

Beautiful Ruth

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 July 2024

Preacher: Gabe Garcia

[0 : 00] We hope that you enjoy this teaching from Christ Church. This material is copyrighted and no unauthorized duplication, redistribution, or any other use of any part is permitted without prior consent from Christ Church.

Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. I'm going to read the scripture and then I'm going to introduce our preacher this morning.

This is from Ruth chapter 1. In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah together with his wife and two sons went to live for a while in the country of Moab.

The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Malon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah, and they went to Moab and lived there.

Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Malon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

[1 : 13] The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever. You can take your seats. I'm going to invite up our guest preacher. His name is Gabe Garcia. He pastors out at a church called New City Church in Oakland in Jack London.

We are a church that is so glad about what God is doing in the kingdom of God here in the Bay Area, and we are happy as a church also to be supporting New City Church. And I was just chatting with Gabe this morning and glad to hear that they're growing, looking for a new space.

So Gabe, we're really thankful for you and excited for what God's up to at your church and all the people that you'll reach that we will never meet here at Christ Church. So thanks for bringing the word to us this morning.

Thank you so much for having me, Christ Church. Good morning. How are you guys doing today? Our church, New City, we meet at 4 p.m., so I'll be preaching a different sermon later on this afternoon and thinking about a hundred details to make church happen, to make our service happen.

So it really is a gift to me just to be here with you all and to worship with you all. So thank you guys for having me. And thank you guys. Christ Church has generously supported us in the past.

[2 : 22] So as we're seeing new people come to know Jesus and we're seeing disciples built up, it's in part because of your guys' faithfulness and your guys' generosity and your guys' commitment to the gospel.

So thank you guys so much. Here's my question to get us started this morning. What do you do and how do you respond when life does not turn out as you expected?

All of us in this room, we have hopes, dreams, and desires, even in the third, fourth, and fifth graders, and I'm so glad you guys are here today. And maybe it's good for us to just name some of those hopes, dreams, and desires.

Maybe you're here today and you're really thinking about that promotion and that new job that you're looking for. Maybe you're here and you're dreaming about retiring earlier and traveling the world.

I have three kids. My dream, my greatest desire is that I would just get a good night's sleep. I used to have big dreams, but now my dreams are a little bit low or just a good night's sleep.

[3 : 26] That's all I'm looking for. Our ability to dream and think about a better tomorrow is actually a part of the human experience. There can be something good and beautiful about these hopes, dreams, and desires.

But we can get into real trouble if these dreams turn into expectations. We can get into real trouble if these dreams turn into expectations, and then we lay these expectations at the foot of God, expecting and demanding that God would make our fairytale life come true.

I experienced this during my sophomore year of college. I went to junior college, and I had a dream to go to USC or UCLA, and I worked hard during my junior college years.

I did extra credit. I showed up to office hours. I got straight A's. I had internships and volunteer hours. I did everything I could to put together the world's greatest application.

And this was also during a time when I was growing spiritually in my walk with God. So I think in the back of my mind, I believe because I was pursuing God in a new way, in a real way, in a fresh way, God was going to grant me the dreams that I had put before him.

[4 : 51] I quickly realized God does not work that way, and I was devastated. Again, we're all going to experience disappointment and unmet expectations.

And I think disappointment and unmet expectation can be an invitation from God to draw closer to him or can also lead to bitterness.

Today, I'm going to read through a lot of Scripture, actually. We're going to read through the whole chapter of Ruth chapter 1. And I hope it's maybe an encouragement for you to dig into this beautiful little book throughout the rest of this summer.

And in this book, we're going to see, in this first chapter, we're definitely going to see some disappointment and unmet expectations. And we're going to see how those disappointment and unmet expectations for one family and specifically one woman didn't lead her necessarily running to God, but led her to a bitter heart.

Now, I know Andrew just read Ruth chapter 1, 1 to 5, but if you guys will allow me, I'm going to read that portion of text one more time, and then we'll continue in our Word together.

[6 : 03] If you guys have a Bible, you guys can open them up to Ruth chapter 1. You can keep them open, because we're just going to keep coming back to the text. I hope that's an encouragement to you. Ruth chapter 1, 1 to 5, again, In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land.

So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelech.

His wife's name was Naomi. And the names of his two sons were Malon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they lived there about 10 years, both Malon and Kilion also died.

And Naomi was left without her two sons and without her husband. Again, the question I put before us, what do you do when life doesn't turn out as you expected?

[7 : 05] Now here's the first principle I would love for us to grab onto. I don't know if you guys are a note-taking church, but you can maybe write this down. There are no promises of a life without pain.

And I think many of us know this intuitively, but still in the back of our mind, we are almost expecting God to kind of go before us and make life easy and comfortable.

But there are no promises of a life without pain. And I think this is really important for us to think through as we imagine and think through what it means to journey with God, especially if you're here and you're investigating what it might look like to follow Jesus.

God, nowhere in his word, promises a life without pain. We see in our text, it says this, in the days when the judges ruled. The days of the judges were some of the darkest days in Israel's history.

It comes after God had led his people into the promised land, but before the monarchy. So it's before King Saul, before King David, and before King Solomon.

[8 : 10] The days, these days, the days of the judges are marked by everybody doing what was right in their own eyes. Now if you go and you actually start reading through the book of Judges, you will see the cyclical pattern that takes place.

Let me just walk through this so we can really get a good sense of when the book of Ruth is taking place. In the book of Judges, this is what we see. We see God's people rebel against God.

Even though God shows himself to be a loving God, a kind God, a just God, a merciful God, God's people will turn against him. As God's people turn against him, God then gives them into the hands of their oppressors.

Again, dark days. Eventually, God's people will repent, and then God will send a deliverer or a judge to give their people temporary rest.

If you've ever read through the book of Judges, when you see God's people experience this rest, you almost kind of, you take a deep breath, and it's like, oh, finally, something good is going on.

[9 : 13] But these days of rest don't last long. What happens? God's people rebel against him. Even though God shows himself to be a kind God, a loving God, a just God, God's people rebel against him.

God's people, God then gives them into their hands of their oppressors, and it's this cyclical pattern that takes place. Again, these are some of the darkest days in Israel's history.

It's a time of violence, idolatry, moral depravity, and again, it's during this time that the book of Ruth takes place. But it's not just spiritual darkness.

We also see in our text that there is a physical famine. And oftentimes for the people of Israel, it's their spiritual waywardness that can lead to something like a famine.

In fact, the famine can be used by God as a form of judgment for their unfaithfulness. Now, a famine could be used by God in a way to draw God's people back to him, that if they would repent and turn to him, God would show himself to be their provider.

[10 : 18] But what does this family do? The family of Elimelech and Naomi. Instead of running towards God, they run away. They run away to the land of Moab, though Moabites were seen as enemies of God.

And maybe we would do the same thing. And we see people all over the world. I mean, they're just trying to survive. And maybe they're just fine looking for sources of clean water and food.

And maybe they move from one place to another. But these people were different. These were God's people. God had entered into a covenant with them. God had made a promise that he would be their provider.

God was the one that led them into the land flowing with milk and honey. And instead of running to God, this family, they run away.

They take the situation into their own hands. And I wonder for us, if we just think about our own lives, I wonder if there's any particular area of our life where we've given up on God's ways, God's wisdom, and God's word.

[11 : 27] We've tried to take a particular situation into our own hands and tried to demonstrate control. I wonder if we've given up in any particular area.

Maybe it's our finances. Maybe it's our relationships. Maybe it's sexuality. Maybe it's our home life where we've given up on God's word, God's wisdom, and God's way.

At the end of these five verses, talk about unmet expectations. Naomi loses her husband. Naomi loses her two sons.

I'm not sure what her ten-year vision was, but I'm sure it wasn't this. Let's continue with God's word. Verse 6.

When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.

[12 : 28] With her two daughters-in-law, she left the place where she had been living, and she set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. Here's the next principle I want us to be thinking about.

We must always be on the lookout for God's kindness. We must always be on the lookout for God's kindness. If we want to fight against bitterness, we have to be on the lookout for God's kindness.

Over the last couple years, I've developed a passion for fishing. It's like one of my hobbies. At age 40, I finally realized I needed a hobby. I needed a friend, and I needed a hobby.

So I found a friend, and I found a hobby. Last week, I got to take my three kids. We didn't get any sleep. But last week, I got to take my three kids on this little fishing trip up in Northern California near Mount Shasta.

And for five days, we're on the Upper Sacramento River. We're at the McLeod River. And as their father, I want to do everything I can so they can experience the joy of catching a fish.

[13 : 33] So I'm leading them on the way, and I'm doing everything I can. I am on the lookout, searching and seeking for the perfect spot so they can catch fish.

I'm slipping on rocks. I'm cutting myself. I'm falling into bushes. My family looked at me multiple times in horror because my face and neck were covered with mosquito bites.

But whatever it took, I was on the lookout for the perfect fishing spot. I think we need to constantly be on the lookout, seeking and searching every single day, no matter what is going on in the midst of pain, tragedy, and hardship.

We need to be on the lookout for God's kindness. It's not one or the other. It's not either or. It's not unmet expectations or God's kindness.

Oftentimes, it's both at the same time. So while Naomi's off in a distant land in the land of Moab, somehow and in some way, she gets a text message that the Lord has provided for his people.

[14 : 43] Again, this is God's kindness. And the author of this little book wants us to see everything under the sovereign hand of God.

This food comes not just because the rain came and the crops grew. This food came because of the kindness of the Lord. I wonder how many times we missed out on God's kindness because we've simply rationalized our way out of acknowledging God.

Every single day, I think we have to be on the lookout. The book of James says that every good gift comes from the Father above. Does your home, does your family, do your children, do you guys have a practice of seeing and acknowledging God's kindness?

If we want to fight against bitterness, we have to be able to acknowledge God's kindness. Let's jump back in the text, verse 8. Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go back, each one of you, to your mother's home.

May the Lord show you kindness as you've shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the homes of another husband.

[15 : 59] Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud and said to her, We will go back with you to your people. Again, this is more of God's kindness.

And this doesn't minimize the pain and the suffering that Naomi has experienced. But God shows her kindness through two faithful and loyal daughter-in-laws that want to stay with Naomi.

And they are making this life-changing decision saying, We're going to stay with you. Your people will now be our people. I mean, think about how radical of a decision that was.

They're leaving their communities, their culture, their family, their customs. They're saying, Naomi, we want to stay with you and your people will now be our people.

Again, that faithfulness that's demonstrated to Naomi is a gift or a demonstration of God's kindness to her. Again, back in the text, verse 11.

[17 : 02] But Naomi said, Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters.

I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me. Even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to two sons.

Would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you. Because the Lord's hand has turned against me.

Here we see Naomi turning away the love and loyalty of her daughter-in-laws.

She says, Enough is enough. Stop following me. Go home. Go look for your own husband. See, culturally it is customary for a childless widow, like Orpah and like Ruth, to marry their husband's brother in order to have a child and carry on the family name, the name of the deceased.

[18 : 10] And what is Naomi saying? She is saying, I have no other sons and I don't even have a husband. And if I miraculously got married tonight and miraculously gave birth to two sons, are you really going to wait around until they grow up?

She says, Leave. Go home. Start over. Forget about me and forget about our family. She's missing out on God's kindness.

She's turning away God's kindness. And now this bitterness is starting to take root in her heart. And more than this bitterness starting to take root in her heart, this bitterness is spilling over towards Ruth and Orpah.

And I think that's important for us to know. But as we think about different areas of our lives, different areas of our heart that maybe are calloused and hard and have become bitter, it's not just a bitterness between us and God.

Oftentimes that bitterness spills over to the people that are closest to us, to the people we love the most. Verse 14 says this.

[19 : 19] At this, they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye. She says, Enough, enough with my crazy mother-in-law. I'm going home.

But Ruth clung to her. Orpah says goodbye. In contrast to Orpah saying goodbye, Ruth clings to her mother-in-law.

And I just love this as we think about, I know that Christ Church, I know that New City Church, we have a vision not to just build up the people of God, but to reach those who seem far from God.

I love seeing Ruth's example. Because there's people all throughout the Bay Area. There's people all throughout East Bay, Berkeley, and Oakland that are experiencing so much pain.

And oftentimes when people experience pain, they want to push us away. I wonder how God might bless or reward our courage to cling to those people in the midst of their pain.

[20 : 22] To say, I'm not going anywhere. I'm going to stay and stick with you. I think our presence and I think our good and healthy clinging, I think God can use that to help people see and understand the hope we have in Jesus.

So maybe I'm just encouraging you to think about a Naomi you might have in your life. Someone who's experiencing great pain and great hardship. How can God use the power of your presence to maybe rewrite their story?

Verse 15. Look, said Naomi, your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her. But Ruth replied, don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you.

Where you go, I will go. Where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people. Your God, my God. Where you die, I will die. And there I will be buried.

May the Lord deal with me. Be it ever so severely. If even death separates you and me. When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

[21 : 37] Now again, I'm hopefully going to encourage you to study and read the book of Ruth throughout this summer. And if chapter one is kind of scene one, this is definitely the climax of scene number one.

Earlier, Orpah and Ruth had made a commitment to the people of Naomi. Here, Ruth makes a commitment to the God of Naomi. Ruth says, don't urge me to go.

Where you go, I will go. Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God. Again, remember who Ruth is. She is a Moabite widow. Somebody who's seen as an enemy of God.

For the people of Israel, as they're reading this story, they would definitely pick up on this most unlikely convert here in Ruth chapter one.

This Moabite widow. The most unexpected person to turn to the Lord. And again, I wonder about those people in our lives.

[22 : 39] Maybe there are people in our minds that are too far gone for God. Now, I don't know what went into Ruth's conversion, but I know God was doing something.

And maybe we would think about those people in our lives. Maybe we would have confidence and trust that God is there and God is working.

That we might see more and more unlikely converts at Christ Church and New City Church. God is already going before us. I wonder what it might look like for us to partner with God.

If God is there, will we join God in that work? Pursuing the Ruth's of our lives. Loving the Ruth's of our lives. And believing and having confidence that God is in the business of drawing unlikely converts to himself.

I also want you to see something about the commitment of Ruth. We live in a culture of a FOMO culture, right? Fear of missing out.

- [23 : 44] And because of this FOMO culture, we are reluctant to make commitments. Because if I commit to one thing, it means I'm going to miss out on other things. But I think God oftentimes blesses and rewards our commitments.

When we are committed to our marriages, committed to our children, committed to our neighborhoods and city, I think God uses and blesses our steadfastness in those particular relationships.

As we look at Ruth, she is making this declaration, this commitment. Your people, my people. Your God, my God. She is making a commitment to the God of Israel and the people of Israel.

Yes, she loves Naomi, but this love for Naomi is now spilling over. She makes a commitment to God and the people of Israel. What might it look like for us in a new and fresh way in 2024, even in the summer, even in July, to make a commitment to God and to make a commitment to God's people?

How might God show up in our lives, challenging us, encouraging us, pushing us forward, as we remain steadfast, just as he has been steadfast to us?

- [25 : 04] Verse 19. So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women exclaimed, this is like the women of the city, of the neighborhood, of Bethlehem.

Can this be Naomi? Naomi? She says, don't call me Naomi, she told them. Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.

I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me. The Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.

Verse 22. So Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

My last little principle that I want us to hold on to is this. To fight bitterness, we must always be rejoicing. When disappointment are laid at the feet of God, oftentimes that disappointment turns into bitterness.

- [26 : 07] Bitterness keeps us from seeing who God is and all his beauty and glory and his unchanging character. And bitterness keeps us from seeing all the good things that God is doing around us.

Bitterness keeps us from joy. Listen to what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians. He says this, Rejoice always. Pray continually.

Give thanks in all circumstances. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. A daily practice of rejoicing is a punch in the face to bitterness.

If we want to fight against bitterness, we have to master the art of being a rejoicing people. Rejoicing is giving God praise, honor, and glory for who he is, what he has done, what he is doing, and what he will do.

And again, this is not to minimize the pain, the questions, the doubt, the frustration, the tragedy that you might be experiencing right now in this moment.

- [27 : 24] See, rejoicing is not the antidote to lamenting. Lamenting can be good and beautiful when we bring our hearts, our pain, and our sorrows to God. God welcomes those cries.

Rejoicing is an antidote to bitterness. Naomi comes home and she tells everyone that she has changed her name. Naomi means pleasant.

She has changed her name to Mara, which means bitter. Again, her pain and resentment has now turned towards God.

I wonder if I just gave us a little bit of time, a little bit of space to just think and reflect if we're honest with ourselves, if there's any areas of our lives where we've become bitter.

And not bitter with somebody or frustrated at somebody, but ultimately bitter towards God. I want us to fight that bitterness by learning how to live in this tension of always rejoicing and, at some level, always lamenting.

[28 : 30] If we're a people that are always rejoicing and not lamenting, I think we're missing out on the pain that's in our world, the pain that's in this room, and maybe even the pain that's in our own lives.

If we're always lamenting, we're missing out on who God is, all that God has done, all that God is doing, and all that God will do. Again, we have to master this art of living within this tension of always rejoicing and always lamenting.

Maybe you're here today and you're like, I really don't know what I can rejoice in. Let me just remind us, as those who believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the gospel is this endless well of resources to give us reason to rejoice.

We rejoice that God so loved us that he sent his one and only Son. We rejoice that Jesus stepped into the brokenness of this world and lived a perfect life. We rejoice that Jesus, because of his love for us and the joy set before him, went to the cross.

We rejoice that Jesus has defeated sin, death, and Satan, and risen from the grave and sits at the right hand of God. We rejoice that Jesus is coming back one day to make all things new.

[29 : 43] And we could do that every single day, even as we experience pain, suffering, and unmet expectations. Verse 22, So Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

Bethlehem means house of bread. So at the start of chapter one, there is no bread in the house of bread. And at the end of chapter one, there is a harvest. There is bread in the house of bread.

And as chapter one comes to an end, I think it's a foreshadowing of what's to come. Even in the midst of great spiritual darkness, God is behind the scenes doing something and accomplishing something that goes beyond our wildest expectations.

Many of you guys know, in the book of Ruth, there's this love story that begins between Ruth the Moabite, right, the Moabite, and her elder, this older gentleman named Boaz.

And from Ruth and Boaz will come a son named Obed. Obed will give birth to Jesse. Jesse will give birth to King David, right? This takes place in the time of the judges when there was no king and everybody was doing what was right in their own eyes.

[31 : 00] And through Ruth would come King David, one of the great kings of Israel's history, a man after God's heart. And from David, generations later, will come the ultimate king, the true hero of every story, King Jesus.

So what do you do when life doesn't turn out as you expected? Remember, disappointment is an opportunity for us to draw closer to God. For the Christian, let me just remind you that you possess the Holy Spirit, the great comforter, who's there to comfort you as you walk through life's pain.

We also have a Savior who's been through everything that we've experienced. So in the midst of our questions or our anger or our frustration, Jesus moves towards us with compassion.

Life might get real hard for us, just like it did for Naomi, just like it did for Ruth. Life wasn't easy for Ruth. Ruth lost a family. Ruth lost her husband.

Ruth lost her community. And the hardness of our lives can lead us to a hard heart, or the hardness of our lives can lead us to God.

[32 : 15] So as we prepare for future trials, I pray that we would learn from this story, and we wouldn't run away from God like Naomi did, but we would run to God like Ruth did.

Let's pray, Christ Church. Heavenly Father, I'm thankful for this community. I'm thankful for the history here. I'm thankful for the gospel that is proclaimed here.

There's so many good and beautiful things about this church, and yet I know, just like my church, the people of our churches, including myself, we oftentimes walk through life burdened by disappointments, tragedy, and unmet expectations.

Lord, I pray that we would continue to be a people that run to you because you are a God that has run towards us in your Son, Jesus Christ.

We are so thankful for the true hero, the true King, our Savior, Jesus. May we continue to look to Him in all circumstances, find life, hope, and joy in Him.

[33 : 24] It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.