

Happily ever after?

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[0 : 00] If you've lost your place, perhaps you'd like to turn back to those verses that we read up here from Ruth chapter 4. We'll be looking at verses 11 through 22. So here we are at the end of the book of Ruth.

This is, if you like, the happily ever after. This is the fairy tale ending. And suddenly everything is coming together. We see here the full completion of the meeting of Ruth and Naomi's niece. And we see here blessings invoked and provided to Boaz, to Ruth, and to Naomi. And beyond that, we see something much more concrete than just happily ever after.

We see not just that vague and implausible hope, not just happily ever after for Ruth and Boaz, but we see the concrete reality of a son. And we see the reality of that son's grandson.

And later they're showing us beyond what the characters see, showing us through to the birth of King David. And in fact, we see even beyond what the narrator sees.

[1 : 06] Because we see beyond King David to great David's greater son. We see from King David to the Messiah from the line of David, to the king who sits on David's throne.

So this book that began in the days of the judges, in those days when there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes, in those days when chaos reigns, this book ends up with the final word of the book, David.

David, the greatest king of Israel. And the story itself takes place entirely during those days with the judges. But this genealogical appendix, if you like, links us right the way through into the monarchy. Hopefully you remember that we've been thinking about this book of Ruth as demonstrating God's providential provision for ordinary people in ordinary life. And as that provision, as that ordinary provision of God reaches full fruition here, as they have the fruit, as they have the family, as they have the descendants, we see that in that ordinary provision for ordinary people, there is also the provision of two extraordinary people, of King David and of King Jesus.

So in these three closing verses we see these different blessings to Boaz and to Ruth, to Naomi, and then if you like at the end we see a blessing to us, to people throughout history.

[2 : 36] For Ruth and for Boaz we have two family blessings that sandwich around two blessings looking for a renowned name. So firstly these family blessings, may Ruth be like Rachel and Leah, perhaps a particularly appropriate blessing because both Rachel and Leah had fertility problems.

Rachel for a long time, though she does eventually bear two boys. And Leah also has a time when she, it says, has ceased bearing children, but then again later has another two boys.

Now we don't know how long exactly Ruth was married to Boaz before Boaz died, but we do know that however long that marriage was, it didn't produce any children. So for Ruth there is at the very least a question mark as to whether it will be a reality that she will have a son, an heir.

The question of whether this promise of a Redeemer will actually work out in full, whether there will be a provider for them in their old age. So this is an important blessing that the people give to Boaz and Ruth as they seek God's blessing on marriage in the provision of children.

And more than that, Rachel and Leah, they're not just another two women who account for fertility issues. These two women are the two sisters who are both married to Jacob who together with their servants, Bilhah and Zilpah, they produce the twelve boys from whom descend the whole of the tribes of Israel.

[4 : 12] So this is a big blessing, isn't it? If Ruth on her own is going to keep up with these four women who produce these twelve boys, that is a big blessing. In fact, I suspect some will say that might be rather too much blessing for a woman to handle.

However, Israel certainly values these large families, doesn't it, as part of our means of protection against enemies. Remember, we're in the days of the judges, the enemies are very real.

And because these sons are the means of production, if you like, you've got to have somebody to show that you're up to the land. A large family is a good thing. Now, we don't actually have any evidence that Ruth did have a particularly large family.

Only Obed is mentioned in it. She might have had that children too, but we don't know. But in any case, maybe the brisem of being like Rachel and Leah, maybe it's not so much the significance of having a large number of offspring.

Maybe they're not wishing that Ruth will have 12 boys, but more that they might be a family of significance. Because Rachel and Leah, yes, there were 12 of their boys, but more than that, they are the 12 boys who form all of Israel, from whom the whole family of Israel descends.

[5 : 27] And if that is these people's prayer, well, that is certainly the answer, isn't it? That Ruth is the mother of a family of great significance. And also, that matches up with the second family blessing, the blessing that the house might be like that of Perez.

His house wasn't particularly massive, but it was, again, hugely significant. The story of Tamar and Judah that's recorded in Genesis 38 is frankly far more unsavoury than even the sibling-spousal rivalry between Rachel and Leah with their one-upmanship and their bringing in their servants and so on.

Tamar's story is worse than that. Tamar denied. Judah's youngest son, as her husband, decides to take matters into her own hands and poses as a prostitute and becomes pregnant by Judah himself.

Now, this is certainly not a great course of action. This is not something to be commended. But as Judah himself recognises, it's her fault was I.S. and his.

And in any case, maybe the townsfolk here see a certain parallel between Tamar and Ruth. Not that they see a parallel in her questionable behaviour.

[6 : 45] Ruth seems to be beyond reproach here. But rather they see a parallel of a foreigner who is seeking to preserve a family life that's threatened with its signature.

A foreigner who steps in, who intervenes, who goes beyond the ordinary, beyond the call of duty to save a family life that is under threat. Certainly that same concern of raising up sons on behalf of the dead is definitely there in the narrative surrounding Tamar.

And that family, Tamar's son, Perez, becomes the leading house of the tribe of Judah and of significance for the town of Bethlehem as well. So Tamar made the name for herself as the founding mother of that house.

And the townspeople asked, might not Ruth, equally willing to be creative, might she not do likewise? That is their wish and they call on God to do so.

Secondly, in between these two family blessings we have two blessings of a renowned name, if you like.

[7 : 55] May you act worthily and may you be renowned. Though as is already a worthy man of Bethlehem, that was how he was introduced to us back at the beginning of chapter 2.

And indeed, Ruth is proclaimed to be a worthy woman in the middle of chapter 3. So if you like, this blessing here is for more of the same.

This would encompass economic prosperity, it encompasses standing in the community, and both of those things are going to be enhanced by a sizable family.

So this is on the piece with the other blessings, that this is calling for God to bless them by means of a family. And secondly, they ask of her Boaz, may you be renowned in Bethlehem?

Or more literally, if you like, may you be called a name. May you be called a name. So this blessing links both backwards and forwards.

[8 : 57] This blessing that he will be called a name links back to what we were thinking about a couple of weeks ago, where we saw that contrast between the other prospective redeemer and Boaz.

The other guy who was so concerned for the preservation of his inheritance, of preserving his name, that he loses everything. And Boaz, who is willing to give up his own name, who is willing to instead preserve the name of the dead in their inheritance.

Boaz, who is willing to give up his name, here the elders write, his name, might be renowned. This also goes forward to verse 14, to this child Obed, whom the women pray will himself be renowned, and this time not only in Bethlehem, but in all Israel.

These are four significant blessings that are primed for Ruth and for Boaz. And who will do them? Who will bring this blessing?

Well, verse 11, of course, there can only be one answer. They call on the name of the Lord, they call on the Lord. Blessings asked of him in verse 11, and delivered by him in verse 13.

[10:14] Now when we come to verse 13, so Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife, and he went into her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son.

That could very easily be the end of the book, couldn't it? She bore a son, and they lived happily ever after. But it doesn't end there, does it? You see, verse 14, we're back to Naomi again.

For all that the book's called Ruth, throughout, at the end of every single episode, we're back with Naomi. Chapter 1, verse 5, the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Verse 18, when Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said, no more. Verses 19 to 22, all about Naomi and her return. Ruth barely features at all.

Chapter 2, where does Ruth go back to after her day without cleaning? Chapter 3, where does she go home after her marriage proposal? Once again, she's straight back to Naomi's house.

[11:15] And here we are again at the end. these verses 13 to 17, if you like, for the conclusion of the whole of 4, 1 to 17, and we're back with Naomi.

Throughout the book, the question has been, how will these two women survive? How will they be provided for? How will they eat in the short term? How will they eat in the longer term? And how will they have the descendants that they need?

If you like, verse 13, Ruth is sorted. Everything is fine. And so we're back again to Naomi. We saw right back in our first week in Ruth that God is deeply concerned with what will become of Naomi. Of what will become of the limineous line. We very easily get tied up in the grand circumstances, don't we, of thinking already down into the genealogy and looking ahead to Jesus and all that and we need to do those things.

But God is never so wrapped up in these kingdom affairs, in the grand movements, that he loses sight of his kingdom people. God never allows the big picture to distract from his care for the individual and neither of them.

[12:37] So for Naomi, here is the joy of the morning after the long night of the name. we've had these chapters of Naomi's grief and struggles and here comes the joy.

Because Naomi now has a redeemer. Naomi is no longer bitter. Naomi is no longer empty. Naomi has a provider for her old age. Naomi has what she's had all along, really.

She has this daughter-in-law, this one who is more to her than seven sons. For a culture that values sons greatly, to say that of a woman is a massive thing.

And we've grown to love Ruth, I guess, over the last few weeks, and maybe that feels like a reasonable statement. We've seen her as a wonderful woman and a worthy woman. But really, I mean, if we're honest, she hasn't actually achieved anything that Naomi's own sons couldn't have achieved if they survived her ship.

They could have had more sons, they could have had an ongoing family life, they could have provided for Naomi's old age. So how is Ruth better than seven sons? What's wrong with the two that she had?

[13:51] Is this just Hebrew hyperbole, if you like? Is this just, isn't she amazing? Well, maybe. But maybe this is a statement of fact. Maybe this is a statement of fact deeper than even the women saying it recognize.

we've not quite got to it yet, but maybe this is foreshadowing that revelation of verse 17. They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Because if Ruth is the one, if Ruth is the means by which Naomi becomes the mother of a rural dynasty, if she is the means by which Naomi is the honored ancestor of Israel's leading family, indeed if she is the ancestor of the Messiah, well then it becomes true that Ruth is greater to her than seven sons.

For Naomi here there is this comprehensive reversal of fortunes. From that deep glow of the famine and the deaths and the bitterness that she was brought to in chapter 1, there's been that upward trajectory throughout, hasn't there?

A few concerns along the way and the dips and worries, but here at last is completion. Here at last is restoration, the end of bitterness.

[15:11] There is no other emptiness, but rather great fullness. And again, the story could end in verse 16. Naomi is fully restored and they all lived happily ever after.

But no, once again, we have verse 17. This child over is the father of Jesse, the father of David. And to make sure you don't miss it there in that half a verse, we get it again in verses 18 to 22. We take us right back to Perez, as it was mentioned in verse 12, and right forwards again to David. In this genealogy of those verses, we see beyond what characters in the story get to see. We can see then that our narrator must be living in the time of David or later on because he knows a full story that Naomi or Ruth or Boaz get to see themselves. And when he records this genealogy for us, when he writes this little addendum at the end, the narrator validates everything that's gone before.

[16:19] Presumably the history of this story has been handed down to him and he takes it and recognizes a greater significance to it.

And this fuller reality that he sees and he records and presents to us, this fuller reality presents a new light on the whole story.

Because what was a story of two struggling widows suddenly becomes this bright, radiant thread in the tapestry of the nation's history.

Indeed, this sparkling moment in the whole history of God's redemptive plan. Suddenly, because this genealogy is here, the question of this book of whether there will be a son, a pawn to Ruth and to Naomi, that question takes on a much greater significance.

Without Ruth, no King David, and without King David, no Messiah. Suddenly, this book is about the preservation of the Messianic line. And suddenly, Ruth, in her unflinching devotion to Naomi, in her depth of commitment to God, suddenly she serves to participate for us another woman who would bear another son of even greater significance.

[17:38] It's hardly surprising, that is it, that Ruth gets that spot in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew chapter 1. One of only four women named in that genealogy, and all four of those women followers.

Suddenly, seeing through this lens of the historical plans and purposes of God, suddenly everything that Naomi and Ruth have suffered, everything that they have struggled through becomes bearable, doesn't it?

Becomes worthwhile. As the book concludes with David, as that last word, as that note of triumph, as it ends there, then whatever has afflicted rethaled over.

For that matter, whatever comes up against the other names that are still here, whatever has come, God's providence has triumphed. God's providential provision has been there, and God's providence will always triumph.

triumph. Because these final verses are here, we can see, when Naomi couldn't, that everything she experienced fits into that pattern of Roman faith 28.

[18:53] And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called according to this purpose. Naomi saw that there was this measure of restoration for her.

She saw that she had her hope again. But I don't think she could have seen how what happened was better than an alternative. I don't think she ever got to see that for us.

But in the unguessable, the unfathomable, incomprehensible pattern of Naomi's sovereign plan for the world, in the face of that pattern, there are what look like insurmountable barriers, what seem like unbearable suffering, that has been overcome.

We see this because we have this here for us at the end, but Naomi did not see it. She saw that restoration, but never the fuller picture, never the full on and one folder.

And that gives us an important caution that commentator Dale Ralph Davis summarises particularly nicely. all of this should teach us caution and wisdom.

[20:08] We simply don't know enough ever to despair intelligently and completely over our seemingly senseless problems, or even over our highly insignificant service.

all of this, the fact that Naomi never saw the full picture, shows us that we never see the full picture. We never see enough that we can look and say, give up, despair, because we never know the full reality until that day when we will stand with Christ in glory and we will see him face to face and we will see a fuller reality.

Until that day, we never know. We never know enough to despair. It is always an overreach for us to do so. We can say we don't understand.

