

No Little People

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: 30 September 2018

Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0 : 0 0] Father, a lot of times we don't think it, but we really, your word tells us we are completely dependent upon your Holy Spirit. We are completely dependent upon your grace.

And Father, especially when it comes to your word, some of us are very, very smart, have high IQs, very good with words. And Father, we ask on one hand that your Holy Spirit help us to be the best we can be with our minds and our intellects. But at the same time, Father, we give you our mind and we acknowledge that by the mere working of our mind, we can never truly know you, that you need to do a work in us to bring us to you and to form us. And so, Father, we ask for that double work of your Holy Spirit, that triple work that you might help us to use our minds to the best, that you might at the same time humble our minds, that we might know our limits, and that in all things you might draw us to yourself and that you might work at a very deep level, the level of our heart. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated.

I have always, my entire life, struggled with pessimism. I am a pessimist in recovery. And some days I'm not very, very, I fall off the wagon, actually. And I mention this because twice now, I've had this great privilege. Probably most of you don't know this, but twice now I've had this great privilege.

I've been invited to travel to a place in the United States and spend three days with some of the most important and influential Christian leaders and writers in all of the English-speaking world, at least North America. I get to hear Tim Keller and John Piper and Kevin DeYoung and the head of Wheaton and the head of the biggest and most important seminaries and Russell Mills. Like, if you're not a Christian and you're just here as a seeker or a skeptic, you might not know who some of these people are. They're New York Times bestselling writers. And I've twice now had the honor of going there and being there for three days while they talk issues through. And I get to sit and listen to them talk and listen to them pray over each other and share their weaknesses.

And most of you don't know that because I feel so unworthy about that. Like, I feel like, who am I to have had this privilege to go there? I have a great church. We're a tiny church.

[2 : 5 2] And some of these guys have churches that have four, five, six, eight, 10, 12, 15,000 people on a Sunday and they write New York Times bestsellers. And I just feel so unworthy when I'm there. I really do.

I just feel, who am I to be here? And many of us, you know, some of you are optimists. And by the way, if you're an optimist, you need to be in recovery. But that's a separate sermon.

But some of us, you know what it means to sort of always feel a little bit like you're just a little person. You're important. Your life doesn't matter. You're not very successful. You're not very important. And that's sort of just the way you understand yourself. And the Bible text we're going to look at today is a very, very, very powerful Bible text. It's actually a good text as well, optimists in recovery as well. And so it'd be a great help if you all turned in your Bibles to Ruth chapter four, because we're going to look at the end of a story that we've been looking at.

If you don't have your Bibles with you, like I encourage you every week to bring your Bible so you can make notes in it or underline words that are very, very important and precious to you. But if you don't have it, we're going to be having the text on the screen this morning as we read through Ruth four. And just before I start reading, I've compared this book and the sermons on it to watching a BBC series or a Netflix series. And you know how something, if you watch the crown, for instance, I think it's 10 episodes in a season and each episode tells a story. You can watch the episode and you can enjoy it. But if you watch all 10 together, it tells a bigger story. And that's what we've been doing with Ruth. In a sense, it's a four episode Netflix special. And we're on the fourth episode. And by the time of the end of the fourth episode, it's not only a good episode in itself, but it helps us to understand now that when we finish it, sort of what's going on in the book as a whole. And in the first episode, which is Ruth chapter one, it's all about tragedy. It's all about death. And it's all about anger at God.

It's all about a woman named Naomi who loses everything in another land. And a woman from another land who's her daughter-in-law, who's also widowed, and they have nothing. And they make their way back to Israel. And she just blasts God several times. In fact, when she gets back to Israel, to Bethlehem, she tells women, all the women in the village, they can no longer call her by her name Naomi, which means pleasant. They have to call her Mara, which means bitter, because the Lord has made me bitter.

[5 : 18] And then in the second episode, which is Ruth chapter two, we saw a beginning of a change in fortunes. We saw how Ruth, who's the Moabite daughter-in-law, who's pledged herself to Naomi to help her. She goes out and says, well, we can't starve to death. And Naomi's just sitting on her butt doing nothing. And I'm going to go out and I'm going to help with the harvest and try to get some grain.

And in that, those of you, you can go back and listen to it online. We begin to see this theme of providence, how God's strong hand of love, hidden hand of love in the shadows, starts to interact with her life. And by what some would call a coincidence, but the author says is actually God's hand, Ruth ends up meeting a fellow by the name of Boaz, who's at least a generation older than her. And Boaz is very generous to her and helps her. And that's the end of the second episode.

In the third episode, which we looked at last week, there's something which is very remarkable. This story is set in the year 1100 BC. And Naomi, the mother-in-law, who's by the name of Bitter, who wants to be called Mara, she says to Ruth, Ruth, I have a plan. You should go and ask Boaz to marry you. Like, that's a dumb plan, by the way. Okay. Like, this is a stupid plan. I mentioned how in Israelite society, it was very hierarchical and it was very structured. And one scholar guesses that there were 16 different levels in Israelite society. And Boaz, from the evidence, is either at level three or level four from the top. And Ruth is level 16. And Naomi's brilliant plan is that Ruth should go and ask Boaz in the middle of the night if he would marry her. And she's also to ask if Boaz would be the redeemer. And last week, we talked a little bit about what it means in the

Bible to be a redeemer. And a redeemer is a person who takes your insoluble problem and owns it and says, I'm going to roll up my sleeves. You can't solve this problem, but I'm going to roll up my sleeves and I'm going to work on your problem until I've made it right. And he says he's going to do that. He says he's going to marry Ruth and he's going to be there. But there's a big problem.

And the big problem is, is that legally, there's some obstacles morally. And in terms of justice, there's some obstacles to him doing it. And that's what's in a sense, the cliffhanger, the end of episode three. And now we come to the final episode, episode four. So hopefully I haven't lost yet. And here's how the episode four begins. Verse one. Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there and behold, the redeemer of whom Boaz had spoken came by. That's the fellow who had legally, morally, and in terms of justice is the one who should be taking these steps. So, and he says, I'll say it again. And behold, the redeemer of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz said, turn aside, friend, sit down here. And the man turned aside and sat down. Now just pause here for a second. I'm going to talk a little bit more about this at the end, but I want to, if you could put up the point, Andrew, this would be very helpful. The writer here, when he uses the word behold, it's like Boaz is going to go and try to fix a legal problem. He goes to where you fix legal problems.

[9 : 01] And who knows? He might have to have sat there every day for weeks, for months, who knows how long before the guy would be there when he's there. But behold, he's there right away. And this is an ongoing theme in the book of Ruth. And I, I, and I, I'm not going to argue for it. And we're going to talk about it a lot more in our next series, which begins next Sunday. And we're going to start the book of Esther. But this is an example of God's providence. We, Daniel explained very well about the, this prayer that we just prayed for St. Michael and all angels, how we easily believe that we're in an empty world and God is distant and absent. And the only time we know that God is at work if we experience a miracle. But the Bible says the main way we experience God is through providence that in fact, God, the Lord is present, powerful, active, and hidden. The Lord is present, powerful, active, and hidden. I'm not going to argue it, but the whole book of Ruth is illustrating it. And I just want to challenge you to consider it. I just want to challenge you to consider it.

You don't live in an empty universe. You don't live in an empty world. You just, you don't. You know, kids watch Sesame Street. And one of the things that Sesame teaches you other than the alphabet is that you never have to pray and that God isn't in the world.

It trains you in secularism, an empty world. One of the reasons we need to gather together on a weekly basis and to read the Bible throughout the week and to maybe meet in house groups and home groups is we really need a lot of help to counter that. And that's what this text is saying.

The Lord is present. He's present in your life. He's present through providence. And his presence, he's powerful, he's active, and he's hidden. And that's the main way that he relates to us most of the time. Well, that's just, that's sort of part of the big picture of the whole book. And it's, it's that he, and the writer in the Hebrew, it's obvious in the Hebrew, which is behold, like, whoa, what a surprise. Here's the guy right now, right this second. So let's deal with this problem, this legal problem, this moral problem, this problem of justice. And Boaz is going to try to deal with it, see what's going to happen. And so here's how it goes. Verse two.

So Boaz took 10 men of the elders of the city and said, sit down here. So they sat down. Then he said to the redeemer, Naomi, watch my place here, Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. So I thought I would tell you of it and say, buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not tell me that I may know, for there is no one beside you to redeem it. And, uh, sorry, there's no one besides you to redeem it. And I come after you. And the man said, I will redeem it. Then Boaz said, the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also, okay, this is pretty shocking. We're going to talk about in a moment.

[12 : 24] The day you buy the field from the land of hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth, the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead and his inheritance. In other words, he's going to have to marry her. He buys the field and he acquires a woman he is to marry.

Verse six. Then the redeemer said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it.

So that's a, just a couple of things going on in this text. Um, the eight o'clock service, uh, have a really, really good guy who comes every week. His wife is definitely not a Christian.

Uh, very, she's definitely not a Christian. Let's put it that way. And I, I said to him, could you imagine reading this text with your wife? Um, uh, she's very feminist, uh, you know, just, and, and, and I, he said, yeah, boy, that there would be fireworks. Uh, so here the Bible is telling you it's all right to buy a woman to be your wife. I mean, you know what? They probably would say, what can you say? Well, here's the thing, because there's two things about this, a couple of things about this before we go on any further. Those of you who've been here other weeks, you'll remember it's a very, very important thing is why do I, why would I even read a story like this? I read a story like this because Jesus tells me to read a story like this. For some of you say that's even worse. Jesus is telling you to read a story where it says it's all right for a man to buy a woman to have as his wife. And, um, and I said, no, no, the, what happens is that after Jesus rose from the dead, twice, he tells his disciples that you need to read the old, what we call the old Testament, the books in the Bible that were written before the time of Jesus, because everything in those books help you to understand who I am, what I've done for you on the cross, and what it means to follow me as savior and Lord. And if we understand that, that means it relativizes stuff like this. It means Jesus doesn't say, read this because it shows how a man should treat a woman. No, he doesn't say that at all. It helps us to know what parts of the story are parts that we should be following and what parts we should just say, well, that's just how it was back then.

That's just how it was back then. Just for the record, nowhere in the old Testament does it ever say that that's what is right for a man to buy a woman as a wife or that men own women. It doesn't say that anywhere in the old Testament. The Bible comes into cultures where all sorts of terrible things go on and the Bible starts to change the culture as people understand their need to be delivered by the Lord and to live in a certain way. And this story is just telling us that's how things were done back then. It doesn't say we should go and do that as well. It just tells us that's how things were done. Well, and what about this? You know, there's some legal and grammatical complexities about this story and why the guy refuses to do it. And you can ask me about it over coffee afterwards.

[15 : 35] But the main part about it is that the man refuses to be generous. A couple of years ago, quite a few years ago, I did a funeral for a fellow and a single man, never married, never had any kids. And he was very generous. And after the funeral was over during the coffee time, a fellow came up and said, by the way, I was John's accountant. I managed, I just, you know, I helped him with his finances. He was pretty hopeless with money. I made sure he got his income tax files and all of that stuff. And every year I would tell John, you're giving away too much money away. And I said to the guy, so we just did John's funeral. Did he have any money left in the bank? And then I said, oh yeah, he had enough money for a couple of years. And I said, so I guess your advice to him was wrong, wasn't it? That he was way too generous because he died with money in the bank.

And the guy said, I never thought about it. I guess I was wrong, wasn't I? So here's the thing. Okay. If you, as a result of hearing the gospel, you decide you're going to be start, and the gospel starts to shape you and you become more financially generous. And that's what the gospel will do to you. It'll start to make you more financially generous as the gospel is written on your heart. If today you give \$100 to the church, you have \$100 less to spend on yourself. That's how it works. Like don't believe those health and wealth gospel people who say you give \$100, the Lord will give you a thousand. It's baloney. That's a Greek word for it doesn't make any sense. And they're just pulling it out of their butt. It's just nowhere in the Bible. It doesn't work that way. You give \$100, you have \$100 left to spend on yourself. I know you get a bit of an income tax return, you know, back later on, but you still have less money. For a Christian, we understand that it's just, I mean, for everybody, like just you think about it for a second. I think even most secular people, if you could be like in a Christmas carol and you could go and you could be present as a ghost in your funeral, and after the funeral, what would you hope people would say about you? Would you hope that they would say about you, boy, the problem with George is he was way too generous? Don't you think that was the problem with George? He was way too generous? Or would you rather they said, you know, the problem with George is he was so cheap. He was so, so, so, so cheap. What would you rather have them say at your funeral? Like I think most people in Canada would say, boy,

I sure hope they'd say my problem was more in the first case, not the second. So here's the problem. The man who's going to redeem, whoever is going to redeem Naomi, at the end of the day, it's an act of justice, and it's also an act of generosity that will leave him poor. But it's an act of generosity, and it's what the Lord is commanding. The Lord is saying, we are to be a generous people.

You are to redeem people out of generosity. And the man says, I don't want to do that. Because if I lose some money, it's going to hurt me. It's like that, the accountant recommending to my friend John, you're giving away too much money, you're going to die destitute. Didn't die destitute, died with money in the bank. And that's what's going on here in the story. He refuses to be generous, and he refuses to be just. It's going to be very important in a moment. So let's see what Boaz says. Where did I stop? Verse 6. Sorry, verse 7. So verse 6, we'll read verse 6 again.

Poor Andrew. Anyway, then the Redeemer said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. He doesn't want to say, listen, I'm cheap, and I don't like being generous, and who cares what the Bible says. I want to keep my money for myself. Take my right of redemption yourself, or I cannot redeem it. Now, this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging to confirm a transaction. The one, pretty weird, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other. And this was the manner of attesting in Israel. It's how to make the act legal. And he's doing it in front of the ten elders. He's doing it at the city gate. This is a very legal act. It would be like going to a lawyer or somebody who can, you know, sign an affidavit or like whatever. It's just, it's very, very legal. So when the Redeemer, verse 8, said to Boaz, buy it for yourself, he drew off his sandal. Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, you are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belong to Elimelech, and all that belong to Killian and Malon. Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Malon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead and his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day.

[20 : 27] Then all the people who were right at the gate and the elders said, we are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel.

May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah because of the offspring that the Lord will give you by this young woman. Okay, so what's going on? So there you go. So it's all legal, okay? Some of you know, most of you know maybe, that a year ago I had the great honor, although I didn't want to go to Angola, I asked the council to talk about, I was honest that if there was a list of 200 places in the world I wanted to go to, Angola wasn't on it. They speak Portuguese, they don't speak English, it's very poor, there's lots of unexploded land mines, and there's poisonous snakes, and I don't even like non-poisonous snakes, much, never mind boa constrictors and poisonous snakes. So I didn't want to go, but I felt it was the Lord's will. I went to Angola, and I was there on behalf of SIM.

Anyway, one of the things in Lubangu, which is where I was in Angola, is there was a huge gas shortage. Last weekend, many of us were affected by the tornado, and in some parts of the city you couldn't get gas, and as it started to filter out where there were places you could get gas, there could be big lineups. In Bell's Corners, when the power came back on because we lost power, there were 10 or 12 cars lined up to get gas. In Lubangu, I discovered that part of my job when I was driving with Norm was to keep an eye out on gas stations to see if one of the gas stations had gas.

It turned out it wasn't very difficult because there'd be a line of 40, 50, 60, 70 cars and trucks to get in to get gas because it was a big event. That doesn't even count all the scooters.

So when we were coming back from something, we could see that there was gas because there was a long lineup, and Norm said, good, they must have just got the gas because there was only about 30 cars ahead of us or 20 cars ahead of us. So we get in the line, all the three of us, there's a convoy of cars, and our car moved slowly closer, and I got out, wandered around. We had to wait quite a while as the cars slowly moved up. And one of the things I observed when I was at the tanks is that twice during that time period, somebody just came up, and as soon as the person had finished pumping their gas, they just stepped in front of the whole line, got their stuff filled, and walked away.

[23 : 07] And just went to the front of the line. Nobody said boo. I saw it happen twice. I said to Norm quietly, although probably nobody there spoke English. I could have probably spoken really loud.

But I said, like, what's going on? That just seems so wrong. It just seems so unjust. And he said, well, it's Angola. Some people are more important than other people, and everybody recognized it, and they just go to the front of the line. They don't have to wait. And, you know, it's really funny. You know, for so many of us, what goes on in our mind is how terrible that is in Angola. But, you know, the Lord really convicted me of something later on. Later on, it dawned on me that, and I think this is still the case, if you go to Disney World in Orlando, if you pay enough money, you can get a special pass to go to the front of the line and not line up. Sort of shows how it's bad in Africa, but it's all right here in North America for rich people. Whoa, what's wrong with that picture?

Just because you have more money. Anyway, so here's the thing. It's unjust. And now, and you might say, well, okay, let's, let's say there was, you know, George, this rich person or the powerful person, and they, they liked you. They saw you, or maybe because you were white, they said, hey, hey, George, you just come here, and I'm going to put you at the front of the line so that you can get what you need and, and go off. Now, let's be honest. On one level, we'd sort of like that, wouldn't we? Rather than waiting in the hot sun in Angola to bit, but the other hand, we'd know that it was, it was just not right. It doesn't solve my problem in a way that's right. Now, why am I saying this? Last week, we talked about how one of the things that characterizes a redeemer in the Old Testament is that the redeemer looks at, let's say, Laurier, and he sees Laurier has an insoluble problem. Laurier cannot solve his problem or problems, and the job of a redeemer is that the redeemer, Laurier asks the redeemer if he, if the redeemer will redeem him, and if the redeemer redeems and what the redeemer does is he owns the other person, he owns Laurier's insoluble problem.

He owns it. He doesn't say, no, I'll become your coach. He doesn't say, I'll become your guru. He doesn't say, I'll become your trainer, because the problem isn't something that just needs a bit of coaching. It's insoluble. And so the, the redeemer rolls up his sleeve, so to speak, and owns the insoluble problem for the other person and does everything that needs to be done that the other person can't do themselves until the insoluble problem is made right. And when we understand that aspect of a redeemer, it is a very powerful illustration of what Jesus does for it, isn't it?

That what we do is I call out to Jesus and say, Jesus, I have these insoluble problems. I am separate from God. I am going to die. And when I die, my separation from God will continue for all eternity. I have an insoluble problem. Will you redeem me? And Jesus says, I will redeem you. And Jesus, in a sense, rolls up his sleeves and he owns my insoluble problem and he does everything that has to be done. So my insoluble problem will be made right. And you realize all of a sudden why reading a book like Ruth can help you to understand the gospel. And if you don't understand, just you read the book of Ruth, you go, wow, that gives me a bit of an image of what Jesus does for me.

[26 : 41] That's like, that's amazing. But you see here, this tells us something even more important. You see what Jesus does. If you could put up the next point, Andrew, this is what the redeemer, this is what's being shown here in the story, is the redeemer, where's my point here so I can read it?

The Lord makes you right with himself in a way that is right. You see what Boaz does, maybe, I don't know this, you know, we don't know the story, but maybe Boaz was just bigger and stronger and more powerful than the other guy or richer. And maybe Boaz could have just said, well, you know, bleepity bleep you, I'm just going to do it. And if you don't like it, well, sucks to be you.

Suck it up, buttercup. Like, I'm just going to do it. I'm just going to use my power, and I'm just going to do it in a way that's unjust, immoral, isn't legal, and I'm just going to do it. And you know, what we see here, though, is Boaz goes through the legalities of it. He goes through something which is just, which is moral. At no point in time can anybody say that Boaz has acted in a way that isn't right, that isn't just, and he does it in a right way, a just way, a moral way, and he does it all for Naomi, and he does it all for Ruth. And you see, that also helps us to understand something about what, you know, how salvation works. Because you see, at the end of the day, what often happens in spirituality, in fact, it's a big problem in Islam. See, in Islam, who makes it into paradise in Islam, the end of the day, Allah just chooses. I choose you, don't choose you, don't choose you, don't choose you, don't choose you, choose you, don't choose you, don't choose you. Sucks to be all you folks, choose you. Just chooses. Like, how's that right?

How's that just? What we see in the gospel is that the gospel helps us to understand, this helps us to understand that when Jesus comes to make it right for us, he does it in a way that is right.

He says, I know that George isn't able to live a life that fits with heaven. I've lived the life he could not live, and I'm willing to allow my life to stand for his. And I know that if every one of you here in the room knew all of George's thoughts and all of his past and all of his actions, you would say you are not worthy to be a pastor. You're not worthy to be a husband or a dad. You're not even like, I don't know why you're not dead, George, because what you've done, what you thought, you are so horrible. And I know that I cannot pay that demand of justice to the God who sees everything and knows everything and will make everything known. And Jesus says, I know that George can't do that, and I know that things still have to be just, and I will stand in George's place and all of the punishment, all of the penalties that properly should fall on George, they will fall on me.

[29 : 41] And so at the end of the day, after Jesus has died on the cross, God's justice and just the moral order has not been defiled. It's not a matter of favoritism. It's not a matter of power. It's not a matter of injustice. Justice has been met. Morality has been met. And some of you might say, well, George, that might be true, but I don't know. Like, is it really fair? I mean, like, it is fair, George, that somebody would be a judge. There's something that's a bit off about this picture. But you see, this is where the book of Ruth helps us as well, right? Because you see, at the end of the day, all of us, what we want is more than justice. We want justice, and we don't want less than justice, but we know that justice can be cruel. Justice can be very hard-hearted and cold.

And what we want is generosity and justice. We want generosity and justice. And that's what Jesus does for us on the cross. See, that's what Boaz does. Boaz is generous. At the end of this process, he is poor. He does what is right. He does what is moral. He redeems Ruth and Naomi, and he is poor at the end of it because he's generous. And what we understand with Jesus is, you're right, for another person to die in my place, to pay the penalty that I cannot pay, for another person to have their right living account for me. So that I, in a sense, it's right for me to be in heaven. Though justice and morality have all been met, but why would anybody do that?

And Boaz helps us to see that it's out of love. And that's how we start to understand that it's out of a generous love that Jesus would do that. And it's not a type of favoritism, which is plagues Islam, because you see, it's not just, well, if you're white or if you're old or if you're young or if you're good-looking or if you're successful or you're important that Jesus will do it for you.

This offer of generosity and justice is available to every single person. It's just a matter of receiving it. And so we have a bit of a picture when we read the book of Ruth and we understand what Boaz has done and we see his generosity and his justice and his Redeemer and we have a bit of a sense about what it is that Jesus does for us and why we need the gospel and why the gospel is so great and such great news.

Well, what happens? We have to finish the story. This next bit is a little bit painful for people. It's already a bit painful because it's going to be a, like there's, I know many of us here, we're single and we wish we were married. And maybe we have a child or maybe we're not able to have children and we wish that we could. And this story and God's providence and Ruth and Boaz is going to end with Ruth marrying and having a child. But let's look at the story. There's actually something here which is very profound and very hopeful for those of us. I began the sermon by talking about how unworthy I felt being able to spend three days with Tim Keller and John Piper and those guys.

[33 : 12] I just felt really unworthy. Still do. Well, this next bit's really important. Even if it, well, let's read it. Verse 13, so Boaz took Ruth. That's a way of, basically took Ruth means he marries her and she becomes his wife. And he went into her, which is a polite way of saying that he had sex, they had sexual knowledge of each other. And the Lord gave her conception and she bore a son.

You know, this language of gave her conception is really problematic for those of us who struggle with infertility or just wish that we could be married and have a child or have more children.

But that's what it says. And she bore a son. Then the woman 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. 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.

Seven sons is like the perfect number of sons in a culture that values men over women. And Ruth is upheld as better than seven sons. Then Naomi, verse 16, took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse.

It really means his nanny. 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.

[34 : 53] And then there's this very boring bit to end the book, but it's actually in some ways how he helped to understand the entire book. Now, these are the generations of Perez.

Perez fathered Hezron. Hezron fathered Ram. Ram fathered Aminadab. Aminadab fathered Nashon. Nashon fathered Salmon. Salmon fathered Boaz.

Boaz fathered Obed. Obed fathered Jesse. Jesse fathered David. So, just as a bit of an aside, when we were talking about the book of Genesis a year or so ago, one of the things I said, I don't expect you to remember it.

I don't remember most of the things I say, thanks be to God. Well, sometimes not. My wife says, don't you remember when I said that? And I don't. But that's... So, I'm not expecting you to remember it. But depending on how you do the chronology, there's 900 years between Perez and David.

900 years. And it just... Old Testament genealogies aren't what we think of as genealogies. They're talking about significance and connection.

[35 : 59] It would be as if, in Old Testament times, if my great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandson became a pastor of a church, and I was an ancient Israelite, and they were talking about that great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandson.

They would maybe say that that person, we'll call him Ezra, that I fathered him. Because it's making connections and significance. But here's the point.

Ruth is not a great person. Think about it. What's great about Ruth? Lots of people suffered more than Ruth did. Right? I mean, she suffered.

She lost her husband. After 10 years of marriage, they didn't have any kids. And she lost her husband. And she became very, very poor.

And she became an economic migrant. And she pledges herself to help a bitter old woman who just wants to die.

[37 : 00] And she worked very hard. And she ends up marrying. And she has one kid. She's not very great. Right? She's not.

She's a little people. It's like me when I went to that thing. I just felt like the littlest of the littlest of the littlest of the little people. I would think to myself, a lot of these guys, their churches have way more, have like five times more staff than I have on a Sunday morning coming to church.

I'm a little people. But you see, here's the thing which is so remarkable. This is why this genealogy is here. Many people in our day and age get very worried about the idea that there's an overarching story.

Because there's this idea that if there's a big story, a big narrative, an overarching story, that it's either used to prop up the powerful and oppress the weak. Or it's a big story that sort of crushes you.

Like it crushes you. It'll mean the women end up having to wear burqas or something like that. The overarching narrative crushes people and it props up the powerful. But what the Bible says is that there is, in fact, the reason that we tend to make overarching stories of our own is because there actually is an overarching story that's being written by God.

[38 : 26] And in that overarching story, it begins with God having made everything that exists and he makes it perfect. And then we see in Genesis 3 how human beings desire to be like God and take God's place.

And how that brings death into the world. It brings alienation into the world. It brings corruption into the world. And we become constantly addicted to being like God.

And in this moment of death entering the world and alienation entering the world in this big story, the Bible there, right away, God says, listen, you will need a redeemer and I will redeem you.

And then the rest of the Old Testament, the books that are written before the coming of Jesus, are all about how God describes how he will one day come and redeem his people.

And then Jesus is God coming to redeem, to be the redeemer who solves our insoluble problem in a way that is right. And then what we call the New Testament, the books that describe Jesus and describe life after Jesus.

[39 : 29] As we live in this period of the already not yet knowing that at some point in time in the future, Jesus will return and there will be a new heaven and there will be a new earth. All political utopias, every single, I'm not picking on progressives.

If I was saying this in the 30s, I'd say it to Mussolini and I'd say it to the hit and to the Nazis and to the many right wing ideologies. But every attempt at human utopia is wrong.

All progressive thought of the right and the left is wrong. Because Jesus will come back and bring an end to all things and usher in the new heaven and the new earth.

And so there's this overarching big story that's going on. But how does that, that doesn't crush us and it doesn't prop up the powerful. Well, how do we know that partially?

Well, part of the way we know it is because of Ruth. You see, God, when Ruth in chapter one has this powerful time where she says, your people will be my people and your Lord, your God, your Lord, Yahweh will be my Lord, will be my God.

[40 : 42] And it's a story of conversion. She gives herself to the Lord. And what happens is that when she gives herself to the Lord, the story of Ruth, both that which goes on before with all of the tragedy, all of the tears, all of the barrenness, and the story of Ruth that's described here and to the end, Ruth's story becomes part of the big overarching story that the Lord is writing.

And you see, the wonderful thing of the gospel is that this big overarching story that the Lord is writing doesn't crush us.

And it doesn't prop up the powerful. But it does three other things. If you could put up the first point, that would be the, or the third point, but the first of my final three points, which I'll say very briefly. When you are redeemed, you and your story become part of the Lord's big story.

Right? That's the importance of the genealogy. She goes back to one of the actual founders of the 12 tribes of Israel. And the writer points how there's this big thing, how God is at work.

It might seem as if Israel is a failed state. It might seem as if warlords and chieftains are in power. It might seem as if everything is falling apart. But that's what it seems like. But in fact, the Lord is sovereign.

[42 : 07] The Lord is providential. The Lord is present and active. And he is moving history in a direction that will eventually culminate in Jesus and then will culminate in the second coming of the Lord. And he is in control.

He is sovereign. He has not abandoned it. And so this guy, they put this little tiny nobody named Ruth. The writer shows how Ruth is part of this big story that will culminate in David.

You know, in Israel today, they don't acknowledge, of course, Jesus as the Messiah. But what's on the flag? Star of David. Most important person in Israel's history. And we now know that this David is, well, we worship great David's greater son, the Messiah.

And we see the story of Ruth is drawn into this big story that God is still writing today. We live in Ottawa.

And the liberals might think it's their country. And maybe the conservatives hope they'll win the next election and it's their country. And Apple and Google and Amazon sort of think it's their country and their playing field.

[43 : 12] And maybe the forces of the left and the right think it's their country and their playing field. But it's the Lord's field. The Lord has never relinquished sovereignty over the earth and its people.

Never has, never will. He is present and active and powerful and will bring all things to their end. And when we put our hands in the hands of Jesus, our story begins to be taken up and reinterpreted and re woven into the story that the Lord is writing.

Next point, please, Andrew. And in this story, in the Lord's redeemed people, there are no little people. For you are each his son or daughter.

I have no authority to say that. Remember I told you I am a pessimist in recovery. And I can think to myself, because when I get my identity from things other than the gospel, I can think I'm not very important.

But when we're redeemed by the Lord, there are no little people. There are no little people. If you could put up the final point, Andrew. And when you are redeemed into the Lord's big story, your life and actions matter.

[44 : 35] Serving at the door. Caring for the kids in the nursery. Serving coffee. Leaving a home group. Telling a neighbor about Jesus.

Praying for somebody who's sick. Shuffling somebody's yard because they're hurt their back. I mean, their driveway because it's the winter.

Or mowing their lawn in the summer. All done just out of an attempt of being open to the Holy Spirit and following his leading. And they might seem completely and utterly little and unimportant.

But when you know that the Lord is in control and he's writing a big story. And when you give your life to Jesus, he weaves your life and your story into his big story.

It means that life is not one dang thing after another. It means that it's not true that whoever dies with the most toys wins. Which is, of course, dumb. Because when you die, you're poorer than poor.

[45 : 30] You have nothing. It's the dumbest thing in the world to even believe. And, sorry, but it is, right? Like, it's really dumb. Like, I look at that on bumper stickers occasionally.

I think, what? You're just telling everybody you're stupid. Like, really? You die, you have nothing. You're poorer. You're no richer than... Anyway, there you go. Sorry. But, you know, what it's saying is your life...

Even the small acts of service and love. The small acts of forgiveness. It matters. The Lord won't always tell you why it matters right now. But there will come a time for those of us who are in Jesus.

Where we will see the Lord face to face. And we will understand the meaning of our lives. And the way that our small acts of sacrifice and love and witness. Have, in fact, been of unbelievable importance.

In the end of the story. That the Lord is weaving. With little people. Like you and me. Please stand. You know, if you have never given your life to Jesus.

[46 : 29] Jesus, it is by the Lord's providential hand that you are here this morning. It is by providence that you are here. And there is no time better than right now to say, Jesus, could you please be my redeemer?

I have an insoluble problem. And now I have a sense of what it is that you do. And, Lord, I ask you to be my redeemer.

And take my insoluble problem. And make me yours. And weave me into your story. Weave the pain and the glory of my past. And the pain and the glory of my present. And who knows the pain and the glory of the future.

I give you my story. I give you my life. May you be my redeemer. And there is no better time than right now to call out to the Lord for that. That the providential hand of the Lord has brought you here this morning.

And maybe in the big story of our lives, we already know that he is our redeemer. But we have other smaller problems which are insoluble. And there is no better time now than to pour out your heart to the Lord.

[47 : 34] And ask that he would guide and provide. Then right now, it is by providence that you are here. And he will hear your prayers. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

Lord, we thank you that you are in control. We thank you that you love us. We thank you that Jesus on the cross and by his life and death and resurrection, he became our redeemer.

He took on our insoluble problem. And he solved our insoluble problem in a way that was just and moral. And in a way that was generous and full of grace.

And Father, we are so thankful for him. And we ask, Father, that you would just grip us with this story and that you would grip us with the truth that our lives, even with their apparent insignificance and maybe apparent dead-endedness, that in fact, you are weaving our story into yours.

And we ask that you would help us to turn our hearts again to you, to be gripped by you and to grip you. And we ask all of this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior, and all God's people said, Amen.

[48 : 45] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.