

Ruth - Part 1

by John McGregor

The sermon explores the book of Ruth, highlighting the struggles and challenges faced by the family and the importance of community and family in the face of hardship.

Duration: 41:56

Scripture: Psalm 145:8

Topics: "Ruth"

Description

The video mentioned in the sermon transcript is not shown in this particular sermon, but it is promised to be shown next week. The speaker expresses gratitude for how God has used and blessed them despite encountering various challenges along the way. The speaker shares a personal anecdote about their desire to become a reporter and the importance of including details in the first paragraph of a story. The sermon emphasizes the idea that God does not abandon us, even when we question His presence or care, and highlights the example of God's providence in bringing a woman from Moab to be listed in the ancestry of Jesus.

Transcript

Well, let's welcome John as he comes to share the word. He's going to start a series today on Ruth, and we'll pray with him. Thank you, Lord, for your word, Lord, and your Holy Spirit that helps us to understand everything that you have for us.

And as John is your vessel this morning, Lord, we ask that you would speak through him, that his mouth would be your mouth, his mind would be your mind, and Lord, maybe more importantly, our ears would be your ears, and that we would hear what we need to hear. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Thank you, Pastor Brad. It's good to see you up and going.

He was lying low the other day. We had to cut the legs off the bed. Sick this week, huh? I'm better.

Yeah, he's better. He's doing good. And last Sunday I was down in Ontario, so I missed you.

And I find myself sitting down there in another church saying, I wonder what's going on with things at Glencairn and how things are coming along and coming together. And so it's a joy to be back and to be home and to report that God did lots of good things because you prayed. We had probably forty or forty-five minutes worth of testimony last Sunday night from what the Lord was saying to people through

the weekend in the five services that we got to participate in.

And it's always great to have a testimony, and I hear you had some great testimonies last Sunday. That's marvelous. Good to welcome Jim and Ruth home.

Ruth, you're here on the day when we start to look at Ruth, so I figured I'd better talk about Jim as well as you. But wonderful to have you home. We were this morning wanting to show you a little DVD about the new Alliance Church in Montreal Lake, Saskatchewan, which is north of PA there.

But we are technically challenged this morning, so we're going to show it to you next week instead. Roberta and I had the privilege last night with some of the other area pastors of meeting the pastor and his wife from Montreal Lake. And they are seeing some wonderful things happen.

And they're already talking about planting more churches in the Northland through some of the communities and reserves. And I would just encourage you, be in prayer for Montreal Lake and for Clifford and Lisa Bird. About 15 months ago they lost their 16-year-old son.

He died in his sleep. They've encountered many things along the way, but the Lord has wonderfully used them and blessed them. Someday we'll no doubt get to have them here at Glencairn, but we'll show you that little video next week, God willing.

Carla Johnson is away with quizzing this weekend, but she has a friend going to Malawi in a few days. And so if you would like to reconnect or send something to Kingston Fury and the orphanage there, please feel free to get in touch with Carla. I'm going to read some scripture and pray in just a moment, but I want to just say something before that.

If Sunday morning is good, and it is, but there's nothing in between Sunday mornings, then we tend to get hungry. I go to the table quite a bit through the week, in case you hadn't noticed. It's a staff thing, right? But Judy's helping us with it, so we're glad.

And one of the things, I'm not proposing to do anything right away, and I don't really think we want to do something super organized, but I want you just to pray and think about the benefit of being involved in a small group through the week where the Word of God can come to your heart and you can grow in Him and be blessed. And some of us are already connected that way, and there are all kinds of ways we can look at doing that. But I just thought this morning might be kind of interesting just before preaching to say something about that, because I think the Lord is stirring hearts in our leadership as well.

And good to just think on and to pray about it. So let me be an evangelist for a moment or two and ask you, if there was a small group probably built around a theme rather than a program, how many of you would think about going to something like that through the week? I just wanted to say I see those hands. That's brilliant.

That's good to see so many hands, because that helps us as we go and as we grow. And I for one certainly need that to be able to encourage me along the way too in the Word of God. So we'll pray together about it, we'll think about it, and we'll see what God will bring along.

Ruth chapter 1 and the first seven verses this week is what we're going to look at for a few moments before we come together around the Lord's table. And it simply says, And they went to the country of Moab and remained there. Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died.

And she was left with her two sons. And they took wives of the women of Moab. The name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth.

They dwelt there about ten years. Then both Marlon and Chilion also died. So the woman survived her two sons and her husband.

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab. For she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had visited his people by giving them bread. Therefore she went out from the place where she was and her two daughters-in-law with her.

And they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. Let's just unite our hearts in prayer. Father, as we open your word this morning, we do so with a sense of expectancy.

And we come, Lord, before you asking that you would feed our hearts and feed our souls. We live, Father, in a world that is full of many things. But to know the fullness of your Spirit and the fullness of your word and the fullness of your victory and to be able to walk with you is such a privilege.

Father, as your people, we have many needs. We want to ask this morning that you, Lord, in the power of your Spirit, would minister to us through the word and by your Spirit. We want to pray for our sister Tina as she goes for surgery this coming Friday.

And, Lord, we just join our hearts as a congregation this morning and ask you to protect her, to give her your peace through the days of this week, to give the surgeon skill to prevent infection, to lift her and to bring healing to her. And for her dear husband Brent, we pray you will bless them both through these days as they wait before you. Father, we have needs.

We have broken relationships. We lift our hearts to you, and we need that healing touch that only comes from the power of the living God. This morning as a congregation, we just reach out our hearts to you, Father.

You know the things that we have each come through this week, the busyness, the challenges, sometimes the struggles. But, Father, we're so grateful that you are here. And you are here to touch us with fresh courage, fresh hope, fresh strength, a fresh word from your word.

So, Lord, be pleased and exalted in our midst this morning, and touch us, we ask, with your encouragement. In Jesus' name, amen. You might wonder why would the pastor choose to do a series on the book of Ruth, and not being on the road so much is kind of nice because I am actually in church eight out of the next nine Sundays.

Woo-hoo! And it is just a privilege, you know, that we have as the people of God to know the working of the Spirit of God and the love of God in our midst time by time. And I chose Ruth prayerfully because we're next Sunday Mother's Day, guys, don't forget. And remind the pastor also.

And Mother's Day runs on through to Father's Day in June, and it's a good time to think about family and some of the things that happen to families. And Ruth is a family story. It is a beautiful love story.

It works through a time, you know, it begins here by telling us when the judges ruled. And as the judges rule, that's a very dark time in the history of God's people. It's a time when there's lots of sin and lots of struggle and great darkness.

But in the midst of that, it's when the judges ruled that there's this beautiful love story, this story of Ruth. It's like a bright ray in the midst of the darkness, if you will. And it's such a tremendous encouragement to see how God works.

And, you know, my first job when I was 15 years old was to work in a newspaper. And I worked in the printing part of it, but I really wanted to become a reporter, as I was pretty sure there's nothing that could be more exciting than being a reporter. And so the reporter on the newspaper used to sit with me, and he'd try to coach me how to write some things.

And alas, in the years that I worked there, I had nothing published. But enough about that. One of the things that he taught me was that it's so important to get as much detail into the first paragraph of the story or the article as you can.

So all the what, when, where, and all that stuff needs to get in there right at the beginning. And it's interesting, isn't it, the Holy Spirit did exactly that in the writing of the book of Ruth, because it tells us so much here in the opening couple of verses. And as we just ponder on it, you would think that when God's people are set free, they've been delivered from Egypt, they've been given the land, things should be going good, everything should be on the up and up, and they should be growing in the things of God, and closer, ever closer to the Lord.

But when you come to the book of Judges, what is it that we find? We find instead that the people of God are sort of on a roller coaster time, and they are experiencing times of great oppression and distress and struggle and difficulty. And then there are times as God brings forth a leader that things come back up, and the people are back close to the Lord. And so that's the setting in which we find this little book.

These times are up and down. Does that sound familiar? We live in times, don't we, that sometimes people will say to me, well, I don't know where this is going, but I'm sure it's going down. You know, it's kind of times like that when you wonder, and to find God in it is a wonderful thing.

So quickly this morning, let me just walk us through these first seven verses, and let's ask just five questions as we go. First, what created the problem? And as we open the book of Ruth, we see it says there is a famine in the land. And that's the problem.

It's a national problem, and not just a localized one, but there is a famine in the land. Scripture gives us at least thirteen situations where famine comes along. And in those that I was able to research through this week, it seemed as if it was a time of God's displeasure, and famine comes along.

And we see it quite a bit in the Old Testament there especially. So there's no bread. That's the problem.

And Bethlehem means house of bread. So there's no bread in the house of bread. Interesting.

And as you just continue to think with me, there's a verse in Amos chapter 8 and verse 11 that says there will come a time of famine, not for bread but for the Word of God. And I think these are days like that, where there's famine, there's hunger in hearts for the Word of God. Lord, I long for a word from you.

And so, these times are not all that foreign to us, although they happened centuries ago. And it's listed as Bethlehem, Judah, so it's house of bread, and Judah means praise, so house of bread, praise, and there's not a lot of that going on. And again, it's good as we have worshiped this morning just to lift praise to Him, and to know the joy of the Lord that is our strength.

But in these days, there's no bread in the house of bread, and there's no praise, there's no joy. All the joy has kind of been squeezed out of the people of God. Why? Just go back to the last verse of the book of Judges for a second with me, and we find the reason.

What is it that created the problem? In Judges 21 and verse 25, it says this, In those days there was no king in Israel, everyone did what was right in his own eyes. There's the problem. In those days there was no king in Israel, everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

People did not believe that God would help them through the situation, so they did what was right in their own eyes. And here is the problem, and it's not, again, foreign to us in our times and society either, because we are so accustomed to having to step up and fix things and do things. And yet, when you look at this, when everybody does what's right in their own eyes, what do you end up with? Well, we would pronounce it chaos.

The Irish can't read so well, so they always say choss. That's what happens when everybody does what's right in their own eyes. What happens in a relationship when everybody does what's right in their own eyes? It doesn't flow.

There's no togetherness. There's no sense of forward movement in it. It is blocked and stuck and so on.

And so, these are the things that we see, realizing that when the people of God stop believing that he will take care of them, then they are trying to take care of themselves, and to push things and force things through, and the human will gets in the way. Oh, so easily. Second question I'd like to ask as we think about these seven verses is, what do we know about this family that is mentioned here? And so, let's just look at their names.

Names, you know, in days gone by were given because they meant something, and the name had an application into that life all through life. So, when you look at the names that are mentioned here, you find Elimelech means, my God is king. So, you're working on the factory floor, and somebody says, who works beside you? My God is king.

Oh, Elimelech. What a name. My God is king.

And everywhere that he went, that's what he's saying. When somebody says, what's your name? My God is king. I kind of like that.

He is proclaiming a theological truth, even by his name and by his presence. That's what Elimelech means. Naomi.

What does Naomi mean? Well, some people say it means blessed. Some people say it means pleasant. In the research I was able to do through the week, I came to the understanding that really Naomi was a person that you might just call Mary Sunshine.

And so you could go to her and say, what a diner, snowing out there. And she would look with a smile, and she'd say, praise the Lord, all that moisture will be so good for things to grow. And she would be like Bev Shea's grandmother.

Bev Shea and his cohorts always tried to catch his grandmother up in saying something bad about somebody. And they could never get her to do it. And they got so frustrated.

And so they came up with the idea one day, and they said, well, let's ask her what she thinks of the devil. And so they went and said, Grandma, what do you think of the devil? And they were waiting for this long negative disposition coming out, you know. And after thinking for a moment, she said, he certainly works hard.

Naomi was a person like that, a sort of Mary Sunshine person, the kind of person that you like to be around, because it's not all done. There are good things to draw out of any situation. Now, when it comes to the names of their children, Myron means unhealthy.

What does Ander mean? Say it louder into the microphone. Lion Man. It's a good name, huh? Strong one.

Did you ever contemplate calling the little boy unhealthy? Never. Never. So here's a dad whose name says, My God is King, and Myron, the oldest of the boys, is named Unhealthy.

Where were you last night? How was night with the guys? Unhealthy was there, and you know. And you start to build up a picture of this family. And then you look at the name Chilion, and his name means puny.

Ever thought about calling them puny? No, it wasn't in the list, huh? No. Interesting, isn't it? So when you look at this mom and dad and the children, this family had its own struggles, didn't it? Do you know any family that doesn't? Every single family does. And, you know, we go a little bit further, just thinking about the family.

Orpa means fawn or deer. So you get the idea. That's a pretty athletic young lady.

Why would you marry one of these unhealthy puny kids? But who knows? Love is blind. My wife says love is blind, but marriage is an eye-opener. You see, this is a family, and there are inexplicable things in families, aren't there? And Ruth.

Well, some people would say it means beautiful and so on. And again, trying to research it out of original language and so on, maybe we would say she was glamorous, but beautiful in every aspect. And here she is, married to one of these kids.

Back to love is blind again. So these are some of the things that we know about this family. A third question we might ask, then, as we look through Scriptures here.

You know, these place names. I'll just mention before we move into the third question. We talked about Bethlehem, Judah.

But Moab. There's a house of bread and praise, but Moab. God says of Moab, Moab is my wash basin.

Not very exciting, is it? I mean, they're going from Bethlehem, house of bread and Judah praise, basically to the garbage can. Well, that's quite a thing when you think about it. No longer looking for God to care and keep, and moving away from the place of bread and praise to the wash basin.

Interesting. What caused them to leave? That's my third question. And we would say, obviously, if there's a famine, hunger.

And hard times. And so, they're moving on out. Because things look much better in Moab.

And you know, the days of Moab have not ceased. Things always seem to look better somewhere else. Sometimes when, in days past, I have talked with people, and there have been marriage problems or family problems, the answer is, I'm out of here.

The grass is greener over there. But you know, I find the problem because wherever I go, regardless of how green the grass is, I seem to bring myself. And I bring all the stuff that I am.

And unless the Lord changes what I am, it doesn't matter how green the grass is. But things look better in Moab. It's hard to stay sometimes with the people of God, isn't it? You think about in the book of Hebrews, and I'll just flip over to chapter 11 and read verses 24 and 25 for a second.

Hebrews 11, 24, and 25. It's that passage that we call the faith chapter. By faith, Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.

For he looked to the reward. He looked to the Lord. Interesting, isn't it? So easy to say, well, I'm not going to go with the people of God.

I'll just step on out. And these first verses are really about this thing of backsliding. And when we think about backsliding, we always think about some gross, gross sin.

But you know, that isn't always the whole thing, is it? It doesn't tell us that they were living immorally in Moab. It doesn't tell us that they were cursing people out or whatever. It just tells us they moved away from the house of bread to the wash basin.

The circumstances of life were tough. Everybody was suffering. It seemed like overwhelming challenges.

But you know what? It's always wrong to move away from the people of God. Ten years and three deaths go past. Probably they maybe thought we'll just go over there for a short time.

Ten years and three deaths. Wow. Out of the house of bread into the wash basin.

First Corinthians 12, 26 says, When one part of the body suffers, all suffer. And it's true. This is why we need each other so much.

But you know, sometimes we think, I can't really talk to people about how I'm hurting. Who will understand? And I don't really want to talk about it. But you know, your hurt and your pain needs to be just as much a part of the body of Christ as the blessings.

That's what it's all about, isn't it? That's what creates that sense of family. When we can hold one another in the love of Christ and walk through the valleys. Psalm 104, verse 10 says, That in the valley he places the streams.

That's that place of refreshment when we find the Lord even in the valley. Backsliding shows us some things. It shows us self-will.

There's no mention of God here being sought. It's kind of like, this is tough, we're out of here. Shows us rebellion, no longer trusting him to meet the needs.

Shows us self-gratification. Ah, man. Do we ever live in a day and time where what I want for myself becomes the biggest thing in the world? And yet scripture is so clear that as we set down our rights and live for him, there comes real life.

When we move away from God, we accept a worldly lifestyle. Ten years in Moab. Ten years without the place of worship.

Ten years without that sense of nearness of the Lord. Wow. Wrong relationships develop.

You know, God was clear in his teaching to his people, who to marry, who not, how to take preference in that, and so on. And so this whole thing develops over this ten year time. It brings emptiness of life and bitter sorrow.

And no wonder at the end of the first chapter, Naomi is saying, call me bitter. Because that's how life was. And that's what backsliding does.

It brings that bitterness and that emptiness. Well, thankfully we don't have to stay there. So let's move on to question number four.

What caused them to return? To come back to Bethlehem. You see, here's where we find that God intervenes. Naomi hears a word that God has visited his people.

And that's all it takes, isn't it? It's the word that says, Hey, the Lord is there. He has returned to bring comfort. He has returned to bring his help.

He has come to provide bread in the house of bread. And when God moves, we see his initiative. I get kind of cranked up about this, because when I'm feeling down in the dumps and feeling sorry for myself.

Did you ever do that, Bryce? Oh, I'm glad I'm not alone. He's not only a great musician, but he's a good thinker. You see, I get down in the dumps and the devil comes along and he says, God doesn't care about you.

Look at the state that you're in. God doesn't care about you. If God cared about you, da-da, da-da, da-da, da-da.

But then Naomi hears this word. God has taken the initiative. And he has come back to his people.

And you think about his love and grace and the outpouring and the longing and coming out of the valley, the sense of, Whoa! Now it's all right, because he's here. That's what brought them back. The presence and the comfort of God.

Why did he return? Well, Judges helps us understand that when times went down the tubes, the people of God went down on their knees and they begin to petition heaven until he came again in the strength of his power, either with a leader or as an answer to their need. And she's in the land of Moab, but it says that she rose up. Does that sound familiar in any way? Can you think of any other Scripture or person in Scripture who's kind of in a tough situation and it says that, I will arise, I think is the word that comes to my mind, from Luke 15.

And it's the prodigal son's story, isn't it? I will arise and go to my father. And that's what she's saying. I'm going to arise.

I'm going to go back. Because God is there. I love it.

I have a friend who's in heaven. His name is Ian Bowie. He was a wonderful Baptist preacher for many years that we got to know.

And one day he told us about how the daycare in his church, they brought to him a hamster. And the lady brought it in and set the hamster on his desk. And he looked and the hamster wasn't moving.

And he looked at the lady and he said, Yes? And she said, Pastor, the hamster hasn't moved in three days. Do you think for the sake of the children you could maybe do a funeral service? Mm-hmm. He said, Okay, I'll come in a minute.

And just to remind him, she left the hamster sitting on his desk. So as he's working there and preparing for the message, you know, all of a sudden he sees a little twitch. One of those little feet starts to go and then another one.

And then all of a sudden that little critter gets up and he goes on its wheel. And my friend Ian said, The first thing I thought is, I've got the power. And he said, No, that can't be right.

As he thought about this, he realized the hamster had gone into hibernation in the cold church basement. But when he got up in the pastor's office where all the hot air is, he revived. That's what's happening to Naomi.

There's a sense where sin and distance between us and God pushes us down. But then when the breath of God starts to blow and the warmth of the Spirit of God starts to come, there's nothing in this world like that, is there? Ah, dear ones, we'll ask one more quick question and then we'll be done for the time and the word this week. What is our life lesson here? It's simply this.

God does not leave us. There are times when we leave Him. And there are times when we question this, aren't there? Lord, are you really there? Lord, do you really care? But He is sovereign and He is over all.

And despite all of these rough circumstances and dark times, just look at what God is preparing. And He had to send all the way to Moab to get a lady who's listed in the ancestry of Jesus and to bring her to His land and again to His people. You know, even in the darkness we see He's working.

So I wonder this morning, I'm speaking to someone and there's some darkness, there's some tough issues, there's some hard things. Could you just grasp this simple thought? The Lord has not left me. He has not forsaken me.

He will not leave me. He is working in it all. And as I stay surrendered to Him, He will bring again the season of blessing.

Let's just pause to pray. Father, as we come to You this morning, even as we've looked in Your Word, we see the misery that being separated from You brings. And regardless of what our circumstances are this morning, there's a longing in our heart just to be near to You, just to know the fresh touch of our God in the midst of all of the challenges and all of these dark times.

Let the light of Your truth shine deeply into our hearts. And let us, Father, know the joy, as Pastor Brad said at the beginning of this service, of just being close to You. And if I'm speaking to someone this morning and you sense there's a distance between yourself and the Lord, oh, just in the quietness of these

moments before we ever come to the Lord's table, won't you just take a moment and come in fresh surrender to Jesus and ask Him, Lord, touch me again.

Let me set aside my agenda, my will, and truly let the words of that song be true of me. This is my desire to honor You. So, Father, continue to speak to our hearts.

Bless us through this little story of Ruth and the way in which You work in her life and family. And oh, God, work in our lives and families too. In Jesus' name we pray.

In God's people's sin. Amen. Let me read to you a few verses as we move toward the Lord's table.

And we'll ask our elders and Pastor Brad just to get ready there. I'm reading from Psalm 145. And just a few verses in the middle of the psalm.

The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all and His tender mercies over all His works. All Your works shall praise You, O Lord, and Your saints shall bless You.

They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom and talk of Your power. To make known to the sons of man His mighty acts and the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

Just listen to these words. The Lord upholds all who fall and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look expectantly to You and You give them their food in due season.

You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. Let's just focus our thoughts on the one who lifts up all who fall. The one who lifts up all who are bowed down.

As we come to the table there is nothing that we can't bring to Him. Nothing that moves in the human heart that we cannot confess to Him and be free from it. And similarly there is nothing that we need that He cannot supply.

So for a couple of moments let us just as individuals seek the Lord in prayer. Scripture tells us before we partake at the Lord's table it's good for us to examine ourselves. And so as we do that for a couple of moments in prayer then Pastor Brad will lead us on at the Lord's table.

So let's quietly seek Him.

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