

# Ruth

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, let me just add my Christmas greetings to you. I know some of you will be on your way out of town. Others are arriving back into town. It's great to see old friends that have returned to the neighborhood for this Advent season.

And if you are in town, I certainly hope you'll be here Christmas Eve at 5 o'clock. And children, there is something in store for you. A visitor from long ago, long, long ago.

And we hope you'll make it. It's 5 o'clock here for a candlelight Christmas Eve service. Ruth. I want us to look today at the woman named Ruth.

The woman whose very person came to experience the fullness of Christmas wonder. And she filled with Christmas wonder even generations before Advent entered into the world.

My hope today is that you would see the beauty of God's mercy toward you in Christ by seeing the humble family line from which our Savior came.

[ 1 : 24 ] That we'll take a look at the family from which He was born. And my own heart has been warmed with appreciation for His love for us this week.

And I hope that you're going to want to do anything and everything possible to attach yourself to the family line, the Christmas photo, as God has really given it to us.

Let me give you a mental picture that will carry the message. One of the more enjoyable things for me in December is receiving Christmas cards in the mail.

I've gotten many from some even from you. And I love the ones where a family or an individual photo is on it.

You know the kind where they've dressed up or they've looked through the whole year to select the best shot. And on the back of the card, you get a line or two about each of the family members and what they're involved in.

[ 2 : 33 ] And I store those and look at them over and over and over again. In the book of Ruth, it will close with a genealogy, much the way Matthew opens.

By way of capturing a family photo through whom a Savior, a Deliverer, a King would come.

And the great thing about Ruth is it lets you see the kind of family photo that our Lord Himself was in. In Ruth, the Christmas photo has Ruth seated with an infant son on her lap named Obed.

Obed will become, in his later days, the grandfather of David, Israel's renowned king, through whom Matthew will say, Jesus now ascends to that throne.

On Ruth's right shoulder, you can envision her husband hand there named Boaz.

[ 4 : 01 ] Boaz is of mixed race descent. And off to his shadow, his own mother, who we saw last week, born a Canaanite named Rahab, who lived many years as a prostitute.

So are you seeing the holiday photo emerge? The great-grandmother of what will be the king, celebrated in a storied life of prostitution, gives herself eventually by faith to marrying someone of Jewish descent, from whom Boaz comes of a mixed-race relation, who will one day wed Ruth, the climactic moment of that union coming in our text today.

Ruth herself being a Moabite, a daughter from Lot, who lived on the other side of the Jordan, who, according to Deuteronomy, pure religious folk were to have nothing to do with, and they were never able to be permitted into the temple.

Ruth's mother-in-law stands in the photo as well, Naomi, who we will see, for I hope you saw how that text so beautifully follows the characters of Naomi, and then Ruth, and then Boaz.

Naomi, the only legitimate heir of the promises of God, but her own blood actually isn't in the line of the one who would be the king.

[ 5 : 50 ] And rather, David comes from Ovid. Ovid comes from this incredibly storied past. In other words, when it arrives in your mailbox today, and you pull it out and look at it, on the front it says,

Happy Holidays from our home to yours.

And our photos were all prettied up. We all look good. But here, you see Christmas in all of its wonder and fullness.

Let me take you through it, as it has been resting upon me this week. In the first five verses, you see how Christ's family came to be.

And it will give hope to you, no matter what kind of family you are from. Naomi. Naomi. She's a central character, isn't she? In verses 1 to 5.

Let me give you just a charcoal sketch, as you keep your text open, and read, as I'm speaking, her interplay, and her plans for Ruth's rest.

[ 7 : 04 ] That's what's actually going on in the first five verses. Naomi plans for her daughter-in-law's rest. Now, we haven't read the whole story, so you need to know, by way of charcoal sketch, that Naomi married a Bethlehemite who died.

She had two sons, and they died. So, Naomi is a woman who calls herself embittered for the way in which her life has unfolded.

This woman of promise just descends into disrepair over the first two chapters to where she actually believes God has it in for her.

Life experience has been that difficult. She's buried a husband. She's buried two sons. She's lived in a foreign country. She's had to flee famine.

She only knows pain. She feels cursed. And by chapter 1 of verse 20, she says, Call me embittered. But in this chapter, 1 to 5, she's making plans for a generation that would come up behind her.

[ 8 : 22 ] She's now begun to draw her attention to the future. Something that's happened in her life and something may need to happen in your life where you can re-envision what God might do in and through you.

For her, it was the kindness of Boaz. Look at the chapter preceding us when Ruth came home with much grain and she tells Naomi in verse 20, Naomi says to her daughter-in-law, may he be blessed by the Lord whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead.

Naomi experienced another person being kind to her. Providing materially for her.

And it ignited something that had disappeared from the fabric of her own life. she actually began to wonder, does the kindness of another demonstrate the kindness of God that would enable me to move from an embittered woman to making plans for the future and future generations?

And that's what she does. Look at verse 1. Naomi is making plans for a future generation.

[ 10 : 01 ] Now there's an important truth here. There needs to come a time in your life and mine. Not that you are emblematic of Naomi and experience or to become like a Naomi but you are to respond to the kindness of God the way you see her respond to you.

And this is what she did. She began to pay attention to her children. In this case her daughter-in-law. And she began to seek the generations that would follow her and to provide for her their wealth there.

In other words she began to trust God that she would spend her time planning for the world beyond her generation rather than her own soul.

Catherine Marshall was a wife of Peter Marshall mid-20th century. He was a chaplain to the U.S. Senate and he died. And Catherine then is widowed and she writes the following.

You are not really trusting God until you are trusting Him for the ultimates of life. When life has tumbled in and we sit in the wreckage.

[ 11 : 18 ] What a lie. Prior to Peter's death I had never really considered such questions. Now they were all important.

That was Naomi. Naomi began to learn how to trust God in the ultimates of life when life had tumbled in and she actually sat in the wreckage.

And all of a sudden in our text she is trusting God. She is setting herself aside. She is beginning to focus on her children and to ask that the generational faith would move forward as she seeks their rest.

Let me talk about Ruth. She makes a plan for Ruth to go down and she says wash therefore verse 3 your cloak and go down to the threshing floor and do not make yourself known to Boaz until he's finished eating and drinking.

But when he lies down observe the place where he lies then go uncover his feet lie down and he will tell you what to do. This is the nature of her plan. There are five verbs wash anoint put on go down observe uncover Naomi is indicating this is the action of faith that you would place yourself at the foot of the one who can redeem and therefore restore our family.

[13:05] That's her plan and it doesn't come without risk. Let me mention two things about the risk. The book of Ruth is written in the days of the judges. The days of the judges are known for this mantra.

Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Naomi is asking Ruth to go and lay at the feet of one who might rescue her.

In a day in which every man does what is right in his own eyes. The risk here is of rape if he is an ungodly man.

Not only is there a risk of bodily injury, but there is a risk in her plan rejection. You need to remember what the Bible says about Moabites and that's what Ruth is.

Deuteronomy 23, Moses wrote, No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord even to the tenth generation. None of them may enter the assembly of the Lord forever because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way when you came out of Egypt.

[14:28] So here's Ruth's plan filled with this risk not only of horrific bodily assault but of this actual rejection and repudiation as a person.

What was Naomi thinking? She was thinking of one thing namely redemption. The same book of Deuteronomy which speaks of how they're to treat Moabites also says something about leveret marriage.

Two chapters later 25 that when a woman would be widowed it would be incumbent upon the husband's family to have one in the family the nearest redeemer marry her that there might be offspring and that the deceased husband would still have a name that would carry on and that therefore this newborn individual would be able to provide even for the widow who in that day would have been completely on her own and without recourse to help no other safety umbrella was engaged in the welfare of Israel social construct that was as strong as this one of leveret marriage and so what Naomi is saying is I know that the man

I'm asking you to risk your life for I know that the one who might reject you is likewise the nearest one I'm aware of who might redeem you who might be worthy as a follower of the word even though all men do what is right in their own eyes and take you to be his wife that's what she's banking on Naomi standing in the family photo of God's son at Christmas an embittered woman who learned how to trust God and gave herself to her children that God might secure their welfare what about Ruth if one to five shows

Naomi's plan for rest verses six to nine you see Ruth's petition for redemption this is storytelling at its best and it would probably be best if we just read it again beginning at verse six so Ruth went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her 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 at midnight the man was startled and turned over and behold a woman lay at his feet he said who are you and she answered I am Ruth your servant spread your wings over your servant for you are a redeemer

[18:17] Ruth's petition for redemption Ruth is a woman who is so filled with faith that I find it wondrous she risks it all and she is a woman therefore in scripture that is heralded as worthy even as Boaz will give her that name this is what she believed in the words of a poet he who hath fed will feed he who hath heard thy cry will never close his ear he who hath marked thy faintest sigh will not forget thy tear he loveth always faithful ever so rest on him today let me put it to you this way ruth held out hope in god's word that he would better her life through an act of redemption and that is what you are to emulate risk all for redemption look at her plea look at the language spread your wings over your servant for you are a redeemer it is intentionally evocative and ambiguous a woman laying at the feet of a man asking that he would in a sense spread himself over her that he would take her that she would be his as he hovers over her it would be for her welfare now think about think about that in regard to your redeemer and what

God fulfills in Christ it would be like going to the manger or the cross or the empty tomb come Easter and it would be like laying yourself out at that cross at that grave at that tomb and pleading that Jesus would redeem your life from all of this injury and past that's that's Christmas that's the wonder of Christmas to approach the manger in three days time and as we have sung to fall on

your knees and to ask that this child would make sense of your life be the forgiver of your sins be the savior of your soul be the husband of your needs be the provider of your wants be the defender of your way that he would cover you that he would hover over you that he would spread himself in a glorious banner and call you his own this is

Ruth's petition why these women we're looking at them all month why does Matthew want you to experience for a month here anyway the stories of these women in his family photo of Christmas there are two reasons I think in Genesis 315 it is the woman not the man through whom God indicated he would give us a great victory over the serpent and the devil the woman is the one in the glorious plan of redemption through whom the savior comes and so these women Ruth included is in the family photo with

Obed on her lap this proto advent card that would indicate the glory of God's purposes for woman all the way at creation in the fall and so they're not just included because we live in a 21st century moment where women have been excluded included they're included because from the very garden itself the exalted place of woman was that through woman we would then know a savior and we will celebrate soon Mary as they say mother of God but there's something else Ruth's plea for redemption and Ruth's glory in the scripture and Ruth's inclusion in the scandalous numbering of women in

Matthew's genealogy rest in the fact that she is also a literary and rhetorical argument in other words these women are anticipating an objection to the scandalous mother of Jesus this young virgin Mary and what Matthew does so beautifully in his genealogy is indicate by way of these women who preceded David as king say to the reader who would say I'm not going to take Jesus because of this scandalous family story and he's already anticipated it and basically he's saying if you don't want Jesus and his family photo then you've got to get rid of David and his as well and it's the women then who hold us to all the glory and wonder of Christmas

[ 25 : 28 ] Ruth will marry Boaz Ruth will give birth to Obed and on her lap is the grandfather of Israel's greatest king never underestimate what he may do with you if you go to Jesus with a plea for redemption Naomi and her plan Ruth and her plea Boaz verse 10 through 18 and his promise and pledge to redeem I'm not going to linger long here but notice what he says to her when she says this verse 10 may you be blessed by the

Lord my daughter you have made this last kindness greater than the first and that you have gone not after young men whether poor or rich and now my daughter do not fear I will do for you all that you ask for all my fellow townsmen know that you're a worthy woman and now it is true that I'm a redeemer yet there is a redeemer nearer than I remain tonight and in the morning I love that phrase when the morning comes when the morning comes if he will redeem you good let him do it but if he's not willing to redeem you then as the Lord lives I will redeem you lie down until the morning notice what Boaz does he blesses her for her kindness in giving her life and hopes for redemption to him and not another Jesus will do the same for every man and woman who looks to him rather than to those who appear to be stronger or a more ready help to your trouble

Jesus will say unto you blessed blessed are those who seek my refuge and my redemption!

this has been something I've been thinking about this week that Jesus actually looks at us when we embrace him at Christmas and we say blessed is the child the one approved by God the savior of the world and the response from our Lord is blessed are you who would come to me for such is the king of heaven he also calls her worthy I thought about this all week as I prepare for three nights from now I'm going to sit at the manger and I'm going to contemplate the worthiness of the bay and I understand that I have a redeemer who will say to the father worthy are these to enter into our eternal rest what what an inversion what a wonder some of you might know the artist

Mary Black she's got that she's got that wonderful song when the morning comes I think of Ruth here listening to Boaz says when the morning comes I'll do this for you Mary Black's words when the morning comes I'll gaze on you with desire imagine that imagine Jesus singing that over you when the morning comes I'll gaze on you with desire when the morning comes my look will be perfectly plain when the morning comes my beloved one you'll know that we both feel the same that's that's Merry Christmas!

[ 30 : 07 ] that as you adore! God's gift he adores and celebrates you that you both feel the same what an extraordinary and humbling gift and so here you have it again from this another Old Testament narrative happy holiday from my family to yours and what is your Lord's family like it's not all well dressed prettied up and well healed not many in his family are wearing wax shoelaces or

nice dresses as you look at it today you see Obi on the lap of a Moabite woman daughter in law to an embittered person who knew life's struggle wife to a husband of mixed marriage whose mother was years in prostitution

Merry Christmas it doesn't matter what kind of family you came from Jesus can be yours if you will enter in you know there's going to come that time two three days time and I hope you remember somebody's going to come and say time for a family photo or you'll be at a place where you'll be with someone else's family and they'll say can you take the picture for us for our family photo yeah great Christmas is the opportunity to enter into the family photo!

of this sordid story family through whom redemption comes it's the day where you can glory in all of the downside of your own home where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in if you find yourself in sad and lowly plain if you are wishing that God would hover over your life if you are crushed beneath life's heavy load if you are bending low today if your steps are slow if your family is a mess if your future seems not this card is for you our heavenly father we thank you that the bible is not some well dressed prettied up family photo of privileged people but instead that you have seen fit to humble yourself to the condition of our own lives!

that we might fully embrace! your glory your wonder your love and that we might marvel that you would take us into your home press us to your breast and call us your children this is a mystery not that we would love you but that you would love us this is a beauty that you behold our scarred history you are telling us that we just share your own this is a glory both by brilliance and weight that gives hope to all who need it this day lord impress these truths upon our heart in Jesus name amen