

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Ruth: Does God really care about me?

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The Redemptive Resolution

Ruth 4

Introduction:

A. In tragedy we can wonder, “Does God really care about me?”

So we’re in our fourth and final week covering the book of Ruth. We’ve been talking how it in tragedy, it can be tempting to wonder, “Does God really care about me?” The book of Ruth speaks to this pointed question, which is such an important topic. After all, when we find ourselves in a deep trial, we don’t want to add to our pain by also becoming bitter towards God.

So, if you’ve got a Bible, please turn to Ruth 4, Ruth 4. Ruth is the 8th book in the Bible, right after Judges. As you turn, I’d like to invite you to please join with me in praying for our Church Family. After all, some of us are in the midst of horribly painful crises, and others of us may be headed towards a crisis we’re not spiritually prepared for. Now as we finish the story this morning, please be thinking about how you can apply it to your life.

B. Review of Ruth chapters 1-3

Now the book of Ruth has four chapters, each chapter is one act in the story. So imagine you’re watching a four part TV miniseries on the book of Ruth. At the beginning of the fourth episode, a narrator hits some highlights from Ruth chapters 1-3. That narrator could say, “Previously on Ruth; in the dark time of the Judges, Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons leave Bethlehem because of famine. They live among the questionable Moabites. Then Elimelech and the sons die, leaving Naomi all alone – a poor, vulnerable widow whose family line may go extinct. So Naomi heads home, thinking that God cares about His people, but not about her. Incredibly, Naomi’s Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth displays loyal love as she commits to Naomi and her God, even though she’ll probably struggle to keep food on the table, be vulnerable to racism and abuse, and know only her bitter mother-in-law.

Now Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem at harvest time, in need of food and family. And it looks like God does care about bitter Naomi, and loyal Ruth. For as Ruth risks her safety as she searches for food, it just so “happens” that she finds the field of Boaz. Boaz just so “happens” to be godly and a wealthy relative of Elimelech, just so “happens” to be at his field,

just so “happens” to give Ruth an abundance of food, water and protection, and just so “happens” to ask God to richly bless Ruth for her loyal love.

Naomi is excited about these developments, and decides that perhaps God does care after all. And given how God has already provided, and given the godliness of Boaz, he just might be willing to redeem and marry Ruth. However, now the harvest is ending, and Boaz has not yet proposed. Given the norms of that culture, Ruth may not have contact with Boaz for a while. So Naomi hatches a high stakes matchmaker plan, telling Ruth to get dolled up and lay down at Boaz’s feet, at night, after he’s been drinking. There Ruth asks Boaz to marry her while mentioning that he’s a redeemer, which means Boaz would take care of Ruth and Naomi. But surprise, Boaz is not the closest relative, and the closer redeemer gets the first shot at marrying Ruth. However, Boaz asks God to bless Ruth for her loyal love and assures Ruth that he’ll take care of the situation the very next day.

Now as God works behind the scenes through godly Boaz, it looks like Ruth will soon have a husband. But questions still remain. Will Boaz get to marry Ruth, or miss out because of the closer redeemer? Will the Israelite people fully accept Ruth, even though she comes from the wicked Moabites? And will Ruth and Naomi finally have that son/grandson who can secure the future of the family’s line and well being? After all, Ruth was not able to have children with her former husband.

I. The Redemptive Resolution – Ruth 4:1-17c

A. The Falling Action – Ruth 4:1-12

Well let’s find out as we cover the final act of our story. Please follow along with me, as I read chapter 4, verses 1-2. “¹ Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, ‘Turn aside, friend; sit down here.’ And he turned aside and sat down. ² And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, ‘Sit down here.’ So they sat down.”

Now Boaz probably went to the city gate for two reasons. First, everyone passed the gate as they traveled to the fields and threshing floor, so it’s a good place to try to find the closer redeemer. Second, the city gate is where official business got done, in the presence of the elders.

Now perhaps God is at work behind the scenes, even in the small things, for as Boaz gets to the city gate and sits down, the closer redeemer happens to come by. Interestingly, in verse 1 Boaz calls him *peloni almoni* in the Hebrew. The ESV translates it “friend” here, but many of

the commentaries note that a better way of translating it would be Mr. “So and So.” Some translations come closer to conveying this idea. For example, the King James Version calls the closer redeemer “Such a one”, the Complete Jewish Bible calls him “Such-and-such” and the NET Bible calls him “John Doe.” Now Boaz knows this guy’s name, for they are relatives from the same small town. And it would be weird for Boaz to call his relative Mr. “So and So” right before starting formal proceedings with him. So, interestingly, it appears that the author chose to withhold the closer redeemer’s name.¹

Now having gotten Mr. “So and So’s” attention, let’s look at verse 3, where Boaz starts to pull a fast one on him. ³ Then he said to the redeemer, ‘Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. ⁴ So I thought I would tell you of it and say, ‘Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people.’ If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you.’” And he said, ‘I will redeem it.’”

So Boaz entices Mr. “So and So” by saying, “Hey, Naomi’s selling her field and I want to buy it, but as closest redeemer you get the first shot.” Now Israelite Law prohibited the permanent sale of land, for it was an inheritance for your family from God. But, someone like Naomi, who didn’t have the strength or money to farm the land, could lease it to someone else. Then at the next Jubilee, which happened every fifty years, Naomi or her descendents would get the field back. Now Naomi probably won’t make it to the next Jubilee, and she has no heirs. So, Mr. “So and So’s” family will be the closest relatives, will have been farming the land for years, and as a result, will get to keep it forever. Mr. “So and So” probably thought this was his lucky day; for he had the opportunity to permanently add to his land holdings at a lease price, while also carrying out the respected role of family redeemer. And so in verse 4 Mr. “So and So” agrees to redeem the land.

But, in verse 5, at just the right moment, Boaz adds a condition to the deal. ⁵ Then Boaz said, ‘The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance.’”

¹ As noted by Dr. Robert Chisholm in his unpublished commentary on the book of Ruth – “If the narrator did not know the man’s name or felt it too unimportant to include, one might expect him to simply omit a vocative altogether. By including these words, he draws attention to the man’s anonymity in the story.”

Boaz is saying, “Oh, by the way, Mr. ‘So and So’ if you buy the land you must also serve as redeemer not to older Naomi, but to younger Ruth.” This greatly changes the financial dynamics of the deal. Now, in addition to purchasing the land, he would have to support both Naomi and Ruth, and marry Ruth. And since Ruth is childbearing age, they might have a son together, and if they did, Mr. “So and So” would also have to support him, even though that son would continue the family line of Naomi and inherit the land that Mr. “So and So” is purchasing.

Now some of us might be wondering, why would God’s Law say that a brother, who may already be married, should also marry his brother’s widow? It’s hard for us to fully understand, but keep in mind that this is a culture where women are very dependent upon the care of a man and it’s vitally important for the family line to continue. In that context, this Law reflects God’s care for the poor, childless widow.

However, technically speaking, Mr. “So and So” may not have been required to marry and redeem Ruth. For God’s Law in Deuteronomy only required a brother to marry his brother’s widow and raise a son in his name. And Mr. “So and So” is the closest relative, but not a brother to Ruth’s dead husband. So this might be why Boaz brought the city elders into the proceedings. In that culture, where it was very important to save face, the closer redeemer would now be under public pressure to honor the moral spirit of God’s Law by redeeming Ruth if he wants to redeem the land.

Let’s look at verse 6 and see what Mr. “So and So” decides. “⁶ Then the redeemer said, ‘I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it.’”

Now Mr. “So and So” may not have been a bad guy, but his actions show that he does not have the same level of loyal love for the family clan as Boaz. Remember, having one’s family line go extinct was considered a shameful tragedy in that culture. And Mr. “So and So” has shown here that he is not willing to financially sacrifice to help Naomi’s family line to continue. And because Mr. “So and So” won’t sacrifice to preserve Naomi’s family name, the author refuses to preserve his name, withholding it from the story. He’s just Mr. “So and So”, anonymous, in a chapter that is full of names.

Now there is a definitely a time and place to make a safer decision. But I can’t help but wonder if I sometimes follow the path of Mr. “So and So” as I keep things safe for myself at times when God instead wants me to sacrificially serve. To follow the meaningful and

memorable path of Boaz; for although Boaz married Ruth to preserve the name of his dead family, his godly action has also preserved Boaz's name to this day, over 3,000 years later.

So let's examine the words of the memorable Boaz, starting in verse 9. ⁹ Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, 'You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. ¹⁰ Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day.'"

In these verses Boaz expresses his desire that the dead of Elimelech's family will live on through an heir. And as we look at verse 11, we'll see that the witnesses gathered share Boaz's hope and ask God to greatly bless Boaz for his loyal love. ¹¹ Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, 'We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, ¹² and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman.'"

Ruth may not be at the city gate, but we see she has finally found her true home among God's people. She's not an Israelite by blood, but she has repeatedly exemplified the Israelite virtue of *hesed*, a key Hebrew term in the book which means "loyal love." And this woman of *hesed*, who starts the story as a suspicious Moabite foreigner, then moves up to a servant-like status in chapter 2, then becomes a maiden in chapter 3, has now become the wife of Boaz, a prominent Israelite. And the people think so highly of Ruth that they even ask God to give her many distinguished children, like Rachel and Leah, the founding mothers of the Israelite nation.

And the people continue to ask God to bless Boaz and Ruth by praying that they be renowned and have a dynasty like that of Perez, one of Boaz's ancestors. This connection in verse 12 with the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore, was appropriate for another reason. For like Ruth, Tamar was a foreigner who helped continue a Jewish family line after the death of her husband.

B. The Resolution and Conclusion – Ruth 4:13-17c

Now most of our questions have been answered, but one remains. Will Ruth and Naomi finally have that son/grandson who can secure the future of the family? And, now a new

question has come up. Given how the people have just asked God to so abundantly bless the loyal love of Ruth and Boaz, will God provide them not just a child, but an important descendant?

Let's start to answer those questions as we look at verse 13. ¹³ "So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son." Now the last time the author directly told us that God acted was early in chapter 1, when God provides His people food to end their famine. But, as we've gone through the story, we've seen God's care for Naomi worked out behind the scenes through the *hesed* of Ruth and Boaz. And now, for the second time, God is said to directly act, as He enables the previously childless Ruth to have a son.

Let's see how the women of the city respond to Naomi's turn of fortune, starting in verse 14. ¹⁴ "Then the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵ He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.'"

Ruth and Boaz have left the scene, as we focus on Naomi and the women of the city, just as we did at the end of chapter 1. Back then Naomi told the women that she was empty and bitter. Now, because of God's provision, she is full and pleasant again. For she has loyal Ruth, whom the women say is better than seven sons. And in a culture that greatly preferred sons and thought of seven as an ideal number, this is high praise indeed.

And not only does she have the incomparable Ruth, Naomi also now has a grandson, who the women pray will be renowned in all Israel. Now my son Grant is the first grandchild on both sides of the family. And his grandmas just go nuts over him. And as a dad, I think it's great, because loving grandparents are the only other people who really understand how incredibly awesome your kid is. And I've seen other grandmas here at Northwest get so excited to see their little grandkids. Now, imagine that joy you've experienced as a grandparent, or you've observed a grandparent experience, and then place on top of it the cultural meaning that this child gives Naomi. For this little grandson took away the shame and tragedy of Naomi's family line ending with her; further, he'll also provide for Naomi once he grows up.

Let's see Naomi embrace her special grandson in verse 16. ¹⁶ "Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. ¹⁷ And the women of the neighborhood gave

him a name, saying, ‘A son has been born to Naomi.’ They named him Obed.” So Naomi helps raise Obed, whose name means “one who serves.” How appropriate, for Obed will serve Naomi by continuing her family name, inheriting her family land, and taking care of Naomi in her old age; A beautiful resolution to a beautiful story.

II. Application

A. The Warren family tragedy shows us the importance of application

But the stories of our lives are not yet resolved. And you may be going through a season that looks more like Naomi of chapter 1 than Naomi of chapter 4. And even Naomi of chapter 4 still bears the pain of her previous losses.

Now some of you know that Pastor Rick Warren and his family have also endured a tragic loss. For earlier this year their son Matthew, who struggled with mental illness, took his life. Warren, in a recent sermon², showed everyone his watch, and noted that it was marked “shock resistant”. The watch was made in such a way as to help protect it from damage as it inevitably gets bumped and dropped. And in a broken world, there are also bumps and drops along the way in our lives, and as Rick Warren said, “You want to prepare to be shock resistant as well.” And by God’s grace, Rick and Kay Warren made countless little choices, day by day over the years, to become shock resistant as they grew their relationship with God and His people. It didn’t take away the buckets of tears they’ve wept. But as they waited for the police to unlock their son’s house, right before their worst fears were confirmed, their small group was right there with them. And as they were tempted to wonder in the darkness, “Does God really care about me?” they had so much to draw upon; all the promises they knew from time spent in God’s Word, all the times experiencing God’s love and presence as they sought Him, all the cultivated friendships that now pray for and assist them, all the previous prayers they had seen God answer, all the times they had seen God work through them as they ministered, all the ways they had let God grow their character over the years, and so much more.

B. Reminder of previous applications (Naomi, Ruth, & Boaz)

Now I sincerely hope that you’ve enjoyed going through the book of Ruth as much as I have. But if we only hear God’s Word, and then fail to apply it to our lives, we’re making a huge mistake. For our gracious God wants to mold us into people who are shock resistant, and help others to be shock resistant too. So, what about you, are you shock resistant?

² *When Your World Collapses*

Now each week we've considered a way to apply the book of Ruth. Maybe you're like Naomi early in the story, you've gone through the crucible, and you're struggling to believe that God really cares. I hope the book of Ruth has helped you consider anew that God really cares about the broken, vulnerable, and bitter. Please seek the help of a "Ruth-like" friend, who can encourage you to journey back toward God's open arms.

Or perhaps, like Ruth, God wants you to show His care as you help someone whose pain you can identify with and minister to; just as widow Ruth so greatly served fellow widow, Naomi. Or perhaps, like Boaz, God wants you to show His care for the poor as you use your resources to help others in need.

Or perhaps God is leading you to apply the book in another way. I've asked one of the members of our church family, Luisa, to share about how the book of Ruth is making a difference in her life. Now Luisa is in a care group with me, so she's had the misfortune of going through Ruth with me twice now. So Luisa, thanks for putting up with me, and for coming up here to share with us...

C. Luisa shares her application from the book of Ruth

[Luisa comes to front to share]

Thanks so much for sharing how the book of Ruth is making a difference in your life. That's a great application. And I bet it's spoken to others, for many of us are in a place we aren't excited about, whether it's our geography, or job, or something else.

D. Consider how you can apply the book of Ruth

So, now that we've looked to the characters and listened to Luisa, how will you apply Ruth? We're going to take a minute now to think about your application. If you've got a bulletin, please get out the sermon outline insert. I'm going to read some questions from it, which will also be on the screen, to help you think of one application to work on. And it'd be great to also discuss these questions later at home, so that you can spiritually encourage those closest to you. Now, here are the questions.

Do I need to seek the help of a "Ruth-like" friend?

Is there something I really need to pray about this week?

How can I spiritually prepare for my next trial?

Can I help someone undergoing a trial that I have also experienced?

Is there someone in financial need who I could help?

Is there something I am convicted about that I need to change?

How do I sense that God wants me to apply the book?

Conclusion:

A. Our sovereign God really cares and provides people who care

Now when you're going through dark times it's tempting to wonder, "Does God really care about me?" And having covered the book, I hope it's clear that our sovereign God really cares and provides people who care.

B. The Surprise Ending – Ruth 4:17d-22

But if you're still struggling, the story's not quite over. Look with me at the end of verse 17 through verse 22. Here we see a genealogy that's a surprise ending. For the story started with us wondering if God cares about Naomi, the struggling, bitter widow. And then we wondered if God would reward the *hesed* of Ruth and Boaz. But here in this genealogy, we see that God's *hesed* towards Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz was beyond their wildest dreams. For Ruth and Boaz had Obed, who had Jesse, who had David, the esteemed king who took the Israelite people out of the dark period of the Judges and into great prosperity.

Now it was reported that God acted twice in the story – when He provided food to His people and provided Ruth a son. But did you notice how God also worked by answering His people's prayers? Look at the screen with me. For when Boaz marries Ruth, that answers Naomi's prayer from chapter 1 that Ruth would find another husband, and it answers Boaz's prayer from chapter 2 that Ruth would find security. And when Ruth and Boaz have a son, it answers Naomi's chapter 2 prayer that God bless generous Boaz. And it answers Boaz's chapter 3 prayer that God reward Ruth. And it answers the people's chapter 4 prayer that Ruth be fertile. And finally, when David appears as Boaz's descendant, it answers the people's chapter 4 prayer that Boaz become famous, and it answers the women's chapter 4 prayer that Obed become famous.

And so what started as a story about a few seemingly insignificant people in a small town becomes much larger. For God's care for them as He preserved their family line became an expression of His care for all of Israel through their descendant, King David. You just never know how God is going to work through the loyal love of everyday folks like you and me. And you never know how God might even weave your tragedy into a part of His plan of blessing, as He did with Naomi and Ruth.

And God's care for Naomi and Ruth even displays His care for us, through David's greater descendent. His genealogy, which includes Ruth, Boaz, and David, is found in the book of Matthew; Jesus, the Bread of Life, born in Bethlehem. Now Jesus is perhaps the ultimate

expression of God's care for us. For because of our ancestor's sin, and ours, we've changed God's perfect creation into a broken, tragic world, and we have severed ourselves from God.

Now in response God could have just walked away and left us in a hellish judgment, or He could have kept His distance in heaven and just sent us an essay on how we messed things up and why we're suffering. But God instead sent His precious Son. For Jesus came on a rescue mission for us. He lived the perfect life we should have lived. And He entered into an incredible suffering, as He took the physical pain of being nailed to a cross. And as horrible as that was, it was nothing compared to taking God's wrath for all our sins. For then He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" On the cross, Jesus lost God's care, so that we can enjoy God's care, forever. When we were a helpless, hurting Naomi, Jesus gave us a love more loyal than Ruth, and a generosity far exceeding Boaz.

For like the book of Ruth, your story starts with a funeral, as you're dead in your sins. And in the middle, there are ups and downs. Now I can't begin to understand your pain, and I certainly can't guarantee that your circumstances will turn around like Naomi's.

But the staggering price that Jesus paid answers the question, "Does God really care about me?" And He didn't just provide back there, He continues to provide for believers today through His love, His people, His work in our lives behind the scenes, and His Spirit. And Jesus gives the grace to endure, and even to grow in the midst of trial. And He gives us hope, even in tragedy. For like Naomi, your story ends full. And like the book of Ruth, your story ends with a wedding. For you'll be united with Christ as part of His bride forever, every tear wiped from your eye, no more struggle, or pain, as we celebrate in God's glorious presence, forever. So let's praise our God of true *hesed*, as we close in prayer.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.