

Ruth 4

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[0 : 0 0] 124. It's the season of Advent. We're looking at the book of Ruth. Today we come to the conclusion of our series. The book of Ruth is set in a dark time.

In a society of turmoil. Due to violent attacks. Family brokenness. Cross-cultural suspicions. The time of God's people. Individually and corporately battled depression, grief, and loneliness.

This is a world not so different. But in the midst of this dark and broken world we see God's merciful intervention on behalf of three otherwise unknown people.

Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. But God's provision for these three otherwise unknown people is part of the larger story of God's provision for his people as a whole.

God brings life and hope to a broken family and God's also bringing life and hope to his broken people. And as we see through the events of this book God was raising up a king to lead his people Israel, David.

[1 : 0 6] But God was also preparing the way to the greatest king of all for the Messiah, Jesus. Who came from the lineage of Ruth and Boaz. So we've entitled this sermon series Prelude to the King.

If you enjoy this series, if you want to dig deeper, if you want to share the message of this book with someone you love and care about, I want to recommend the book I recommended three weeks ago, Paul Miller's book, A Loving Life.

It sold out, but we ordered more copies. So they're down in the book stall, five bucks each. They're more expensive online. But it's, I just found a really insightful book into looking into the book of Ruth and meditating on what it means to live a life of love as Christ has loved us and has broken the world.

Alright, let's read Ruth chapter four. We're going to be looking, I'm going to sort of take a big picture approach today to the book of Ruth. So we're not only going to be looking at chapter four, but this is the conclusion to the story and what we haven't read already.

So, Ruth chapter four. Now, Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there and behold, the Redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, turn aside, Fred, sit down here.

[2 : 1 9] And he turned aside and sat down and he took ten men to the elders of the city and said, sit down here. So they sat down. Then he said to the Redeemer, 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 I come after you.

And he said, I will redeem it. Then Boaz said, the day you buy the field from the 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.

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. Now this was the custom in former times in Israel, concerning redeeming and exchanging.

To confirm a transaction, the one threw off his sandal and gave it to the other and this was the matter of attesting in Israel. So when the Redeemer 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 Kilion and to 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.

[3 : 50] That the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place to your witnesses this day. Then all the people who were at the gate, the elders said, we are witnesses.

May the Lord make this woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah who together built the house of Israel. May her back worthily in Ephratha and be renowned in Bethlehem and may your house be like the house Perez who take our war to Judah because of the offspring that the Lord will give you by this young woman.

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. And 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 has given birth to him.

Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. 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.

[5 : 03] Now these are the generations of Perez. Perez fathered Hezron, Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Aminadab, Aminadab fathered Nashon, Nashon fathered Solomon, Solomon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

The book of Ruth begins with famine, death, and bitterness. If you look back at the beginning of chapter one, we see a famine in the land.

In the town of Bethlehem, which means house of bread, the baskets were empty. And the famine, as we saw, was a sign of the spiritual dryness and chaos of the time of the judges.

What everyone did is they saw fit when there were no moral and spiritual boundaries. We also see a family dying off. first, the family of Malemalek, first spiritually as they left the promised land, settled in Moab, gradually lost their distinctive identity as a people of God, and then physically as the husband and the two sons passed away.

And then we see a bitter old woman, Naomi, left alone, destitute, invulnerable, far away from her native land, complaining against God. But the book of Ruth ends, not with famine, death, bitterness, but with blessing, life, and fullness.

[6 : 45] Bitter Naomi is now blessed. Her empty hands are now full as she nurses her grandson, Moab. Where she had once been a destitute and vulnerable widow, she was now honored as mother in Israel.

And instead of bitterly complaining against God, she's the recipient of a joyful blessing. We also see that the dying family of Malemalek has been restored to life and hope.

Chapter 4, verse 10, Boaz promises to perpetuate the name of the dead, that is, Malemalek, in his inheritance, that his name may not be cut off.

To the family that once seemed to have no future, now has a future with hope. There's also a future for God's people. His family, the stricken people, have been provided not only with food, not only with a good barley harvest, and all the rejoicing that resulted from consuming barley products, but with a new leader, David.

The book begins with the name of the Malemalek and his family, who die off of Moab. The book ends with the name of Perez and his descendants, prophetly Boaz, and culminating with David, the son of Jesse.

[8 : 04] So we see a journey from bitterness to blessing, from despair to hope, from famine to fullness. But of course the question is, how do we get from bitterness to blessing, from despair to hope, from famine to fullness?

Maybe you're asking that question on an individual level like Naomi. Maybe you feel like you can relate to her in some way or other. At the beginning of the book she was emptied out, embittered, vulnerable, grieving, alone.

Maybe the world looks bleak, like some of the cloudy, foggy days we've had this week. Maybe you're getting older. You look back on your life and there are regrets and unfulfilled desires.

For one reason or another some opportunities seem to have come and gone and there doesn't seem to be much hope of a bright future. Maybe you're asking that question not just for yourself but for your family.

If your family has been inflicted by sickness or loss. Maybe it's relational conflict, emotional baggage that has a long and unresolved history.

[9 : 26] Maybe you weep and pray over your prodigal sons and daughters who have drifted so far away from the Lord. Maybe you struggle to honor your parents when their flaws are painfully evident.

Maybe you wonder what does it mean to be an agent of God's redemption in my family. Maybe you've stopped weeping, praying, struggling and wondering.

You simply resigned yourself. It is what it is. I'll just keep my distance. Maybe you're asking that question about church.

Is it possible to move from famine to fullness? Maybe you've seen churches literally self-destruct due to internal conflict. Maybe you've been burned out from serving in church ministries where you've been frequently criticized and rarely encouraged.

Maybe you're weary of superficial small groups, close friends have all moved away or passed away or had babies or just don't seem interested in spending time with you anymore.

[10 : 39] So your inclination is to withdraw, to remain at arm's length in the local church. Maybe you were once a church leader and you have vowed never again.

Maybe you're happy to attend but you resist that step of joining and committing. Maybe you float around from one church to another every couple of years but you never really settle down anywhere looking for an elusive fullness for love and truth and glory for the spirit of the word but just doesn't seem to be there or anywhere.

Is there a path for individuals, for families, for churches, from bitterness to blessing, from despair to hope, from family to fullness?

the book of Ruth addresses this very question and it gives the answer yes.

It shows us the path that God and his province laid out for Naomi, for a little lunch family and for the people of God as a whole during the time of the judges.

[11 : 58] And this very same God who made a path way back then made a way for us today in his son Jesus Christ. So what I want to do this morning is I want to trace the path from bitterness, despair, and famine to blessing, fullness, and hope.

I want to trace the path through the storyline of Ruth. If you weren't here in the last three weeks this will serve as a review. If you weren't here I hope this will put the whole book in perspective.

So I want to sort of do an overview of the storyline of reason and progression. Second I want to consider the implications for us as individuals and families and as a church.

So first what's the path that we see throughout the storyline of this book? Well from beginning to end in this book there are four movements that correspond to the four chapters.

Now the chapter of the first divisions in the Bible were added hundreds of years after the Bible was written. So they were added in the Middle Ages for the sake of easy reference so you could easily find the same spot as someone else.

[13 : 15] And sometimes you know the chapters and verses just sort of divide up the text into manageable chunks. But here in Ruth the chapters and divisions are exactly where they should be to mark the progression of the story.

There are four clearly defined episodes in this story and so it's nice. Now if you read each of the four chapters carefully what you will notice is that in each chapter there is a key word that appears over and over in that chapter but not at all or not much in the rest of the book.

And if you're reading the ESB the Bible translation that's in the pews it's very consistent in how it translates the words so you can see it without having to read Hebrew just by reading your English Bible we can see these things.

So I'm going to point out these four key words which will see the progression of the story. Chapter 1 you remember right? Chapter 1 the key word is return 12 times in this chapter only 3 times in the rest of the book.

Chapter 1 emphasizes God's initiative. Naomi's far away in Moab but God's kindness leads Naomi to return home from exile.

[14 : 30] Chapter 1 verse 6 Naomi arose with her daughters-in-law to return for why does she return? She had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food.

It's God's kindness that leads Naomi to return God's initiative that gets the whole story going. in fact Naomi says in verse 21 chapter 1 she says I went away and the Lord has brought me back.

It's actually the same word the Lord has returned to me. So we see God's initiative to return Naomi back home. Now Naomi at this point she's empty she's bitter she's vulnerable she's grieving she probably wasn't the easiest person to hang around with because she was prompted by the good news of God's kindness so she returned home to God's people and the land of God's promises.

We also saw that in her return God's steadfast love didn't leave Naomi alone. Ruth returned with her. Chapter 1 verse 22 Ruth returns swearing in holy loyalty not only to Naomi but also to Yahweh to the God of Israel who made promises that through this one nation he would bless all the peoples of the earth.

What we see in chapter 1 is that Ruth is a living embodiment to Naomi of the steadfast love and covenant mercy of God himself. So that's the first move in the story return.

[16 : 07] Chapter 2 the key word is glean. He appears 12 times only in this chapter. Now this chapter 1 emphasizes God's initiative bringing Naomi home.

Chapter 2 we see Ruth's initiative in going out to the field to glean. Now the word glean simply means to gather leftover grain during harvest time out from someone's field.

And it was hard work. Ruth left the house early in the morning. She probably left the house at 6 a.m. and says she worked until sundown gathering grain in Boaz's field leading over.

It was back breaking work. And then she beat out the grain to separate the part that we really want to keep from just the stocks. and she carried up home 30 pounds of stuff all the way in the dark by herself.

She probably left the house at 6 a.m. and got home around 9 or 10 at night. It was a long hard day of work. Ruth went out to glean, to gather, to seek food for her and Naomi to sustain them.

[17 : 19] And in this chapter we saw how God provided. God provided for Ruth and Naomi from his law which explicitly allowed foreigners and widows and the poor to glean in people's fields.

To pick up the leftovers in order to have enough food for them to live on. But we see that God provided not just what they needed for that day. God provided generously through Boaz.

By his providence he brought her Boaz's field. By Boaz's kindness, she went home with two weeks worth food. There's another sign that God was beginning to fill Ruth and Naomi's emptiness.

We see these glimmers of hope from famine to fullness there now. They have enough to eat and more to spare. A sign of hope for the future.

Chapter 3, moving on, we've seen God's initiative to return Naomi home, Ruth's initiative to glean. Chapter 3 we see Naomi's initiative.

[18 : 24] Naomi proposes an elaborate and unconventional plan to send Ruth up with Boaz. Go to the threshing floor late at night, notice where he lies down, uncover his feet, lie down near him and wait and see what happens.

Ooh, if you've listened to last week's sermon, you want to hear more about that. Now the key word in chapter 3 is lie down. Here's eight times only in this chapter.

Lie down at his feet. But we can summarize the theme as petition. In the ancient world, man's feet represented his authority.

Bowing down before someone's feet was a recognized gesture of humble supplication and submission and petition. Boaz awoke in the middle of the night and saw Ruth lying at his feet and said, Who are you?

Ruth boldly made her petition clear. She said, Spread your wings over your sermon for you are a redeemer. Chapter 3, verse 9. Ruth wasn't simply asking for Boaz's general protection.

[19 : 36] She was asking for his particular loyalty in marriage. Of course, it was a risky plan. It was an uncertain outcome. But it was motivated by well-founded hope.

You see, Naomi had seen how God had honored Ruth's initiative to seek food, to seek nourishment for her family, for her Naomi. And God had abundantly provided even more than they needed.

Naomi had also seen evidence of Boaz's character. Ruth wasn't just pursuing some guy who she barely knew. Naomi saw Boaz's loyalty, to the Lord, his diligence to protect a vulnerable young foreign woman, for being part of his kindness in inviting Ruth to join him, and to join his young women, and then his table.

So Naomi's plan wasn't a foolish risk. It wasn't just wishful thinking. Sometimes our hopes are actually not well-founded, but Naomi's hope here was a bold risk motivated by well-founded hope, what we see is that God honors his people when they take bold and unconventional risks that are motivated by well-founded hope.

Like Tamar, Genesis 38, though that's another story for another day, and Brahab and Joshua 2, also another story for another day, but they're both the same principle. They take bold risks motivated by well-founded hope in God, and his promises.

[21 : 10] So even by the end of chapter 3, we see the movement in Naomi from despair and inaction to hopeful action. And you see this process from bitterness to blessing, from despair to hope, from famine to fullness, but we're not done yet.

Now we come to chapter 4. We see God's initiative to return Naomi home, Ruth's initiative to glean, Naomi's initiative to set Ruth's up, and 4.

We see Boaz's initiative to redeem. The word redeem or redeemer appears 13 times in chapter 4, 8 times earlier in the book. Now what does redeeming mean?

Probably when I read this at the beginning of the passage, thinking what exactly does this mean? Do you know redeeming, redeeming, redeeming, the redeemer? What's going on? Sometimes we think of redeemer, I think probably the most common way we define redeem is to purchase someone out of slavery.

But that doesn't completely make sense in this context. Nobody's a slave here who's involved in the story. And in the multisput context, the meaning of redemption or redeeming was even broader and richer than that.

[22 : 22] So Paul Miller summarizes it this way. He says a redeemer was a male member of the clan who rescued another member, often a woman, who had fallen on hard times.

A redeemer could restore property, for example, property that had been sold in order to pay a debt. A redeemer could purchase a relative out of slavery. A redeemer could marry a brother's widow in order to raise him a child bearing a brother's name.

A redeemer could avenge a relative's killing, assist in a lawsuit, and ensure that justice is served for a relative. Now, interestingly, as far as we know, this idea of a redeemer was unique to ancient Israel.

It wasn't a common thing in the ancient world. It was a specific provision of God's law. And the key aspect that distinguished the redeemer from other kinds of helpers was that the redeemer took personal ownership of the situation of the person in need and of their problems.

So a redeemer didn't just give someone advice or tell them where they could get help. A redeemer didn't just make referrals or write a one-time check.

[23 : 35] A redeemer could sustain ownership of a person in distress and all their problems. Now, in Boaz's case, Ruth asked him to marry her, and she said, and she asked him to do that on the basis that you are a redeemer.

In other words, it was a relative in the clan who was eligible to fulfill this office, this responsibility of redeeming. Now, as we saw last week, Boaz's initial response was, if I could, I would.

But there's a redeemer nearer than I. In other words, there's a closer relative who by law or custom has first dibs. And so, finally we get to chapter 4. Right?

Chapter 4, verse 1 through 6, we have this extended conversation between Boaz and this potential redeemer. And you might, again, you might wonder what is going on here. But remember back to chapter 1.

There's this extended contrast between Orpah and Ruth, the two Moabite widows of Naomi's sons. At first, Orpah says, Naomi, I'll go back with you to Bethlehem.

[24 : 52] I'll join you on your journey. And then Naomi says, well, that's very generous. But you realize what it's going to cost you. You'll probably never get married.

You'll never have the security of a husband or the hope of a legacy through having children. You'll be alone and vulnerable in a foreign land. Go back home to your mom and dad's house and you'll have a bright future.

And so Orpah sees what the cost is and Orpah makes the sensible, reasonable, logical choice. She weeps, kisses Naomi goodbye, and goes back to Moab.

Now the Redeemer here in chapter 4 is very similar to Orpah. At first, he's very happy to buy the land, take care of elderly widow Naomi for probably a few more years, the rest of her life.

And it's not a bad deal for him in the long run. When Naomi dies, the land will belong to him. But then Boaz says in verse 5, do you realize what it will cost you? The day goodbye the field from the hand of Naomi, who also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead and his inheritance.

[26 : 11] Now what does that mean? That means if he marries Ruth, he supports Ruth for the rest of her life. He supports her children. Her children get Ruth's dead husband's last name, not his.

And when the children are grown, this guy would have to give them the land. He doesn't come out with anything for himself in the long run. And so suddenly, he backs down.

He sees the cost, and he says, hmm, not quite worth it. And Boaz steps up to steal the deed. See, in both of these cases, why is there this extended contract, right, this long dialogue?

It's about the costliness of redemption. The costliness of redeeming love. In chapter one, Ruth counted the cost. She made the rare, risky, restrictive decision to be loyal to Naomi and to Naomi's God, leaving everything behind in order to go with her to Bethlehem, and God honored her decision.

Chapter four, here, Boaz is counted the cost. And he chooses to redeem Naomi, to marry Ruth, and carry on the name of the family of a little life.

[27 : 33] He's not just pursuing what will be good for himself. He's not even just pursuing what he and Ruth would enjoy with the others. And Eric, he's carrying, he's stepping into this responsibility of being a redeemer for the family, for the whole family.

God honors Boaz's decision. I threw Boaz and Ruth. God came to redeem his people by raising up a son who would be the grandfather of King David.

And of course, we can see in hindsight, God was preparing the way for a greater redeemer to come. For Jesus, the Son of God, who became our brother, to deliver us from bondage, to redeem us in every sense of the word, to take ownership of our deepest problem, to bind himself to us in covenant love and faithfulness, and say, I will be yours and you will be mine, and I will give you all that I have, all my riches and righteousness and joy, and I will take all of your sin and all of your despair and all of your bitterness, and I will be yours and you will be mine forever.

So we come to the conclusion of our story. Forbitterness, despair, famine, to blessing, hope, and fullness. God's initiative to return Naomi, Ruth's initiative to glean, Naomi's initiative to petition, and Boaz's initiative to redeem, and God's blessing at the end.

So that's the storyline of Ruth in a nutshell. Now, what are the implications for us? I want to consider some implications of this storyline for us as individuals in our family relationships, and for us as members of God's church as people who belong to Jesus.

[29 : 38] So first, as individuals and as families, how do we move from bitterness to blessing and from despair? Now, one of the things that the book of Ruth shows us is that this is an ongoing process, not an instantaneous transformation.

Naomi's journey from bitterness to blessing does not happen in one night, or one week. It takes a year, right?

And when she arrives home at the beginning of barley harvest, that will be April, to the end of barley wheat harvest, when she plots to set up a roof with Boaz, probably late June, and then at least nine more months after they get married, until baby Obed is born, and she's precipitating this blessing at the end.

And even at the end, if you read chapter 4, verse 15, there may be a subtle hint that Naomi's journey isn't quite finished yet. She still doesn't fully recognize the depth of Ruth's sacrificial love.

And so the women of the town have to remind her of that, and how valuable Ruth has been to her. But let me point out four steps along Naomi's journey that might be helpful for us to keep in mind.

[30 : 57] journey at an individual and family level. So first, repentance. Naomi's journey began with God's kindness leading her to repentance.

She felt bitter toward God. She was angry at her misfortunes, perhaps, but she immediately left behind the paganism of Moab and returned home to God's people and God's promises.

See, the path of bitterness to blessing begins with repentance prompted by God's grace. Returning to God's promises and God's people, even if there's still a lot of bitterness and questions and doubts there.

So repentance. Second, Naomi's journey continued with God's provision of a loyal relative, Ruth. Ruth's loyalty. At first, we saw that Naomi didn't even acknowledge Ruth's presence.

But Ruth kept on loving her nonetheless. Despite Naomi's expressions of bitterness and hopelessness, Ruth stuck with her. At the beginning of chapter 2, Ruth and Naomi have come back to Bethlehem.

[32 : 14] This is Naomi's home turf. Naomi knows how things work here. But Naomi, but Ruth, has to take the initiative. Even though she's a foreigner, Ruth has to get up and say, let me go to the field and glean.

Let me seek food for us so that we can live and survive. Naomi's despair fostered idleness. Ruth's initiative became a means of God's sustaining grace.

Ruth's prayer. Ruth's prayer. Brothers and sisters, let me encourage you not to give up loving someone who is stuck in a season of bitterness and despair.

They may not thank you now, but you are a means of God's sustaining grace for them, as Ruth was, or named. Third, there's repentance.

Naomi's repentance for his loyalty. Third, there's surprising provision. Boaz's surprising generosity. And we actually see that God releases Naomi from at least some of her cloud of bitterness by surprising her with generous provision in a time of great need.

[33 : 29] When Ruth came home that day, carried 30 pounds of barley and a whole plate of leftovers from dinner with Boaz and his family, Naomi's spirit revived.

Chapter 2, verse 19, she says, Blessed be the man who did notice of you. May he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness is not for sake from the living and the dead. Naomi begins to see beyond herself.

Instead of merely lamenting her emptiness for Naomi, blesses God for somebody else's kindness. Sometimes God's surprising, generous provision releases us from bitterness and despair.

It gives us new joy and hope. There's been a few times in the past year when someone or some group of people has caught me off guard as an unexpectedly generous and undeserved gift.

These expressions of generosity have lifted my spirits and renewed my joy. Sometimes they tend to come to miss the most stressful times. But brothers and sisters, maybe delight in surprising others.

- [34 : 45] Consider if you can surprise with an expression of generosity that's not just the bare minimum of what they need, but as Boaz did for Ruth, laugh is provisional.

Because this is part of how God releases his people from bitterness and fills us with hope. Fourth, unselfish love.

Naomi's journey from bitterness to blessing continued as she looked outside of herself, as she considered Ruth's future more highly than her own. You see, the journey from bitterness to blessing is not just about God changing our external circumstances, or even bringing surprisingly generous people into our life.

It's also a developing internal resolve, nourished by the Holy Spirit to love as Christ has loved us. And we see that in Naomi's initiative on Ruth's behalf in chapter 3.

Naomi said, should I not seek rest for you? That it may be well with you. Naomi wasn't plotting to advance her own status. She wasn't clinging to Ruth and saying, don't you ever dare leave me.

- [36 : 08] She was seeking what would be best for Ruth. looking outside herself and loving unselfishly, even when her own future was precarious and uncertain.

You see, the basic pattern of Scripture is this. Our faith is rooted in the love of God for us. That's where it starts. It doesn't start with us loving God. It starts with God loving us.

We love because He first loved us. But our faith matures in part when we extend ourselves in Christ's love to others. Jesus said, the one who loves me will be loved by my Father and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

Paul Miller put it this way. He said, love deepens faith. And he says this. He says, many Christians, which I found, I thought it was quite insightful, he said, many Christians get stuck trying to grow their faith by growing their faith.

Practically, this means combining spiritual disciplines, reading the Word, praying, with reflecting on the love of God for them. But he says, that will only get you so far.

- [37 : 24] In fact, sometimes it can lead to spiritual moodiness, where you're constantly taking your calls, wondering how much you know the love of God for you. Or you go on an endless idle hunt, trying to uncover ever deeper layers of sin, oddly enough.

He says this can lead to a kind of spiritual narcissism, self-centeredness. But he says, Naomi and Ruth discover God's blessing and grow in their knowledge of him as they obey.

As they extend themselves in unselfish love for the other people that God has put right in their lives. So he says, instead of running from the really hard thing in your life, embrace it as a gift from God to draw you more deeply into his life.

Into the life of Christ. So these are four parts of Naomi's journey. Repentance, her own repentance, Ruth's steadfast loyalty, Boaz's surprising generosity, and God's work in her heart to make her a person of unselfish love.

So that's some of the individual and family journey. What about as a church? What's the path of family to fullness? You know, we live in a time, in many ways, it's increasingly like the time of the judges when Ruth and Boaz and Boaz lived.

- [38 : 58] In some people's minds, the future of the church in the West is bleak. What does the book of Ruth have to say to us as a church? Well, at one level, it reminds us that renewal, revival, is a gift from God.

There are two explicit statements of God's action in this book. At the beginning, chapter 1, verse 6, the Lord visited his people and gave them food. God's kindness sets the whole story in motion.

If the famine hadn't ended, Naomi would have stayed in Moab and none of this would have happened. At the end, chapter 4, verse 13, the Lord gave Ruth conception and she bore a son.

Again, if Ruth had remained childless and it seems that she had been married for 10 years in Moab and had no children there, if she had remained childless, the family of the limelight would have died off and King David never would have been born.

As the psalmist says, if the Lord doesn't build the house, the builders labor and vain. But while the book of Ruth affirms God's sovereignty over all things and our utter dependence on Him, the emphasis of Ruth is that God accomplishes His purposes through people who love and people who pray.

[40 : 11] That God works through human agents. God's activity is hidden, yet He is continuously present and continuously working out His purposes through the initiative of Ruth to glean, through the initiative of Naomi to petition Boaz, through Boaz's initiative to redeem.

The story is framed by two, only two statements of God's explicit action, the beginning and the end, not because God is absent from the rest of the story, but to show that the whole story is framed by God's guiding presence and sovereignty.

In all these things, God is at work for the good of His people. We also see in the book of Ruth, God's plan is carried forward by prayer. There's not a lot of statements that explicitly talk about what God does, but there's a lot of statements, there's a lot of expressions calling on God to bless people.

Chapter 1, Naomi blesses Ruth in Orpah. May the Lord deal kindly with you, the Lord grant that you may find rest. Chapter 2, Boaz blesses Ruth.

The Lord repay you for what you've done. A full reward be given you by the Lord under whose wings you have come to take refuge. Chapter 2, Naomi blesses Boaz.

[41 : 31] May he be blessed by the Lord. Chapter 4, verse 11, the elders of Bethlehem and the people at the city gate bless Ruth and Boaz.

was a blessing that through them the house of Israel would be built up. And finally, the women of Bethlehem blessed Naomi in 4, 14 and 15.

Now what's the point of all these prayers of blessing? You know that every one of these prayers in the book of Ruth is answered. Naomi's prayer for Ruth and Orpah.

Boaz's prayer for Ruth that she would be rewarded by the Lord under whose wings she's come to take refuge. Naomi's blessing on Boaz that he would be blessed. The elders of Bethlehem's blessing on Boaz's and Ruth's marriage and the blessing of the women of Bethlehem on Naomi that God would restore her life and nourish her in her old age.

every one of these prayers is answered. So the book of Ruth encourages us to pray. In the midst of troubled times in our own life and our family and the church and the world let us call upon the Lord to shower his blessing upon us and our families and our future generations.

[43 : 00] Sometimes we'll see the answers to our prayers. Sometimes like Boaz we won't become part of the answer to our prayers. Boaz prays that God would protect Ruth under his wings and then in the next chapter Ruth says spread your weight over me.

Boaz becomes part of God's answer to his own prayer. Sometimes our prayers will be answered long after we have finished our earthly pilgrimage.

You see, Obed was the grandfather of King David but Ruth and Boaz didn't live to see that. often it's only in hindsight that we can see what the Lord has been doing and given the shortness of our lives on earth most of our hindsight will come from the perspective of eternity.

Brothers and sisters, let us pray. When we're in the middle, when we're still in the middle of that journey and we haven't yet arrived at the fullness of blessing and hope and renewed life and joy and peace and fullness, let us pray.

Let us call upon the Lord to bless one another. Let us trust that the same God will answer the prayers of those of this book.

[44 : 28] Here's our prayers through His Son, Jesus Christ. You see, what we see in the book of Ruth is that God brought Naomi, the family of Lebelech and the people of Israel as a whole from bitterness, despair, and famine to blessing, hope, and fullness.

And a thousand years later, God would once again intervene and come to a woman in Bethlehem in a time when God's people were wondering, has He left us alone?

Has He abandoned us to our own sin? Will we ever be delivered from our oppressors? Is there hope for me? Is there hope for the church?

And into that world God sent His Son. God sent His promise and blessing and His messengers say to Mary, nothing is impossible with God.

And the New Testament closes with a prayer, come Lord Jesus. Because we're still waiting. He's come. He came for Ruth and Naomi and Moaz.

[45 : 44] He came as God's Son and our Savior to redeem us. And He will come again. Brothers and sisters, don't tire in the meantime of praying and loving and waiting and trusting that He will fulfill His promises.

He will bring us from bitterness to blessing. He will bring us from despair to hope. He will bring us from famine to fullness. Let's pray. God, we thank You for Your steadfast love.

We thank You for Your faithfulness to Your promises to Naomi to a live-lunched family to Your people as a whole.

We thank You that You are the same God yesterday, today, and forever. We thank You that we have the even greater assurance because You have sent Your Son.

Because He has accomplished our redemption through His death and resurrection. Lord, we pray that You would fill us with blessing for You, that we bless Your name and bless one another in Your name.

[47 : 08] You would fill us with hope, renew our hope for the future, and that You would fill us with the fullness of Your Holy Spirit that comes from being united to Christ.

Lord, make us messengers, of that blessing and hope and fullness in this Christmas season these weeks ahead. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.