

Fullness

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Preacher: Paul Dudley

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 17th of March 2002. The preacher is Paul Dudley.

His sermon is entitled Fullness and is based on Ruth chapter 4. Father we thank you for the great kindnesses that you show us.

We thank you for the way that you have spoken to us. We pray that you will be with us now. That you will show your kindness upon us by helping us to hear the words that you are saying. Father that you help us to have ears that are open and hearts that are ready to serve you.

We pray that you will help me also in your kindness. We pray this in your son's name. Amen. The Macquarie Dictionary describes fullness.

That's F-U-L-L-N-E-S-S. Fullness as the state of being full. I'll say that again.

[1 : 05] The description of fullness, the dictionary has it, the state of being full. So I thought I would just look up what does it mean to be full. Well, being full has this idea of being full up.

The state of being filled to the utmost capacity. To be complete. Entire. So I guess it has this notion of, if you want to be a state of being fullness, of having fullness, is this state of being complete.

Of being entire. Of being filled up to the utmost. Well, as a child, I guess I reflect back on my childhood. And the points why I think of my fullness, that state of being entire, of being complete, are times of parties.

You know, you're a little kid, you go to a party and there's the lollies, the cake, the lollies, the chips, the games, the lollies, all those lovely balloons.

And the lollies. Well, I thought nothing could be better than going to a party. It was my state of being full.

[2 : 20] It was great. Fullness. Fantastic. The problem was, my eyes were too big for my head. Inevitably, I ended up vomiting at the end of each party.

If I would have known, that poor Collier was going to use things against me, now perhaps I may not have used that illustration, but I just couldn't help myself going to parties. I would just keep on eating lollies and food, and it was just fantastic.

Until I was over full. Well, today we're going to be looking at, in this passage, some characters, some characters, who have a far richer fullness, than me at parties.

Ruth and Naomi. For those who haven't been here, we've been working through the book of Ruth. In chapter one, we saw at the end of it, both Naomi and Ruth, coming back from the foreign land, of Moab.

In Moab, terrible disaster has fallen upon Naomi and her family. She went there with her husband, and two sons. Her husband dies, her two sons die, but not before being married.

[3 : 30] One of them, one of the daughters-in-law of Naomi stays, but the other comes back with her. Ruth. And so Ruth and Naomi, come back to Israel.

And as Naomi walks into the land, she speaks of her emptiness, of being gutted. She speaks of having her, just been utterly empty.

She has no food. She's looking for food. Little does she know, that there standing next to her is Ruth. In chapter two and three, we see the way that, they go seeking for food.

And for marriage. And at the end of chapter two, we saw last week, that Ruth and Naomi were filled. They found food. God richly blessed them.

And they had this great food. The famine was at an end for them. We also saw, at the end of last chapter, Boaz, this close relative of Naomi, was going to sort out and make sure, that Ruth would get married.

[4 : 39] Ending her sadness. Ending the emptiness of their lives. And so we left at the end of last week, a couple of unresolved issues. Will Ruth marry Boaz?

Or will she marry another? For Boaz mentioned last week, that there was another who was closer. For as a part of the custom of Israel, those who were a part of the family, it was their role to redeem them.

A kinsman redeemer. To bring them to fullness. But there was one closer than Boaz. One who was the next of kin. And so Boaz, as we saw at the end of chapter three, sets out to the gates to sort this out.

The other problem that we find, the unresolved tension is, Naomi, she's had a fill of food, but she still has no one to complete her fullness.

She's lost her two sons. She has no children. She is still not full. Well today we're going to see the fullness for these two women come.

[5 : 44] Through great kindness. You might like to have the chapter open in front of you. You'll find it on page 212, chapter four. The opening scene starts, there is Boaz heading towards the gates.

Now the gates of Bethlehem were a place of great, a significant place. It was the place where Boaz was going to try and sort out this problem of marriage for Ruth. You see, the gates were a place where people would go through to go out to the fields.

It was a place where people would go en route to different places. The gates was a central place where people would go through, making it a good place for Boaz to go. But also the gates were a place of legal transaction.

What would happen at the gates, the city was obviously quite full inside and not much room for people to meet. But at the gates there was a little bit of room. A congregation would meet there. People could meet there. It was a place like a court, a place where legal transactions could occur. There were benches in the wall and inside the wall as well as they were going through.

[6 : 49] And it would be just this area where they could sort things out. Well, we see there in verse 1 that no sooner had Boaz gone up to the gates and sat down that the next of kin should turn up.

One of the great things that we've been seeing through this book of Ruth is the way that God has been there in the background guiding things. Here we see, just by chance, the next of kin should happen to walk by just as Boaz gets to the gates.

Here is God again in the background. Well, Boaz says, come over and sit down. Come over, friends. Sit down here. And he went over and sat down.

Note here in this verse and the verse next after verse 2 the way that Boaz is a man of great standing. He's a man of authority. He's an important man.

He says to the guy to come over and what does he do? He comes over and sits down. Then Boaz, to make sure that he's got a group of people witnessing the transaction that is about to happen, calls 10 people over, 10 elders and they sit down as well.

[7 : 54] And so there we have this little huddle of 12. There they are. You can imagine those who are around there trying to listen in. What's happening over there? There's Boaz.

10 leaders. What's happening? And all of them trying to listen to what is about to happen. Well, Boaz gets straight to the point. He tells the next of kin that Naomi has come back and that she has some property that she wishes to sell.

And that, as the next of kin, it's his responsibility if he wishes to take this property back. Now, if you remember, Boaz has gone there to sort out the marriage of Ruth.

But here is Boaz talking about property. No mention has been up to this point. But Boaz is very shrewd here. Very shrewd. He's a wise man.

He lets this next of kin know there is property involved in this whole thing. Well, he tells them about this property and in the end we see there at the end of verse 4 that he says this is the next of kin not Boaz.

[9 : 05] He says, I will redeem it. And why wouldn't he? Here he was getting a piece of property with no strings attached. Ruth was pretty old.

She wasn't about to have any children. I mean, not Ruth, Naomi, sorry. Ruth, well, he didn't really know much about Ruth but he knows that Naomi's not going to have children so therefore when Naomi dies the property will be his.

It's going to be great. It's going to be more inheritance for himself. Things are fantastic. This is good news for the next of kin. But before he starts getting excited about this, Boaz butts in.

You see there in verse 5. Then Boaz said, the day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi you are also acquiring Ruth, the Moabite, the widow of the dead man to maintain the dead man's name of his inheritance.

Oh, there's a string attached here. You take the land you also get Ruth. Oh, she's a Moabite and if you're going to redeem the land and sort out this whole problem here then you need to sort out the fullness of Ruth.

[10:09] You need to do what is right by her also. Listen to what the words of the next of kin says. At this the next of kin said, I can't redeem it for myself without damaging my own inheritance.

Take my right of redemption yourself for I cannot redeem it. Hey, if I take Ruth it's not going to be all that good for me. For the next of kin realises that once he takes on Ruth if he marries Ruth then if there's going to be children there then well he's going to have to pay some child support.

Not only that, once he buys this land also, once this child grows up that child is going to be looking after land, not him. He won't get the land the child will. And not only that, when he dies some of his inheritance is going to have to go to the child, one of Ruth's children.

children. This is not a wise move. His inheritance will be very, you know, it's going to be take away from his inheritance. I can't do this. I cannot redeem it.

Well, as was the legal custom we have the storyteller informs us at this point that there is a legal custom. A sandal custom. This seems very unusual but it's called a sandal custom.

[11:31] And we see there in verse 7, now this was the custom in the former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging. To confirm a transaction the one took off a sandal and gave it to the other. This was the manner of attesting in Israel.

Now can I just say people would be very glad not to do business with me. Very, very pleased because I have pretty smelly sandals I'm afraid. But that was the custom.

And so we see in verse 9, verse 8, Boaz accepts the sandal. The bloke takes off his sandal and goes, look, I can't redeem this, I don't want the land, you take the sandal.

And in verse 8 we see that Boaz takes the sandal. He takes it. And in verse 9 we see that with a sandal in hand he exercises his right to redeem Naomi and Ruth.

Let me read it to you. Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, Today you are witnesses that I have acquired from the hand of Naomi all that belong to Elimelech and all that belong to Chilion and Malon.

[12:40] I have acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Malon, to be my wife, to maintain the dead man's name of his inheritance in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and from the gate of his native place.

Today you are witnesses. We have been building up to this moment. Here is Boaz about to obtain Ruth as his wife.

This is fantastic news. In verse 11 and 12 those who are sitting there, the elders, they cry out a great blessing. Then the people who are sitting at the gate amongst the elders said, We are witnesses.

Listen very carefully. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into the house like Rachel and Leah who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephra, bestow a name in Bethlehem and through the children that the Lord will give you by this young woman.

May your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah. A blessing. They say, Look, we have witnessed it. This is great news. May your family be a great family.

[13:53] May it be a family like Rachel and Leah. Rachel and Leah are the women who end up having 12 sons that end up being the nation of Israel.

May you be a great family like this. May your name be great in Bethlehem. May your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah.

This family, Perez, was a great family out of all the 12 tribes. It was one of those elite tribes. A great tribe. May you have a great tribe here.

Note these points here because they're little hints of what is to come. Little hints of what is to come. Well, in the rest of the chapter we come to the climax.

The first 12 verses, it's not the climax. It's just setting the scene for what is about to come. But there are many climaxes here. Three in fact.

[15:00] The first climax we see there is the climax between the story of Ruth and Boaz. So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife.

When they came together the Lord made her conceive and she bore a son. What a great climax. It's like the end of those romantic comedies, isn't it?

You get to the point they're married or they're riding off into the sunset or they've got a child now. It's that last scene in those great movies.

Here we have the climactic scene for Ruth and Boaz. They're married. And not only that, they have a child.

Note one thing though. Note that the son is a gift of God. The Lord made her conceive. Again, we see God's hand in this.

[15 : 58] Well, that's the first climax. Let's look at the second climax. The second climax is that of Naomi. If you remember, Naomi was empty.

But here we're going to see her great climax. Ruth is full now. We've seen her great fullness. She's married with a child. Naomi. Let's have a look at her. Verse 14.

Then the women said to Naomi, Blessed be the Lord who has not left you this day without next of kin. 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, has born him. The women come rushing up to Naomi.

A son's been born. It's a boy. Isn't this great news? This is fantastic. The emptiness that Naomi felt of not having a next of kin she now has.

[17 : 05] Note a few things here. Note how they say, Blessed be the Lord. God is the one who has brought this about. God again is in the background here.

He is the one who is responsible for all of it. They pray that this person may be famous in Israel.

Note how this is an extension. The elders pray that the children may be famous in Bethlehem.

But the women are saying, May they be famous in Israel. A little hint here for what is to come. Note also in verse 15 how he will be a restorer of life.

A family line for Naomi. Note also that this child will also be a nourishment. It will provide nourishment for Naomi.

Well the two great problems that Naomi had at the beginning of the book that have been destitute, not having any food and not having any children has been fulfilled.

[18 : 13] Note also the mild rebuke that the women bring to Naomi. Naomi said when she came into the city to the women, I am empty. Utterly empty.

But the women here say, you are loved by Ruth. You didn't come back completely empty. You came back with Ruth. And she has shown great kindness to you.

She is better than seven sons. Seven sons was a way of saying that was the perfect number. To have seven sons was a great thing. It was a great blessing.

She is better than the seven. We are going to see why in a moment. Well that is the second climax. The first climax we see the great kindness to Ruth and Boaz. The second climax is that of Naomi.

But then we have a third climax which is a bit of a surprise in this whole story. The women in verse 17 say this, the women of the neighbourhood gave him a name saying, a son has been born to Naomi.

[19 : 21] They named him Obed. Listen very carefully. He became the father of Jesse, the father of David. Here is the great climax of the book.

This family that we have been following for so long is going to be the family of David. Great King David. The one who would bring security for Israel.

If you remember back at the very beginning, you might even like to turn back to chapter 1, verse 1. It says, in the days of judges. The days of judges were a terrible time. A time of disarray where they lacked leadership.

Here is the way that God provides for Israel. Here is the way that God brings great kindness to Israel by providing a king for them. Note how that King David does not become king because of any shrewd politics or any clever tactics.

The book of Ruth shows very clearly that King David is brought about because of God's divine guidance and care. This is the purpose of the book, to show the way that God cares for Israel.

[20 : 45] What a great kindness that God has shown to Israel, bringing about a king for them. salvation. What are we to make of this final chapter of Ruth?

It's kind of difficult to try and work out how we apply it to ourselves. A story that happened so long ago. The first thing that comes out of this chapter is the way that it shows God's great plan of salvation.

To understand this, we're going to have to take a little trip back through the Bible. At the beginning of the Bible, we see in Genesis 1, God creating a great world.

On this world, he places Adam and Eve. He places mankind to rule there, under him. They're in relationship with God and things are good. In Genesis chapter 3, we see where Adam and Eve reject God.

They reject his authority and the relationship is broken. is broken between themselves, between the world and God.

[21 : 56] In chapter 3, we see a little hint that God is going to deal with this problem of broken relationships, of the relationship between humans and God. This great plan of salvation, God's rescue plan.

In chapter 12, God speaks with Abraham. He tells him about his great rescue plan, the way that he's going to bring about this salvation. He tells them, through your family, Abraham, I'm going to bring great blessing.

I'm going to bring you into a new land. I'm going to restore things the way that they should be. It's going to be a great blessing, not to you, but also to the ends of the earth.

You might like to flip to Matthew chapter 1. As I continue this story, you'll find it on page 783.

783, Matthew chapter 1. Because this great plan of salvation continues. From Abraham on, through the rest of the Bible, we see the way that God brings about his salvation.

[23 : 06] He brings about his plan of bringing people and God back together again. you see there, in Matthew chapter 1, verse 2, Abraham was the father of Isaac.

In Genesis, we read about Isaac. Then we see about Jacob, and we keep on going through all the different generations, the way that God works through these generations. There are great miracles, the way that Moses comes along and they are brought out of the promise out of Egypt, the way that God cares for them, the way that God brings them through the Red Sea.

And then in verse 5, we see there how Ruth fits into this story. Ruth fits into God's plan of salvation.

And Salmon, the father of Boaz, by Rahab, and Boaz, the father of Obed, by Ruth, and Obed, the father of Jesse, and Jesse, the father of King David.

Here we have a genealogy, a list of all the people that are bringing out God's salvation plan. King David, great King David.

The book of Ruth shows how God works in the ordinary lives of people. God brings about his salvation plan, not by great miracles, not by the opening of the Red Sea, but by this family, by the way that people interact.

[24 : 34] God brings about God's great plan of God. He points to an even greater king that is to come.

As you read through the list there, you can see more people, more and more, name after name of people, as they look forward to this great king who would turn up, God's great plan of salvation.

In verse 12, we see that Israel keeps on stuffing things up and so they are taken off to Babylon. But God doesn't forget his promises to Abraham, his great plan of salvation.

And we see right at the end of the list, the Messiah is born. Verse 16, and Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

Ruth fits into this plan of salvation. salvation found in the Messiah, Jesus. God's great plan fulfilled in Christ.

[25 : 41] What a great kindness that God has shown. A great kindness to us. For it is Christ who brings about salvation.

Bringing about that broken relationship, fixing it up, rescuing us. As we read through the rest of the book of Matthew, we see the way that Jesus brings about this plan of salvation.

The way that he brings about blessing for the nations. A blessing that was promised to Abraham. A blessing to the nations, which includes us.

You see, Ruth was a foreigner. She was outside God's people. Yet she comes in under God's wings. Through Matthew, we see the way that the gospel goes out to the nations.

The way that many people, many nations, different tribes and people are to come into God's great blessing. What a great, no, no, what a supreme kindness God has shown.

[26 : 57] That we can be a part of God's rescue, that we can be a part of God's rescue plan. It's not our cleverness or shrewdness, wisdom, power or might, but God's divine providence.

God's divine working out, as we see in the book of Ruth. You may not feel like you have every spiritual blessing.

You may not feel like you are completely full. But in Christ, those who trust in Christ, we have every spiritual blessing.

When Christ comes again, this great kindness we will see. We only see in part at the moment. When he comes again, we will see it in full. When Christ comes again, we will see the great kindness of salvation shown to us.

So what does that mean for us now? We've got no room for boasting. God is the one who is working behind the scenes. All we can do is look humbly to the cross.

[28 : 04] God is the one who is going to do. God is the one who is going to do. God is the one who is going to do. God is the one who is going to do. Well, the second thing that we see from this fourth chapter of Ruth is the way that people lived under the law.

You see there, Ruth, finally coming fully under the house of Israel, coming into Israel. She is completely there. She has been married to an Israelite to Boaz.

But remember, she is a Moabite. The book goes at length to tell us time and time again she is a Moabite. She is a foreigner. And this causes us a bit of problem.

As I mentioned in the first chapter three weeks ago. For in Deuteronomy, the law tells us that the Israelites were not to bring the Moabites into the assembly of Israel.

The Moabites were not to come into the assembly of Israel. How do we understand the law then? How does the book of Ruth interpret the law? Is the book of Ruth saying, well, you don't have to worry about the law.

[29 : 11] Back here, you know, it doesn't really matter. You can do what you want. It doesn't matter that a Moabite comes in. No, I don't think that's what it's saying. Because as we've looked through this fantastic book, we've seen the way that God, a way that Boaz has been at pains to keep meticulously the other laws.

Think back to the way the gleaning. When Ruth went out to the fields to pick up the grain. A part of the law. Providing for the widow and the landless alien.

Note the way that Boaz brings about the redemption of property through Kingsman's Redeemer. Note the way that Boaz does everything by the letter.

Boaz is a law keeper, not a law breaker. Yet he marries the Moabite. How are we to bring these two things together? Well, I think life always is more complex than the law can deal with at times.

Here we see Ruth the Moabite. But not only is she a Moabite, she's a widow. And she's a landless alien in Israel.

[30 : 29] She seeks to take refuge under God, under Yahweh's wings. Here we see a loving kindness shown to her.

Here we see the spirit of the law being fulfilled in this letter. You see, the spirit of the law is loving kindness. It weighs up the matter.

It looks at this situation. It goes, she is a widow and an alien without land. Loving kindness.

The book here shows that the spirit of the law is loving kindness. The letters may say things but behind what the actual law says, what it's driving at is loving kindness.

When we go to the New Testament, we see that Jesus fulfills the law through what? Through loving kindness as he dies on the cross for us.

[31 : 36] Loving kindness fulfilling of the law. Because of what Christ has done, we are no longer under the law. But as Christians, we are called to live as God's people.

We are called to live lives of loving kindness. To live lives that imitate Christ. This is picked up throughout the New Testament.

Kindness is a leading theme throughout. It's a virtue, a fruit of the spirit. Kindness. When Jesus spoke about things, he said, Jesus summed up the law as love of God and neighbor.

And this captures the essence of what Ruth is teaching about loving kindness being the fulfillment of the law. We are to be people of loving kindness.

Are you people of loving kindness? How is it that you speak to one another? How is it that you are using your money, your time, your energy?

[32 : 47] We are to be people of loving kindness because of what God has done for us. I love watching TV ads. TV ads are great.

I think there are some very clever TV ads out there. Many of them try to tell us the way to fullness. During the Olympics, we saw the AMP ads trying to tell us that fullness is found in AMP.

You see this guy and he's looking at someone and he sees himself 30 years on. I don't know if you know the one. He's looking at himself there and the bloke beside him says, you know, AMP, it'll get you there.

Look at the security he's got. Look at the fullness that he's got. I think to myself, what will I be like in 30 years' time? I imagine I'll be a little bit fuller as well. Look at the TV ads for the AFL.

There's this great ad at the moment telling us that the fullness of life is AFL. It's more than a game. It's life itself.

[34 : 00] Fullness is found in this game. Well, Wayne Carey, he didn't think that fullness was found there. He went looking elsewhere.

You also see the TV ads talking about fullness being found in being slim. of losing weight. You lose weight, you'll have the fullness of life.

It's a fullness in emptiness. All these different things the TV ads tell us about fullness. Well, the book of Ruth tells us a very different thing about fullness.

It tells us that fullness is found in the loving kindness that God shows us. That's where fullness is found. in the loving kindness of God.

The book of Ruth is supremely about kindness. Kindness shown between people. Kindness shown from God. Kindness shown to you.

[35 : 06] I pray that we may learn more about the fullness that is shown to us. That is ours shown to us in the kindness of Christ. Christ. And as a result we may live lives of kindness.

That we will be people of kindness. For this is the very character of God himself. Let's pray. Father, we do thank you for the book of Ruth.

We thank you for the great kindness that we see there shown, that you showed to these people in this book. Father, we pray that you help us to understand more of the fullness that is ours in Christ. The great kindness that you have shown us. Father, help us to be people who are kind also. Amen.