

From a Foreigner to King Jesus (TGC 2011)

by Alistair Begg

This sermon delves into the book of Ruth, highlighting themes of redemption, provision, and the journey from emptiness to fullness. It explores the characters of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, emphasizing the divine intervention and grace at work in their lives. The sermon draws parallels between Ruth's story and the gospel, showcasing how God's loving kindness reaches across boundaries to bring salvation.

Duration: 50:18

Scripture: Ruth 1:16, Ruth 2:10, Ruth 4:13, Luke 15:17, Ephesians 2:8, Hebrews 4:16

Topics: "Redemption", "Divine Providence"

Description

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Transcript

Well, let's turn together to Ruth and to chapter 1. And as you're turning there, I'm humbled by the privilege of being included in a company of folks whose books I read, whose sermons I listen to, and from whom I learn. And it is true that I went to the DEMIN program for just as long as Tim stayed there, and as soon as he left, I left, because I quickly discovered that none of the rest of the faculty knew what it was he was doing. And consequently, when he left, the real heart of the program, at least at that point, left with him.

And I'm so glad that he did leave because of all the wonderful work that has been done in New York ever since. Well, let me read just the first chapter in order that we have this fresh in our minds. In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab.

The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Malon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah, and they went to Moab and lived there. Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons.

They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Malon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. When she heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi 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. Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show kindness to you as you have shown to your dead and to me.

May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband. Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud and said to her, We will go back with you to your people. But Naomi said, Return home, my daughters.

Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons 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 give 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 gone out against me.

At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. 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 anything but death separates you and me. When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem.

When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And a woman exclaimed, Can this be Naomi? Don't call me Naomi. She told them, Call me Marah, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.

I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me. The Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.

So Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by Ruth, the Moabites, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning. Thanks be to God for his word. Just a brief prayer, an old Anglican prayer.

Father, what we know not, teach us. What we have not, give us. What we are not, make us.

For your Son's sake, amen. The latest and presumably the last novel by David Foster Wallace was reviewed in a variety of newspapers this week. James Campbell of the Times Literary Supplement described Foster's novel as follows, The supreme example of purposeful boredom in literary form.

The only good that I could find in that was the fact that this novel had been published posthumously, and that Foster Wallace was not around to have to respond to the very encouraging review that had been given to him by the Times Literary Supplement. In stark contrast, the book of Ruth is arguably one of the loveliest short stories ever written. Here in these four short chapters, not very many verses, we have

literary art and theological insight at its very finest.

And what makes the book of Ruth sparkle so much is the background against which it is set, in the same way that when you go to the jewelers, they always bring out that dark velvet cloth as part of their shtick in order to try and make a tiny diamond look as though it's really a little better than it was. But against the background of the period of the judges, the book of Ruth shines, because the story of judges, as you will know, was at the very least a time of instability. If there had been blogs in those days, then they would have been filled with reports of civil unrest, of a kind of moral decay, religious declension, and unchecked corruption.

And that you read all the way through, and we find that as the book of Judges finishes, it says, and in those days Israel had no king, and everyone did as he saw fit. And then you turn the page, and you discover in the book of Ruth that there is another side to the story. That away from all the clamor in the corridors of power, we find that God is at work in a very unusual way, in a sequence of events involving a Bethlehem farmer, a foreigner from Moab, and a lady who had faced a triple bereavement.

If these four short chapters were to be made into a movie, and we had the privilege of interacting at all with the way the musical score was written, we would lobby very strongly for the music having very much of the lament about it, especially in these early verses. And the sort of plaintive background refrain would epitomize the unfolding drama that is contained for us, with all of its sadness and disappointment, in the scope of just a few verses. And the camera, as you will notice, is trained almost routinely on Naomi.

It comes back to her again and again. It's almost as if God is preoccupied with this particular individual—a lonely lady living in a foreign land in her declining years, with no children to care for her and no grandchildren to cheer her spirits. Who, then, would ever imagine that her sad predicament would, in the providence of God, lead first to the conversion of her daughter-in-law Ruth, through that, in the lineage of it, to the birth of David the great king of Israel, and then, in turn, to the coming of the Messiah? Now, we shouldn't miss—and I say this parenthetically—we shouldn't miss in studying a book like this the opportunity that it provides in mentioning these things to make clear to the Naomis of our culture, to the Naomis who are present in our congregation, that the God of the Bible is a God who defends the cause of the widow and a God who cares about their suffering.

It certainly wouldn't be the main emphasis, unless, of course, we were dealing with it in a very short passage at a time. But nevertheless, it bears pointing out. With all that said, we need to turn to the task at hand.

The assignment that has been given to me, as with my colleagues, is to discover how we might adequately and hopefully effectively preach Christ, preach the gospel from these chapters. Learning to do this, as some of us were reflecting in the midday, learning to do this is, I think, the journey of a lifetime. I always like it when I find a quote from James S. Stuart, the late Scottish Presbyterian from the Royal Mile.

When you read, for example, in *The Heralds of God*, his lectures to the theological faculty and student body in Yale in the 1950s, when you come across a little sentence like this from Stuart of all people, where he says, No one knows how to preach. It's phenomenally encouraging. It's a wonderful encouragement.

One of the most encouraging sentences that I've read in preparing for this. No one knows how to preach. It is right, says Stuart, that the task should humble us, wrong that it should paralyze us.

So it serves to humble, but not to paralyze. And in setting forth the truth of the Lord Jesus to our listeners, our listeners then ought to be able to follow the progression of thought that gives rise to our introducing them to the person and work of Jesus, especially in Old Testament narrative. That's not just as straightforward as it sounds, because some of us are adept at not allowing our congregation to follow our progression of thought.

In some cases, it's because there's not a lot of progression of thought, and there's no linear progression in what we're doing. It's full of non-sequiturs. And so, when we finally bounce out with the end, you will see that Jesus is over here in verse 17.

Somebody four rows back wakes up and says, How in the world did he possibly get there from there? And his wife says, I haven't a clue, but we can ask him afterwards. I'm greatly encouraged that these chairs are here, incidentally, and if you've looked on the program, I have the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and one of the writers coming behind me who are going to explain how you do what I'm supposed to be doing right now. First when I saw their pictures, I was threatened by it, and then I decided, no, I shall be encouraged by it.

I know they have my best interests at heart, and they can explain that that wasn't what I meant at all. But you know the kind of thing I'm talking about, the way it is a sort of formulaic approach to this process, where we've been told by somebody that you have to do this, and indeed you won't get your grade if you fail to do this. And so, instead of it becoming something that is instinctive as a result of our comprehensive understanding of the whole historical redemptive approach of the Bible, it becomes a sort of formulaic process, and it catches people off guard, including ourselves sometimes.

You know, for example, the story of the Baptist preacher who was totally preoccupied always with the issue of believers' baptism. And on one occasion, he gave out his text as Genesis 3.9, and God said, Adam, where are you? And he said, my points will be as follows. First of all, we will examine where Adam was, secondly, what Adam was doing, thirdly, why he was there, and then finally, just a few thoughts on believers' baptism.

And this idea of preaching Christ out of the Old Testament has often that kind of flavor to it, if we're not careful, if it becomes formulaic for us. And I want to try and help us with this. We come to this with certain assumptions—at least I assume we do—and I'm going to identify them for us, just so that they're on the record, as it were.

First of all, we assume that God has acted in human history both to reveal and to redeem. Also that God has raised up prophets and apostles to provide both the record of God's intervention by way of revelation and redemption, to provide both the record of that and the interpretation of that record in Holy Scripture itself. Thirdly, it is our assumption that the preacher's message, both in its content and in its aim, is in setting forth the Scriptures, and in setting forth the Scriptures that speak of Christ, we then in turn will set forth Christ.

Fourthly, it is at least my assumption that the need for the proper Christian use of the Old Testament is an urgent need. And I presume that that is a shared sense of urgency on the part of those who have convened this particular conference under this particular theme. The urgency is there because some of us have been scared away from the Old Testament by the extent of scientific and historical criticism.

We ought not to be. And others of us have neglected the teaching of the Old Testament, have been inhibited by certain models of dispensationalism. Fifthly, I am assuming that we will be helped if we learn, as Alec Matias suggests, to read the Bible from back to front.

That it will be a tremendous help to us if we work from the back to the front. It will be easier to find the tributaries, if you like, if we stand at the mouth of the river and then work our way back from there. Now, this I think is fairly straightforward.

It comes out in all kinds of illustrations, that the Bible is like a detective novel where all these various themes are woven together for a period of time until there is then a great denouement, which makes sense of all the interwoven pieces. Or the Bible is like a two-act drama, where if you show up for the first and leave before the second, you will be left wondering how it concludes. If you come late and arrive in the second, you will annoy everybody around you by constantly saying, who is this person, and why are they here? B.B. Warfield used the analogy of the Old Testament as being like a richly furnished but dimly lit room, only, he said, when the light is turned on, in the person and work of Jesus do the contents become clear.

And so, for example, we need the book of Hebrews in order to deal with Leviticus. We can't make sense of the prophets without the Gospels by way of interpretation. And the message of Ruth cannot be understood apart from the coming of the Lord Jesus.

A couple more assumptions—or observations, actually, not assumptions. The Old Testament Scriptures can and should mean more to us than they did to the people of the Old Testament, for we live in the light of their Christian fulfillment. And our pattern in this is clearly Christ addressing Cleopas in Luke chapter 24.

And indeed, it is hard to imagine Jesus doing what he did in that incident, leaving out all that is here for us in the richness of this little book. The last thing I want to say is that the genre of the text should determine the way in which we accomplish the purpose of proclaiming Christ. There's something gone badly wrong in our exposition if we're able to preach the exact same kind of sermon, no matter whether we're in Old Testament narrative or in an epistle or working through a gospel.

In the sense that it must be the genre of Scripture itself which determines for us the way in which the whole story is unfolded, so that when we come to something like the book of Ruth, we have to immerse ourselves in, if you like, the sights and the sounds and the smells and the tastes. These four chapters are sensual, in a proper use of the word sensual. I don't mean that they arouse any kind of erotic notions, but they are full of the senses.

And the way in which the story is crafted is so wonderful that it introduces little glimpses, little intriguing pieces here and there, which give to us as the readers the sense that there's something more that is beyond this if we will just read on. In other words, Ruth invites us to feel deeply, and it will then be our understanding of the gospel which will prevent us from making any kind of wrong applications from the book, so that we might be able to apply it properly. And indeed, the very privilege of dealing with a tiny story like this and with this narrative is something that has great appeal in our time.

Stories are wonderful in every generation. And adults, I think, in many cases, have a peculiar sense of nostalgia for a phrase that the Oxford English Dictionary says has been used to introduce stories since the fourteenth century. And what is that phrase? Once upon a time.

And has finished with the phrase, and they all lived happily ever after. Did you find it interesting—those of you who read the reviews and perhaps buy the books—did you find it interesting that Dreyfus and Kelly, the philosophy professors from Berkeley and from Harvard, sought to bring their philosophy down to the level of me by writing a little book called *All Things Shining*, where they offer to us the idea that in the little glimpses and moments of time, we may be able to find significance. And indeed, the subtitle of the book is *Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age*.

It's wonderful, isn't it? So you tell the people, say, I know you've been feeling very gloomy lately. I think you should go home and read *Moby Dick*. You will feel much better.

Have a cup of coffee and read *Moby Dick*. You'll be much better before you finish the evening. But to the extent that there is something in that, here, if you like, is a way for us to say to people, you don't need to read the Western Classics to find meaning in a secular age.

I've got a classic for you here right in the book of Ruth. Will you read this? It's a wonderful story. I've actually done that from time to time, especially when I've been traveling and I've met somebody, and they said their name is Ruth, perhaps in a restaurant or a lady that was somewhere on a plane.

And I said, well, do you know you have a book? He said, no. Oh, yes, it's a great book. You should read it.

It's short, but it's super. So here now, with all of that in the past, we're going to have three charcoal sketches. All right? Three charcoal sketches.

In other words, I'm not up here with all of my paints and all of my crayons to fill in all of the blanks. If you did art at school as I did, and I mean art at school school, like where you don't know what you're doing in art. I had a... I don't mean art art, I mean like whatever you do when you have to paint or whatever.

And my art teacher at Oakley Grammar School was Mr. Walker, and I couldn't do anything that he asked for me to do. I was absolutely, completely useless. And I used to try and plead with him, Mr. Walker, can you show me how I should approach this? And he would come, and he would take his pencil, and I would try and keep him there as long as I possibly could.

And then he would get wise to me, and he would always say the same thing to me, I'll get you started, beg, but I'm not going to do it for you. And what I want to suggest here is that I'm going to get you started, but I'm not going to do it for you. And these are fairly arbitrarily picked as sketches, but they at least send us in the right direction.

My first sketch has a title, and the title is *Three Women on the Road to Somewhere*. *Three Women on the Road to Somewhere*. And of course, we read of this point on the road.

It's described there in verse 7 with them setting out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. It is quite a picture, if you were to draw it, if you were to paint it. It is full of all kinds of terms of endearment.

It's not so much a Kodak moment as it is a Kleenex moment, and you've got these three ladies just bawling their eyes out in the middle of the road, attempting to say dreadful chauvinist things about that, but I won't, because I can cry as good as any lady in a circumstance like this. But the backdrop, the backdrop to the scene on the road is a backdrop of poor choices and sad experiences and deep disappointments. It's all wrapped up in the interweaving of these women's lives.

We need to backfill that and be brought to a certain level of understanding. God had warned his people that if they were unfaithful to his covenant promises, the consequences would be dire. We read of their experience of that in the book that precedes this.

Famine now has come as a result of the rebellion of the people of God. But because of his lovingkindness, because of his chesed love, he has held out to his people the promise of forgiveness and the promise of grace if they would return to him in repentance and faith. And this huge drama is played out here in a microcosm as the camera zooms in on the family of Elimelech.

Elimelech, his name means, the Lord is King. Ironically, he obviously didn't feel him to be king over the circumstances of the famine, otherwise he would have stayed put in Bethlehem. He leaves Bethlehem, the house of bread, ironically, facing famine, and off he goes to sojourn in Moab in a sense, if you like, pragmatism wins out over obedient faith.

And Naomi, by the time you get to verse 13, is able to explain exactly what has really been going on. The Lord's hand, she says, has gone out against me. I can't explain my life apart from the intervening work of God.

We made certain decisions, and in light of that, we found ourselves in this place. But of course, his kindness, the indication of God's mercy in providing food for his people—and the word that reaches Naomi there in Moab in verse 6, she heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, and as a result of his kindness, she now has determined that she will return to the place of her beginnings. I think if we'd asked her to give her testimony, she would have been happy to quote George Herbert, or if I stray, he doth convert, and bring my mind in frame, and all this not for my dessert, but for his holy name.

And now she stands in between Moab and Bethlehem, urging her two daughters-in-law to go back to the place where they would find security. And essentially, what she is doing is urging these girls to count the cost—a cost which Sinclair Ferguson puts as, they had to choose between Yahweh plus nothing in Bethlehem or everything minus Yahweh in Moab. And with that choice set before them, Orpah, as we know, goes back.

But Ruth refuses to go back, despite the urging of Naomi, despite the incentive that's created as she sees her sister-in-law going back up the road. She says, Look, Orpah's going back up there. Why don't you go with Orpah? You've still got a chance.

You could still catch her now. Go back, my daughter. And yet, look at this amazing response.

No, don't urge me to leave you. Don't urge me to turn back from you. And what we have here is just essentially Ruth's conversion.

How do we actually fathom this? How do you plumb the depths of divine persuasion? How do we understand the mystery of this, that presented with the exact same circumstance, confronted with the same urgings from the same lips of the same lady, one turns and leaves, and the other uses the language of the covenant and says, No, I can't go back. And the reason I can't go back is because I am no longer what I once was. I am no longer trusting in the gods to which my sister-in-law has now returned.

Don't ask me to leave you. I'm going to go where you go. Your god is my god.

And she's just employing the language that, presumably, she had learned in the course of time. And one of the things that we have the opportunity to do in this section—and I want to take the opportunity just now—is to make sure that we recognize how clear is the call of God to respond to his unerring, loving kindness and grace, and to urge upon people the necessity of their coming to do as Ruth has done, and to trust in this God. Some of us here have a hard time with this, pressing upon people the necessity of a decision, the necessity of a choice.

God does not believe for us. We believe, and Ruth believed. Do you? Do you? Are you a believer? Have you turned your back on the substitute gods of the world in which you live by nature? Have you been embraced by the loving kindness of God as it has been manifest to you in so many different ways? When I read this again this week, my mind went back to an occasion some years ago when with the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, we had gone to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to Harvard.

And it was while Jim Boyce was still alive, and some of you will have been there. David Wells was there, and many were there. And I had the responsibility of speaking.

I think it was on a Saturday morning. I got up early on the Saturday morning, and I went out, and I found a coffee shop, and I was sitting in there with my notes and my Bible. There was virtually nobody in the place at all.

I was joined first of all by a sparrow that came in, and then by a little girl from China, a Chinese girl who was a student at Harvard. She saw my Bible, and she said to me, are you a Christian? And I said, yes, I am. And she said, I am a Christian too.

And I said to her, how did you become a Christian in China? I was sort of asking the sort of sociological question, you know, the factors that led up to this, and I've never forgotten her response. I said, how did you become a Christian in China? Do you know what she said? I enter through narrow gate. I enter through narrow gate.

That's, you see, what happened here. Ruth entered through the narrow gate, through the turnstile. A hundred thousand people at Wembley to watch the soccer, but every one of them going in through the turnstile has an individual.

What is God doing here? He's reaching into the life across barriers of race, into the life of this Moabite girl, and her picture is painted into the great scene in Revelation. And in this tiny microcosm, we have the indications of this growing, developing, huge company that no one can count from every nation and tribe and people and language who will fall down before King Jesus, who will be from the lineage of this woman who is converted as she goes in through the turnstile. It's just a charcoal sketch.

Secondly, charcoal sketch number two, the name of the man is Boaz. The name of the man is Boaz. Not much of a title.

Well, it might not be much of a sketch. We'll have to see. Verse 19, this is chapter 2, Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one in whose place she had been working, The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz.

Now, I grew up—a third of my class in Glasgow in elementary school were all Jewish, and so I know a lot of Jewish moms, and I love them. I love their interest, and they all have a way about them. And this is—you can see it here.

Where were you working today? I was in a field. I bumped into a guy called Boaz. Oh, Boaz.

Boaz is a nice boy, Naomi. Boaz is a kinsman redeemer. You should stay in his field, Naomi.

That is a good field. You see, because the music—you had changed the music at the end of chapter 1, hadn't you? You did it instinctively. Because we've gone from famine to the barley harvest.

So we've put away the bagpipe player, which should routinely be done in any case. We've put away the bagpipe player, and we've brought out the minstrels. And so, the music has changed.

The mood has changed. It's no longer plaintive. There's just the inkling.

It's not full-blown yet. And they returned at the time that the barley harvest was beginning. Just this wonderful little glimpse of fullness that is about to emerge out of emptiness, of this discovery of that which will enrich and embellish and sustain.

And as chapter 2 begins, we find that the storyteller introduces this new character. Naomi had a relative on her husband's side from the clan of Elimelech—interestingly, a man of standing whose name was Boaz. And we're forced to say, I wonder who he is.

I wonder what he's like. I wonder if he has a big part in this story. Don't you often wish you didn't know the Bible? I wish I could go back and not know it, so that I could read it again.

So I didn't know the end of the story of Joseph. It would be so fantastic. Maybe if I live long enough, I'll have forgotten the end of the story of most of them.

As it is, I can't find my car key, so there's a great prospect that is before me. But into chapter 2, Ruth has been learning the ways of God, in the law of God. He has made provision for the poor.

They can go to the fields and get the leftover grain. And Ruth is not about to sit on her hands. She's not about to lie in her bed and say, Well, goodness, here I am now, stuck with the old lady.

I could have gone back and got a husband. I came here with this old lady. Now what am I going to do? No! She's up in the morning, washes her face.

Let me go, she says, into the fields and collect some grain. Behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor, favor, favor, praise him for his grace. And favor to our fathers in distress.

Praise him still the same forever, slow to chide and swift to bless. You see, the word favor is beginning just to send us in a direction, and it comes all the way through. Let me go and find favor is verse 2. I am totally amazed, verse 10, at the favor I have found.

Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me a foreigner? Well, we could say that before we went to sleep tonight, couldn't we, Lord Jesus Christ? Why have I found such favor that you would notice me an alien and a stranger? And once she's got this favor going, she wants to keep it going. Look at verse 13. May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my Lord, she said.

You have given me comfort. You have spoken kindly to your servant. And this chesed, loving kindness of God is running all the way through.

I'm not pointing it out all the time. It would be tedious and is part of you painting when you follow this up later on. And you've shown kindness to your servant, though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls.

I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene and wonder how he could love me, a sinner condemned unclean, that you would show such favor to me, a foreigner. There's a sense in which, you know, if we knew Boaz personally, we could nudge him and say, she ain't seen nothing yet, you know, because this is about to hot up. And, you know, and first of all, it's pure chance, isn't it? I mean, that's what it says.

The whole way it happened, it just so happened that she picked that field. In the Authorized Version, it says something like, as hap would have it, as it fell on her hap, or her hap fell to the—some strange thing. We need a new translation, there's no question.

But as it turned out, it so happened that she found herself working in a field behind belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. Now, just again parenthetically, we have to decide when we're teaching this whether we're going to interact with people's view of the world, whether we're going to stop and deal with the issues of fatalism and determinism, whether we're going to say to people that the Christian view does not have you held in the grip of blind deterministic forces, nor is your life just bobbing around like a cork on the ocean of chance. But know that God is providentially at work in all of our free human choices, all of our decisions, all of our responsibilities, that over it all, without in any sense coming and trampling over us like a juggernaut, God is at work in all these things.

And at the end of chapter 2, and into chapter 3, of course, the drama intensifies once again. Naomi is up to her tricks, and one day Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you where you will be well provided for? What do you have in mind? Is not Boaz a kinsman of ours? A kind kinsman? Now, when Naomi informed Ruth of this, that Boaz was a kinsman-redeemer, it may have meant as much to her as that phrase will mean to the average member of our congregation when we're preaching, if we're not careful. And the danger is that once we've plowed around for three and a half days in Leveret Law and the kinsman-redeemer stuff, we've confused ourselves to the point that there's no possibility of us making it clear for our congregation.

And so we just, like, the kinsman... And the people said, Did he say something there, or was he just clearing his throat? No, I think he was trying to get to chapter 4. So what is the law here? Well, the law is that we mustn't say more than we should, but we mustn't say less than we must. And the great challenge is of getting it clear in our own minds so that we can make, in a few sentences, the position clear, the unfolding story beginning to find a resting place in our listeners' minds, letting them know that the Hebrew word for next of kin most often is the word *goel*, that that word is used of Yahweh with frequency throughout the Old Testament, reminding the people of God that Yahweh is their divine next of kin, that he is the one who comes alongside them as the one who has both revealed himself and will redeem his people. And so, from there, we make the point that as kinsman-redeemer, in the immediacy of this familial setting, Boaz has the right—the responsibility, but mainly the right—to intervene in the circumstances of Naomi and Ruth.

He has the right, the prerogative, to take on all their needs and to take on all their troubles and to take them to himself and to bear them as if they were his very own. Now, Ruth would have come to an understanding of this. And the marriage of Boaz and Ruth gets to the very heart of this concept.

That's why eventually we have Paul speaking of this great mystery, and I'm speaking, he says, Christ and the church. I'm speaking here about an amazing marriage where God has taken the divine initiative. And it is in this that we would then have the best opportunity to allow our listeners to see the glory of the gospel—to let them know that this is something of a foreshadowing of Christ, who in himself is the only one who has the right to take and bear as his own all that spoils and ruins, all the loss, all the hurt, all the disaster, all the alienation, all the brokenness, all the sinful, messed-upness of things—that this physician heals by taking to himself our diseases, that he bears them in himself.

We would be able to explore those things, and to explore them we would have to. But finally, the last charcoal sketch is in verse 16 of chapter 4, and the heading of this charcoal sketch is, Look at that little bundle. Look at that little bundle.

And I'm going to leave you to work this out, because we're going to finish with a song and turn our gaze to God in song. But one of the themes that we have to tackle is this whole developing thought of moving from emptiness to fullness—actually, in the case of the family of Elimelech, finding that their fullness is really an emptiness, so that in the discovery of genuine emptiness they might find fullness. We would want to work out in greater detail, if we had the opportunity and the time, the wonderful juxtaposition not only of the place of Bethlehem itself—that it was in this precinct here that David would tend his sheep, the king who was to come—but that it was out in these same hillsides that the shepherds would sing of the birth of the Messiah and so on—but also that we would want to work out this whole notion of provision.

There's so much about grain. There's so much about bread and everything else. And somehow, in a way that would be legitimate, I think we would want to punch right through into Luke 15 and see that fellow in all of his alienated mess saying to himself, in my Father's house there is bread enough and to spare, but I perish with hunger.

I will arise, and I will go to him. And these elements, these glimpses, these nudges in that direction are there to help us. Help us to be able to speak about the fact of alienation, which is apropos our time.

Paul Simon's new album is out. I just listened this afternoon to an interview on NPR with him, and they were pressing him on how is it that he's written so many songs that are religious. No, no, he says, these are not religious songs.

These are spiritual songs. The man pressed him. He said, well, are you thinking more about spiritual things now? And Simon said, well, I suppose I am.

And here he is. He said, what, almost seventy years of age, and we're still singing, you know, they've all gone to look for America. Kathy, I'm lost, I said, though I knew she was sleeping.

I'm empty and aching, and I don't know why. Counting the cars on the New Jersey turnpike, they've all come to look for America, laughing on the bus, playing games with the faces. She said the man in the gabardine suit was a spy.

I said, be careful, his bowtie is really a camera. And what this reminds us of is when we look at Ruth, we find a Moabites, and that's one of the reasons it comes again and again. She was a Moabites.

She was a Moabites, because the writer is making it clear that by nature she was naturally excluded from the fellowship of God and from the blessings of the covenant. And God, because of his loving kindness, reached down and made her his own. It's interesting, I mentioned all things shining, that one of the

observations made by Dreyfus and Kelly is that when you go in search of all these shining moments, you need to be very clear about the fact that none of them cohere, and none of them combine to make really any sense at all.

It is really nothing other than existentialism. But when we tell this story to our congregations, we can tell them that this is a different story. That Jesus, as the mediator of a new covenant, extends his blessing, the blessing of Abraham to sinners, by bringing them into a covenantal relationship with himself.

And that if they will turn to him, that he will welcome them with open arms. Let me just quote Calvin to finish. If in doubt, you should quote Calvin.

So I'll just quote Calvin to finish. This is Calvin, and this is purposeful. Calvin says, When we have preached in such a way as for somebody to be brought under conviction of sin, what then do we do? He says, Then we show that the only safe haven—the only safe haven—she had come to take refuge under the wings.

The only safe haven is in the mercy of God, as manifested in Christ, in whom every part of our salvation is complete. As all mankind are in the sight of God, lost sinners, we hold that Christ is their only righteousness, since by his obedience he has wiped off our transgressions, by his sacrifice appeased the divine anger, by his blood washed away our stains, by his cross borne our curse, and by his death made satisfaction for us. We maintain that in this way man is reconciled to God the Father, but by no merit of his own, and by no value of works, but by gratuitous mercy.

Father, thank you for the Bible. Thank you for this little book we scratch at its surface, and we pray for your help as we both take it to ourselves and seek to take it to others. We pray that our vision will be that of seeing unbelieving people across the barriers and boundaries that are raised in the cultures of our world to becoming those who, like Ruth, found shelter, found refuge in your covenant love and mercy.

Hear our prayers, O God, and let our cry come to you for Christ's sake. Amen.

Video: https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/P8Szi_Nez0U.mp4

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