

The Book of Ruth #1

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the themes of redemption and faith in the Book of Ruth, emphasizing the importance of collective spiritual health amidst adversity.

Duration: 57:35

Scripture: 2 Samuel 6:1-7, Matthew 6:33, Revelation 3:11

Topics: "Ruth"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the book of Ruth as a contrast to the dark and tragic conditions described in the book of Judges. The speaker emphasizes that even in the midst of terrible situations, God acts with a long-term perspective. The sermon highlights the theme of faith and the consequences of acting contrary to God's revealed will. The story of Ruth is presented as a demonstration of the triumph of faith and the importance of staying on God's ground.

Transcript

Today, as the Lord shall lead and enable, the message is going to issue from a consideration of the Book of Ruth, which you will have before you. And let me say here that the outline which is here presented has only the relationship to what we are going to say of either informing or reminding you of its content. That is, we do not propose to study that outline as it is.

Many of you will not need to be acquainted with the content of that little book. Others may have such a need, but we all need to be refreshed in our memory of what is there. This book is in a peculiar way, largely because of the comprehensiveness of it, concentrated into so small an area of words.

The peculiar setting forth of what was brought before us at the beginning of this conference, faith through adversity unto enlargement, establishment, and life. That would be so apparent if only just now you could read the little book right through as a citizen. We are not going to take it up in that particular way, although that will be always governing and lying behind what we have to say.

If I were to take any particular fragment from this book, which I consider to be the key to it, I think I should take from chapter four in verse five, the last clause, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. I could add to that, if you like, what is in the fifteenth verse, the first clause, he shall be unto thee a restorer of life. I think everything in the book circles round and finds its focal point in that fragment in verse five.

Raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. By universal consent and accord, this book goes by the name of Ruth. But why not Boaz? Why is it not the book of Boaz? He was a man to begin with, without the slightest suggestion, shadow of invidious comparison.

He was not a woman. He was a wealthy man. He was a religious and highly respected man.

A man of outstanding personality. An honored and distinguished citizen. And he seems to have been the chief and most responsible actor in this drama.

And he was Harbiswile. Why was his name not put to the book? Who was Ruth, after all? What was Ruth? She was a widow, nothing discreditable or dishonorable about that. She was unknown by this, and there was a good deal discreditable and dishonorable about that.

We shall see. She was a stranger, an alien in the land. Why should the book go down in history under her name? Well, you see, the answer to that question is, firstly, the message of the book.

But more than that, it is the sum of the whole Bible. For the whole plan of redemption in all its principles, in all its glory, is gathered into this little book. You can read in ten minutes.

There is no more comprehensive book in the Bible in relation to the principles of God's way of redemption. This book needs to be rescued from the back seat. I trust that today something of that will be done.

I have said that the whole great plan of redemption is here, in principle. And oh, how very much there is here of help. The message for the life of the Lord's people.

I confess to you, that although I have read it many times, and have known it for many years, some early morning hours, recently, the far west of America, brought a new thrill to my own heart as I meditated in this book. I felt the Lord was speaking to me in relation to this topic. Well, let us come to it, and begin to express, or take note of, some of the beautiful and wonderful things that it has to say to us.

But this, the book is so simple, isn't it? There is nothing profound here. You are not dealing with mysteries. It is the easiest book of all to read.

And so, these wonderful things about the Lord and his people, you and me, are brought to us without any strain, without any effort, in the very simplest way. We must not stumble at the simplicity. This book, then, unfolds itself, or its message, along certain, quite clearly discernible lines, which run right through it.

But we note its historic setting. To what place in the history of the Old Testament it belongs? That is stated for us in the very first sentence. Now, it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, in the days when the judges ruled, although it must have been written long after those days, its own internal evidence shows that.

Yet, it was when, not after, the judges ruled. This is not a sequel to the book of Judges. This is something that actually took place in the days of the judges.

Now, of course, you need to be refreshed as to the content of the book of Judges. All that we can say at the moment, again, is the book of Judges is one of the most terrible books in the whole Bible. Indeed, the most shocking things in the Bible are found in that book.

There are those things there which you don't like to read, you like to pass over. When you come on them, you just want to shut your eyes and take no notice. Yes, a dark and terrible, and at times a very evil situation, uptake, showing capabilities of the people of God, which are altogether beyond imagination.

The depths of iniquity in the human heart, the remote position from the thoughts of God to which his people can come. It is difficult to speak in exaggerated terms of some things in that book. Indeed, I think that more than once, as we have read through that book of Judges, we have been amazed at the patience of God, the willingness of God to come back to his people.

Well, right in that book, while that condition in general obtained, you set this, this contrast, this beautiful picture, given to us in the book of Ruth. And so, we are brought to see God acting with the long view in the midst of such conditions and at such a time. Look at the last words of the book of Judges.

In those days, there was no king in Israel. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes. The last words of the book of Ruth.

And Obed forgets Jesse, and Jesse forgets David. God acting with the long view in such conditions and at such a time. Wonderful to contemplate.

Everything seems to be a contradiction of God. Indeed it is. Everything seems to say the situation is spiritually hopeless.

This is spiritual calamity. In its last stage, and right in the midst of death, God is acting with the long view, and he is acting toward that day, bringing in David and the glorious kingdom. And through David, another greater than David, and a still more glorious kingdom.

I think that very first thought is a tremendously inspiring one. Tremendously reassuring one. Tremendously comforting and encouraging one.

We are sometimes inclined to think that situation is spiritually very desperate, and very difficult. And the thoughts of God are far from being represented and expressed amongst his people. Things have gone far from that.

I say it is reassuring to recollect that in worse days than these, God acted secretly and sovereignly with the long view. To have it as he ever intended it to be. It's then that he did it.

Well, if we said no more, that's a help, isn't it? And that's a message here, right at the very beginning. But let us break this up, and take up these leading lines, along which the message is unfolded. The first line, of course, is a dark line.

It's the line of tragedy. In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. And we know, do we not, that again and again in the history of Israel, the word of the Lord was fulfilled in that very way.

In faithfulness to him, he would bless his people in their fields, in their baskets, and in their stores. But should they be unfaithful, his curse would rest upon their fields, their baskets, and their stores. That was fulfilled again and again.

Outstandingly, you remember, in the days of Elijah. Thus saith the Lord, there shall not be rain upon the earth for seven years. And the drought and the famine followed with devastating results.

And when you look at the book of Judges, you're not surprised, are you? This famine. The famine was not just something that happened. It was a part of the divine judgment.

Because of the spiritual state. Because of their lost distinctiveness. Read in the book of Judges again.

Sometimes it seems that even the best people were implicated in this. Gideon. Even in Gideon's own home.

Home of his father, they were idols. And later, after the Lord had used Gideon so mightily, he set up an enemy. The lost distinctiveness of the Lord's people.

He called to stand apart from all other gods. And resultantly, their lost ascendancy over their enemies. A case of constantly reiterated disobjugation to one nation or another.

Lost ascendancy. Lost unity. They were a disintegrated people morally and spiritually.

They had no authoritative testimony in the world. It was gone. God was not all in the land where he had so singularly and wonderfully moved in order that he should be the only God of this world.

We have spoken about this earlier. Dividedness. God was against.

And the singleness of God's place. The Lord which he moved. Firstly, in calling Abram out of there.

And the five thousand gods that were worshipped there. To be their only God. His only God.

And then, keeping him waiting till the day when Canaan was assailed through Joshua for the destruction of the seven nations because of their gods. Clear that land of idolatry. Bring his people into a land where he alone, he alone utterly was the object of their occupation, of their worship.

Here there are idols. Other gods in the land. And their testimony is gone.

He is not all. No wonder there's a famine. A famine in the land.

Do you like to translate that into spiritual terms? See, it works that way, spiritually. Now, as it worked literally and historically in the old dispensation. The measure of our food, our spiritual resources.

The measure of our plenty, our increase, our enlargement. The measure in which we are conformed to the thoughts of God. It's governed in that way.

And there's a great deal of spiritual famine about today. Yes, the Lord's people far and wide are very hungry. Indeed, they're starving everywhere you go.

You have this complaint, you can't find bread. Difficult to find any spiritual food. There's a famine of hearing the word in any fullness.

And you know, Bible teaching is not always feeding. Maybe plenty of Bible teaching. Indeed, there may be Bible institutes galore.

And the people still be starving. A large percentage of the Lord's people may attend them and go through their sessions. And still be poor in scraggy things in their spiritual life.

Don't let us confuse these things. For food is food. And there is a depth of real spiritual food.

Largely because the full thoughts of God for his people do not obtain, do not govern. It's otherwise where they do. Famine in the land.

And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to sojourn in the country of Moab. He and his wife and his two sons. Now, Elimelech, his wife and sons were very decent people.

Were very nice people. Were very good people. Hadn't anything at all to set against them in their moral life.

Their respectability. Perhaps in their God-fearingness in heart. But here's a thing to note.

How often good and honest and sincere people of God become involved in tragedy because of the general state of the church. Look at this line of tragedy. Here it is in verse 1. They went to sojourn in the country of Moab.

Verse 2. The name of the man was Elimelech. The name of his wife, Nomi. The name of his two sons, Marlon and Gilliam.

And they came into the country of Moab. And continued there. Thusfore, and they took them by the women of Moab.

The name of the one was Orpah. The name of the other, Ruth. And they dwelled there about ten years.

Marlon and Gilliam died. Both of them. And the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

Verse 20. And she, Nomi, said, Call me not, Nehomai. Call me Mara.

Bitter me. I went out full. The Lord hath brought me home again empty.

Why call ye me, Nehomai? Being the Lord hath testified against me. And the Almighty hath afflicted me. It's tragedy, isn't it? Tragedy.

And it's the tragedy of good people being involved in a situation on the part of the Lord's people more generally, which is not according to the Lord's might. I don't know if you know what I mean. You see, this man evidently lost heart.

This man, Illuminati. He lost heart. He lost hope.

He lost faith. He said, It's no use staying here. There's nothing for us here.

There's no prospect here. There's no way here. We'd better get out.

This man lost heart and hope and faith and made a terrible mistake which led to all this tragedy because of the state of the Lord's people. Oh, how many things there are in the lives of so many of the Lord's people which would never be if the Lord's people as a whole were right. You think of all the things that have come in into Christianity which ought never to have come in and would never have come in if the original position of the day of Pentecost and afterward had been maintained.

All the things that came in when spiritual decline came in. All this terrible, terrible heritage of the day when the church began to lose its spiritual position. And how many have become involved? You've got to take this attitude, dear friends, about people who seem to be in a mess.

Why are so many in a mess? Not their own fault. Because they haven't got the help that they ought to be having by the church and amongst the people of God. Because things are not in that condition where they can get their help amongst the people of God.

You see, the state of the Lord's people collectively has a very tragic repercussion upon the individuals of the Lord's people and their lives. When the Lord's people collectively are in a right spiritual state corresponding to the Lord's mind, the Lord's thought, the Lord's revealed will, then the individuals find their safety amongst the Lord's people and escape from a lot of mistakes. They find their life there.

They find their guidance there. They find their protection there. They find their wisdom there.

That's how it ought to be. But because that state is not so, as the Lord would have it, lots of people are just making terrible mistakes and terrible blunders. They're involved in this whole thing and it's tragedy for many individuals because they haven't got the values of the corporate and collective life of the Lord's people as He would have it.

We must be very considerate. And very sympathetic and very understanding. For the blame is not always upon the individual.

They have become involved in a Christianity which has brought in a lot of things that God never intended and which never would have been if things had continued as at the beginning. So here are decent, respectable, nice people, God-fearing in their own heart, but moving out along a line of terrible tragedy because the nation was wrong, because the corporate body was wrong. Like that.

But then they're not all together without blame because there is individual responsibility. And tragedy just must overtake those who surrender their faith and principles to policy or personal security. You got that? You see, they knew quite well that the covenant related to that land which was their home.

They belonged to the covenant land and the covenant people. And they knew quite well what God had said about other lands and especially about Noah. Whether they'd slipped up in forgetting their Bibles, I'm not able to say, but you know we get into a lot of trouble by not knowing our Bibles.

Doing a lot of things that are altogether wrong whereas the Bible has something to say about that quite precisely and quite definitely if only we would know our Bibles, read carefully our Bibles. You know, David got into a terrible, terrible bit of trouble on one occasion because he forgot his Bible. Over the new car and the ark, you remember, putting the ark upon the car.

Oh yes, and the Lord said the Levites should carry the ark, not a car. It was there in the Bible. David was very upset with the Lord for smiting the drivers of that car to death.

But he went and carried out with the Lord and took his Bible and found where it was written that the Levites should carry the ark. And he adjusted things, but it did not mean that he was saved from the tragedy. Listen to this.

The Lord has given us his word and made known his mind to us. He won't save us from the tragedy that follows our ignorance of what we could know, of what we could know and should know. That's a very deep lesson that comes out of this case.

And so tragedy must overtake those who surrender faith. Ah yes, it was a call for faith, wasn't it? You see, the whole of this wonderful story in this little book works out to such a triumphant issue because faith came in somewhere. Faith came back where it had been lost.

You mustn't anticipate, but you see it came back right into the family circle of eliminate. The lost faith led to the tragedy. The recovered faith led to recovery and glory.

To lead that, he surrendered faith. Ah yes, a very severe test of faith, it's true. A severe test of faith.

But you've got a principle here. The Lord Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights and was a hunger. The situation perhaps physically was quite critical, perhaps desperate.

And Satan said, command that these stones be made red. Here's a test of faith in the Father, isn't it? You see the principle? Whether faith in the Father will lead us to do the wrong, the right thing, or loss of faith will lead us to do the wrong thing. What a tragedy it would have been if the Lord Jesus had surrendered faith in his Father to apparent necessity.

To the circumstances which seemed after all so desperate and so serious. Here it is. Eliminate.

Let go his faith. Under test of faith. Surrendered it to circumstances.

Surrendered it to policy. To policy. And one of the most disastrous things is policy.

What is it politic to do? It's over against what God has said. Allowing policy to govern. Or our own advantage, our own security, our own well-being when God has made his mind about it perfectly clear in his word.

You see, we cannot after all preserve our fullness. I'm referring to verse 21. I went out full.

And we cannot preserve our fullness off of God's ground. We may have a lot get off of God's ground and you can't keep it. They thought they would keep it all.

You see. By going to Moab. Preserve their fullness.

They went out full evidently. They took everything with them. Thought they would be quite secure.

They had everything that they got with them. Full they went out. She's there.

Came back empty. We can preserve nothing at all if we get off of God's ground. If we get on to ground that is foreign to God.

And Moab was altogether foreign to God. And foreign to God's covenant. Indeed it was worse than that.

So the old man said in these terrible words, I went out full and the Lord hath brought me home empty. The Lord hath testified against me the Almighty hath afflicted me. You see God acted sovereignly in disapproval.

God thought to get them back. Adversity under God's hand is always intended to be firstly a corrective and then a restorative. God is sovereign and he acted sovereignly with them and so he brought this adversity upon them.

He could do no other. In his kindness, in his mercy and according to his beneficent thought he chastened them. David said before I was afflicted I went astray.

How true that is here in this case. Ah, yet it's all the dark line. Here is what? Well, death.

Elimelech is dead. His two sons are dead. Death.

Deadlock. Impasse. No way through.

Everything has come to a deadlock, to a standstill. All tied up. Barrenness.

Barrenness. Elimelech tells that of herself and then the two wives of her two sons. No children.

Barrenness. Deadlock. Death.

When we act contrary to the revealed mind of God. It's a terrible lesson. Yes, deadlock.

No way through there. Barrenness knows fruitful ministry if we are off of God's ground. Oh, take it apart.

God has made His mind perfectly clear on all matters concerning our life and our service. He has laid down His principles. He has told us where and on what ground He will meet us.

He has told us that it is in His house that He'll meet us. His people. He has told us that He has appointed in His house certain things and certain people under the Holy Spirit's anointing for our direction and for our safety, for our good.

Let us get off of that ground and see what happens. You can put it to the test. Can't forbid that you would, but it's apparent, it's quite clear.

Limitation and spiritual test and barrenness. The lives of the just moving past on toward their close with a story of barrenness which might have been a story of fullness, richness of service because they would not and will not recognize God's principles amongst His people. Say what you like about it.

Blame the Lord's people. Blame the Lord's servants, if you will. God's word is perfectly clear on them.

We shall find our way and we shall find our service on the ground that God has laid down. And if we, knowing that or having had it given to us in the word of God and we should know it, ignore it, argue ourselves out of it, depart from it, refuse to have it, violate it, all right, spiritual test, spiritual barrenness, spiritual deadlock. These are things that we should lay to heart, hard as they sound.

Let's lay them to heart. The inheritance which ought to be ours and is ours by right, by covenant as in this case either falls into abeyance with deriving nothing from it or it passes to others. There's a terrible warning in the book of the Revelation that no man takes thy crown.

Crown that could be ours passing to others. Well, that's that's one of the lines along which this whole story unfolds. It's the tragic line.

It's the dark line. And I know you're oppressed by it. Still, it's as well we recognize the message of this book.

Because, dear friends, it's not only a message which applies to us individually in our Christian lives, but you see, this is one of the major lines of the whole doctrine of redemption. Probably we shall see later on. Until and until you recognize the crown of death, the reasons for death and deadlock and barrenness, you're not in a position to appreciate the wonderful, wonderful mercy of God.

So we pass to the next line along which the book unfolds. We could gather that under one little phrase and title of the Lord, well known to us in the New Testament, the God of Hope. The God of Hope.

That's a dark, terrible background, but over that stands this, the God of Hope. Look, chapter one, verse six, 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 how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread.

Verse twenty-two, No man returned but Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law with her, which returned out of the country of Moab, and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of the barley harvest. Good news from a far country. Good news in a far country.

She had heard out of in the land of Moab God had visited his people. Maybe we could just place this in the book of Judges, but it was evidently one of those periods between the tragedies that were there. There were those periods, as you know, the Judges, when the situation was changed.

For a little while under Gideon, for instance, and under Deborah, and under others, bright, bright patches in a long, dark day of four hundred years. It was evidently in one of those brighter periods in that dark history that this is set. The Lord visited his people and gave them bread, and from Ammon to Harvest.

There is a place where God meets us, but he will only meet us in that place, and that place is resurrection, on resurrection ground. Well, the Lord is risen indeed. He says, Thomas, I won't believe it.

And so he was not with them when the Lord appeared to us. He was somewhere away, outside, wandering about perhaps morosely in his despair and darkness. The Lord never went after Thomas.

Let him get on with it. Let him stew in his misery. He never went after him.

Here is the place where I meet you, where you believe that I am worshipped. Be not faithless, but believing. It was a question of faith, wasn't it, to believe in the resurrection.

The good news had gone out. Good news had gone out. We had seen the Lord.

The Lord is risen, but he would not believe the good news. So he was left outside in the dark. And the Lord, I say, didn't go after him.

It was not until he came in. Out was he came in on that day and don't know something had been going on in him. Perhaps he'd come to the place where he said, well, I'm certainly getting nowhere along that line.

This is getting me nowhere. If there is any hope anywhere at all, it seems to be amongst those people in that room. The very least I can do is to go and see.

Ah yes, and when he got onto the ground where the Lord was believed and where they were enjoying the reality of his resurrection, the Lord met him. And he met the Lord. There is always a ground, you know, like that.

You know, the story of the prodigal has that aspect to it, hasn't it? The elder brother would not go in. All right, let him stay outside as miserable as he could be. All the rejoicing is inside.

He's got to come on to resurrection ground in order to be in the good of resurrection life and joy. That's the place where the Lord meets us. You see, the barley harvest.

Now you Bible students know quite well that barley is always the type of resurrection. Always the type of resurrection. It's the first of the harvest, of the grain.

Well, barley is referred to quite a lot in this little book, isn't it? Let's look. One, two, three, four, five, six times in the little book. Barley is referred to.

And from the barley harvest Ruth comes into her new life and her new fullness by what Boaz gives her on this store of barley. Everything is, so to speak, resting upon the barley, isn't it, on the barley harvest. What about those five barley loaves with which the Lord fed the multitude? What did he go on to say immediately afterwards? Oh, my bless his life indeed.

How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Well, the mystery of Christ imparting himself to us is only known by us on resurrection ground, isn't it? The Holy Spirit ministering Christ after his resurrection. His risen life ministered to us. The barley loaf, you see, I need not say with the meaning of the barley and you can go through the Bible with it and see it.

Always this one thing resurrection, resurrection, the living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead unto an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that he did not away reserve to you. You can read that right into the book of Ruth. So, God always moves back as well as forward on the line of resurrection.

That's the message here. He's moving back on the line of resurrection. In other words, God is always on the positive line.

This situation is no pleasure to God, is no satisfaction to God. This tragedy of things either in the land or in the lives of these Jews gives God no glory. He always reacts to a situation like that on the principle and the line of resurrection.

He's on the positive line. Do believe this. Are you somewhere in this tragic situation, this situation of tragedy? Have you come to a rest, to deadlock? You come to an impasse of barrenness.

You feel you've got off the Lord's ground. Listen! Listen! The Lord doesn't accept that. And he doesn't want you to accept that.

The Lord does not believe that as the ultimate thing. The Lord acts on positive lines. There is no despair and tragedy so deep and terrible that the Lord will react to it in resurrection.

Oh, lay hold of this by faith. Lay hold of this that God is the God of resurrection. God is the God of the barley harvest.

His answer to death, His answer to desolation. He is the God who raises the dead. If you feel like that, believe Him as that.

Believe Him as that. Good news for you. As for me, oh my, good news.

The reversing of all our misfortunes is in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. You got that? Yes. And so it says, they went out of the country of Noah.

Out of the country of Noah. Why? They heard good news of resurrection and believed it and acted upon it. It doesn't say, oh, that's all talk.

Don't believe that's true. That's only a rumor. No.

They believed. The report. They believed the report.

There was resurrection. And they put their faith into action and they went in that direction. Embraced it by faith and found it to be true.

The thing that you and I are called upon to do many times in our lives is to believe in the God who raises the dead and lay hold of that resurrection by faith and commit ourselves to it in definite action. Move our faith by our work. And on that ground we inherit the fruit of His resurrection.

The curse is removed. The Noah lay under the curse. It remained under the curse.

It was an accursed country and people. And in itself Moab was still under the curse. But they left the ground of the curse because of resurrection.

You can see the doctrine, can't you, of the New Testament in that? Yes, the curse. The curse. It's over all this creation as it is but because Jesus has been made a curse for us and suffered the judgment and has risen for our justification on the ground of resurrection we leave the ground of Moab the place of the curse and come into the fruits of His resurrection and how rich they are.

Beware of getting back into the land of Moab. That is, beware of the earth touch. Touching in your spirit the realm that still lies under the curse and this world is still under the curse.

Beware of a voluntary touch in spirit, in life with that which lies under judgment for it means depriving you again of your spiritual life and of your fruitfulness and of your joy and your peace. Beware of the earth touch. Note then God's action in resurrection is to make His place true to its name.

To make His place what it should be. You see, it's Bethlehem and Bethlehem means house of bread and when there's a famine that covers Bethlehem then that's something altogether contrary to its very name. Contrary to...

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