

Ruth: The Unexpected Daughter

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- [0 : 0 0] Ruth, chapter 1, verses 6 to 18. 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.
- With her two daughters-in-law, she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.
- When Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go back, each of you, to your mother's home.
- May the Lord show you kindness as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.
- Then she kissed them goodbye, and they wept aloud. And she said to her, We will go back with you to your people.
- [1 : 3 3] But Naomi said, Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have another? Any more sons?
- No, 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 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.
- At this they wept aloud. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye. But Ruth clung to her.
- [2 : 3 7] 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. And where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and 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. That's it.
- There may actually be more preamble and introduction in the sermon this morning. Where to start? Oh yeah. Any of you remember the Adrian Plass diaries?
- [3 : 4 7] There's one particular one where he felt he had a word from God which he acted upon. And that word was, buy a bullfrog and call it Kaiser Bill.
- So he wrote that down and popped it into his pocket, his jacket pocket, and it was lately discovered by his long-suffering wife. This may be a word from God or it may just be my own thoughts.

Too hot for soup? Gaspacho. Putting that aside, I'm going back to what Chris was saying about the closing of schools.

One of my colleagues in my office recently was starting reminiscing and remembering with great fondness her former head teacher, one Mrs. Morrison.

But out of this school closing, already they're sharing online one particular DVD of when part of the stage collapsed in front of the Queen while they were singing.

[4 : 49] But in their hundreds, they are making connections with each other again. And I think especially those who sung together in any of the various gospel choirs they had. So even out of this, there are some positives coming for people reconnecting with each other.

And we could pray that even in that reconnecting, people reconnecting with, St. Martin's was a Christian school, and maybe they'll begin to think again on their Christian faith. Thank you.

I also had a sudden revelation as I was sitting there this morning, thinking, actually, this sermon, if it was an exam question, at the end of it, you might think, missed the point of the question.

Because having thinking about what the previous sermons have been like, I'm taking Ruth, but I've taken it as the book, not as the person. So there's not so much of a character study.

Someone reminded me a few days ago that I have actually spoken on Ruth before, back in June 2016, which I hadn't remembered, actually. Although at that time, I spent probably about 20, 25 minutes only on part of Chapter 3.

[6 : 06] So I've got four chapters, so four times as much time means about an hour and a half, roughly. Don't worry, it'll be a bit quicker than that. Could you put the first slide...

...on some of what Emily was saying last week when she was talking about Rahab, and she mentioned the women that are mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus.

And I went and had a look at that, and it doesn't seem to be any rhyme or reason that connects these particular women, of which Ruth is one. But I had a quick look and saw what was going on with each of these, and there was a sort of vague connection with a later part of the sermon.

So if I press the right button... Yes, gone in the right direction. Tamar, who maybe had been a Canaanite, possibly or probably wasn't an Israelite.

She pretended to be a prostitute, and she had anonymous sex with her father-in-law. She gave birth to twins, of whom Peretz appears in the genealogy of Jesus.

[7 : 19] Rahab, as we learned last week, actually was a prostitute, actually was a Canaanite, and therefore not an Israelite, and was the father of Boaz, who appears in the genealogy of Jesus.

Bathsheba, possibly a Hittite. She might have been an Israelite, but she was possibly a Hittite. She was married to a Hittite. She was raped. If you read carefully the story of David and Bathsheba, it doesn't come across as consensual, really.

She then ended up marrying David, which was probably also not a free choice. She ends up being the mother of Solomon, who appears in the genealogy of Jesus.

And this morning, we are going to be looking at Ruth and the Book of Ruth, who sits between Rahab, who is her other mother-in-law, and Bathsheba, who marries Ruth's great-grandson, David, who, of course, also appears in the genealogy of Jesus.

Ruth herself was a Moabite, so again, not an Israelite. All these non-Israelite women appear in the genealogy of Jesus. And they were forbidden to marry into the Moabite tribe because of the Moabite's sexual immorality and worship of false gods.

[8 : 43] So Ruth. Possibly a question mark after that might have been more appropriate. So Ruth. And the four chapters of Ruth.

Let me explain. Actually, there's too much, so I'll sum up. Chapter one. Naomi and her husband and two sons leave their homeland in Judah because of a famine.

The sons each marry a Moabite woman, which they're not supposed to do, Orpah and Ruth. Later on, Naomi's husband and both sons die. Naomi hears that the famine that she left in Judah is over, so makes plans to return home.

Naomi blesses her daughters-in-law and sends them back to their own families. Orpah goes. Ruth refuses. And commits herself to Naomi and to Naomi's God.

They return to Bethlehem where Naomi is welcomed back but declares herself to be called Marah, which means bitter, because of how she feels about her circumstances.

[9 : 51] The harvest begins. Chapter two. Ruth goes gleaning and ends up in the fields of Boaz. Boaz, who happens to be related by marriage to Naomi.

Boaz makes Ruth's gleaning arrangement safer and more official. Boaz blesses Ruth because of her commitment to Naomi. Naomi recognises that Boaz is subject to certain cultural obligations towards herself and Ruth.

Chapter three. complicated goings-on at the threshing room floor. And this is where my email exchange with someone seven years ago happened.

And I re-read the exchange we had then and a bit more around this. And in the end, sex may or may not have happened. On balance, it probably didn't because when it happens in the Bible, it's usually made fairly clear, even with metaphor.

And there's nothing in the metaphors used in this particular chapter three that strongly suggests that sex happened. But whatever did or didn't happen, certainly at the end of it, Boaz and Ruth's relationship was closer than at the start.

[11 : 17] Chapter four. There is a closer kinsman than Boaz, but he declines his cultural obligations as he doesn't want to marry Ruth because then that risks his lands and property moving out of his immediate family.

So in the end, Boaz and Ruth get married and have a son. Obed, father of Jesse, father of David, the town's women praise God because of his, that's God's provision for Naomi.

So is it the book of Ruth or is it actually the book of Naomi? I'm not going to answer that or even address it. So very briefly, running through the four chapters of Ruth, it's a story of redemption, of buying back.

And we know that our Christian story is a story of God through Jesus buying us back. We've deserted him, but we have nothing with which we can pay ourselves to buy ourselves back into his kingdom.

Just as the prodigal son was left with nothing, his father welcomed him back and he paid the price of a fattened calf, which he could have sold probably for a good deal of money.

[12 : 38] And we see just an overall general picture of Christ the Redeemer in this story and our redemption. Thinking of Naomi, a husband and two sons in a foreign country, they all die.

She's left alone with no one to provide for her. Her daughters-in-law aren't even of the same tribe or the same faith. And although she describes herself as bitter, there is clearly hope within her feelings of going back to her own country, back to where there is no longer a famine.

And even with her devastation of loss, there was still hope. Those circumstances, they didn't define her, they didn't determine her future, but that's because she recognised that she herself had to take some action.

She didn't just allow the circumstances to happen and to continue. She made a decision and then she acted upon her decision. And then we see as she worked on that decision to go back to her own country, to make no obligation on her daughter-in-law to go with her, we see that one of her daughter-in-laws, Ruth, says, no, I'm going to commit myself to you and I'm going to commit myself to your God.

And I think that talks to the character and the practice of Naomi because it tells us that she must have had an active faith because otherwise Ruth would not have thought it worth buying into.

[14 : 19] It was not something that was secret that Naomi hid from her daughter-in-law. It was something that Ruth had seen being worked out and having seen it being worked out thought, yes, this is something good.

This is something positive. Even if you, Naomi, say, God has held his hand against you because of your loss, I can still see something bigger in your God.

doing the right thing may require sacrifice.

So for Ruth, she decided that the right thing was to follow Naomi, sacrificing, as she probably thought, the opportunity to marry someone in the Moabite tribe, one of her own people, probably someone nearer her own age, and to have security amongst her own people and her own history of worship.

But as I said, living out our faith, as Naomi did, can lead others to faith. I would encourage you to go back and read the book of Ruth in all four chapters.

[15 : 36] It doesn't actually take that long to do because it reads as a very nice story. It doesn't have lots of heavy theology like some of Paul's writings, for example.

But looking back on the different things that have come out of reading Ruth, just a few pointers towards God. God uses ordinary people.

people. There was nothing particularly special about Naomi or Ruth. They weren't daughters of great rulers of kings.

They weren't sisters of rulers or kings. They weren't part of the religious ruling establishment either. They were ordinary people.

And some of the other women I've mentioned, Tamar and Bathsheba and Rahab. There was nothing particularly special about them or the positions they had before God used them.

[16 : 44] And obviously out of those particular examples, but also to a degree Naomi and to a certain extent Ruth because she also had lost a husband and a wider family. but particularly for Tamar and Bathsheba and Rahab.

God uses damaged people. He doesn't look for the perfect person and think there's someone I can use. He looks at you and says even if you're damaged I can still use you.

He used Naomi and her knowledge, sorry, I don't need to press that do I? Well we'll stick with that for the moment because it won't go back.

God used Naomi. She had knowledge of the way things worked culturally back in Israel and even though she felt bitter she did not allow herself to sink into bitterness and to forget everything around her if you like as we say these days have a pity party in the corner on her own.

She used her knowledge and understanding of the culture and the people to work out some sort of plan. God can use heartbroken people Naomi and Ruth.

[18 : 04] God can use desperate people Tamar especially. She was desperate. Her father-in-law should have provided her with his third son to marry but he sent Tamar away to live with her family rather than keeping her within his family waiting to marry the third son.

So she became desperate and we might say that in her desperation she committed horrendous sin but God still used her. And also for Ruth coming back into Bethlehem into Judah into a place that was not her own people gleaning round the outside of the fields so both literally and metaphorically on the margins.

God can use people on the margins. You don't have to be in the middle of church life. You don't have to be in the centre of the place where you work. You don't have to be in the centre or the most important person in your family.

God can use you however central or however far apart from the middle you feel. And for our part God asks us to be faithful.

Faithful as Ruth was to her mother-in-law knowing that she already had a strong relationship with her mother-in-law that was more important to be faithful to than going back to her previous own people.

[19 : 33] God asks us to be righteous. So Boaz was righteous. He did the right thing by Naomi and Ruth.

God asks us to be dutiful. Sometimes a duty to our family sometimes a duty to our customs and culture. And God can work through the laws and customs of the land.

A miracle isn't always needed. The story of Ruth is a plan or a story of how a plan to use what happens in the culture and the laws and the expectations of people at that time to bring about a positive marriage.

But even within that we can see that this marriage included a degree of love and was not just a financial and practical arrangement. So often we're looking for a miracle when a miracle isn't needed but just to use the things that we know and already have to hand.

so Ruth was an unexpected daughter. She was used by God.

[20 : 58] She became part of the genealogy of Jesus. She committed herself to following the instructions of her mother-in-law even when they seemed strange.

Go and sleep at the feet of a man at the end of his working day. Yes, mother-in-law. Rather than what on earth am I doing doing this?

If you think you're ordinary, if you think or know that you're damaged, even if you're heartbroken or feel desperate or feel as though you're on the margin, that doesn't mean that God hasn't noticed that you're there.

It doesn't mean that God can't use you. Thank you. Thank you.