Naomi's other daughter in law chooses her old ways instead of Yaweh. Recall the words of Ruth: "your people will be my people, your God my God". Ruth is saved from famine. She is saved from poverty. She is saved from childlessness. Ruth is saved to eternal life – BY FAITH! Because she called upon the name of the Lord meaning she pledged allegiance to God, agreeing to abide by His good Laws and His good Lordship.

But Orpah is not saved. She did not reach out. This story warns us we are not saved by familial ties. Your grand-daddy's faith won't save you. Notice how Ruth sets the initiative. She declares her loyalty to Naomi and to Naomi's God. She even takes initiative with Boaz proposing to him!

The question is have you?! I know there is someone listening here or on-line who has not taken the initiative and responded to the call of God. Listen to the wisdom of the ancients' friends! Listen to the warning implicit in Matthew's genealogy. The inclusion of Ruth in the list of the family of the Messiah also draws attention to the exclusion of Orpah. This story is asking you, "Are you in?" Are you? Friends, a Holy God who is

the author of Justice, in inventor of fairness, the creator of true morality cannot be with sin. Heaven is no place for selfishness, disobedience, jealousy, anger, unforgiveness, or any other mark of evil. Don't delude yourself, we all have these evil running through our veins, we were all born into it. Look at the world today and see the proof. Human culture is EVIL. The optimism of people like Isaac Asimov is unfounded and patently false! Human culture will never reach utopia, because we are all individually sinners! Put us together and it only gets worse! But there is hope. We can be redeemed from the mess we are in. God offers a payment for sin. Yours and mine. This is the most glorious news of the incarnation! God became man for us. The ultimate empathic move.

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21

He knows our weakness, he knows our pain. But more than knowing about it, he did something about it. He lived a perfect life, and died a sacrificial death for us. But it does no good if you don't grab onto it. If you don't know how, come talk to one of us after the service, and we will walk you through how you can respond to God's gift in Jesus.

And as we close I want to address those in the family of God. Let's circle back to Romans chapter 10:12-13 we read a moment ago and the great promise of “all who call on the Lord will be saved.” Paul is also quick to point out that people must hear to be saved. We learned this last week with Rahab. She heard, therefore she believed!

“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” Rom 10:14-15

And so it is clear that we must invite. We are charged to be the agents of the Gospel, the tool God uses to invite the outsider in. Will you do that this Christmas? Will you be strategic and fearless in this? Will you be the Naomi to a Ruth? Will you invite the outsider in? Let us pray