

Ruth 1

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[0:00] Good morning. Join me, if you would please, in your Bibles, in the book of Ruth. The book of Ruth, four short chapters after the book of Judges, just before 1 Samuel.

Before we begin today's study of Ruth 1, I want to give you some brief background on the book and a brief explanation of the reasoning for spending the next four weeks, Lord willing, in this book. And I wrote that sentence before I wrote the rest of the introduction, so we'll see how brief it is. Both the authorship and the date of authorship are uncertain concerning Ruth.

I most like the tradition that holds Solomon as its author because, as we will see, he may have written it as a telling of his family's story. However, regardless of who or when the book was written, the reason for its writing can be clearly ascertained.

Verse 1 sets the scene for the book. In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. We have studied in great brevity the book of Judges the past two weeks.

[1:21] We did an overview of it. We looked at a single story in it. Perhaps we'll revisit it sometime soon. But in that time that we spent in it, I noted a pattern for us in the book.

And you may recall, first the people rebel, then God hands them over to the people of the land. Then God shows them mercy by raising up a judge.

And then the judge, by God's help, delivers the Israelites, and they have rest. And finally, the judge dies, and the people return to their wickedness.

So this occurs over and over and over again. So when the events we will study over the next month occur, this is God's dealing with the nation of Israel. Wickedness, judgment, mercy, rest, wickedness over and over.

In the midst of all the stories of turmoil that occur across a 300-year span in the book of Judges, we get this little gem of a story.

[2:23] It happens in the days when the judges ruled. The bulk of this story takes place across a single harvest season.

And it zooms our attention in on a widow and her daughter-in-law. And the sovereign kindness of God towards them. It is proper for us to understand God as sovereign.

Absolutely powerful. If you don't believe that God is sovereign, I'm not sure that we worship the same God. The scripture is replete with the expressions of God's absolute power.

It is also proper for us to understand that his sovereignty takes action. It's not just something he possesses, but he actually works sovereignly.

He is not idle, but he is working at all times in the affairs of men. This is a great comfort to those who know God and who belong to him.

[3:30] Take, just as an example, the possibility that you have been troubled in this election season by who may be our next president. I think we have reason to be troubled. Either way, to be frank.

But Daniel chapter 2 and verse 21 says that God changes times and seasons. He removes kings and sets up kings.

As sure as the summer gives way to fall. Did we all doubt that this year? I did at times. And here it is. Finally, in November, fall seems to have arrived.

God is ordering the matters of the world. This doesn't always happen in a way that we understand. But we do well when we remember that God has the good of his people in mind as he acts.

It's not always felt as good. But if we remember God does, in fact, work for the good of his people, we really do well. I want to show you this from two places in the Bible.

[4:35] One in the Old Testament and one in the New. Briefly, you can mark Ruth and go there or you can just listen to me. The first is in Psalm 84, verse 11. This is the last half of it.

There the psalmist says, No good thing does God withhold from those who walk uprightly. If we are in Christ, then we walk uprightly before God.

And this psalm tells us that God doesn't withhold anything good from us. I don't believe that this means that we are just waiting to receive the good things and the bad things are in a different category.

But this means that God, in everything he gives us, is working good. And I believe this because of a more clear text that we see in the New Testament.

Romans 8, verse 28 and following. There Paul writes, And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good.

[5:33] For those who are called according to his purpose. And then he carefully defines the good that God is working in the first half of verse 29. For those who before knew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

We see in these texts that God is working, that we would be more like Christ. That we could be with Paul in his writing to the Philippians from a Roman jail.

That for him to live is Christ and to die is gain. We call God's sovereign ordering of the world for the good of his people, his providence.

Most of you likely know that your elders have proposed a name change for our church. And were present at or have listened to the proposal and accompanying explanation. But allow me a moment more to repeat some of what was said there concerning the word providence.

In Latin, this word literally means to foresee. Pro, before. Vite, to see. If you put those together, you have simply the English word provide.

[6:53] However, to foresee doesn't quite get at how the word is used. It will be helpful for you to think of the English idiom, I'll see to it.

If I say this, I am saying that I will accomplish what needs to be accomplished. I'll do everything that's necessary to do the thing I'm promising to do. And this is what is meant by God's providence. God will see to it. What is the it that he will see to? All the good that he has promised us in order that we would look like Jesus Christ.

Recall Romans 8, 28, and 29. And stay with me just a bit longer and look with me at one more text. And then we will begin looking at Ruth.

I want you to see a place where we readily see both providential work and the language itself of providence. This is Genesis chapter 22, verse 7 and 8.

[7:55] God has commanded Abraham to make a sacrifice of his son Isaac. And they have traveled to Mount Moriah and have left behind the servants that went with them.

And verse 7 says, And Isaac said to his father Abraham, My father, here I am. He says that my son. He said, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

Abraham said, he responds to Isaac, God will provide or see. The literal translation of the Hebrew word is, God will see for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.

So they went both of them together. And then in verse 14, there's a ram that's provided to be sacrificed in the place of, instead of Isaac. And then verse 14, Abraham called the name of that place, The Lord will provide or see to it.

And it is said to this day on the mount of the Lord, It shall be provided or seen to. God provides. He is providential.

[9:01] In the giving of the ram as a replacement for Isaac for Abraham's sacrifice. This episode is typologically rich as we know that the ram foreshadows the provision of Jesus Christ to die in our place.

God's providence includes the means of our salvation, the subsequent sanctification and glorification, but it also includes all the minutia in between.

Regardless of what troubles you this day, if you belong to God in Christ, if you are one of his people, you can rest in the fact that God is working all things for your good.

Your highest good. That you would look more like Christ. In union with your creator. A life that is full of peace that surpasses understanding, regardless of your circumstances.

Thankfulness in your heart. Confidence in your future glory. Now, I have folded in the front of my Bible an origami sparrow.

[10:12] Thanks to YouTube, I learned how to make this origami sparrow. It serves to remind me to look at the birds of the air.

They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet my heavenly Father feeds them. Am I not more valuable than they?

Matthew 6 and verse 26. Now, assuming that you can see what I am holding, this little origami sparrow, you can see in this creased paper, this form of a sparrow, but how it takes this form is not discernible.

Maybe you are one of those people who do origami, and you know how this was created. The average person has no idea how this shape was made. I had grand plans to unfold it and refold it for you, but I am so nervous I will not get it back together, that I am not going to.

It might go terribly wrong if I were to do that, but if you were to take it, and carefully unfold it, and fold it back again, perhaps you would begin to understand how it has come to take this shape.

[11:24] How we understand providence can be a bit like this origami sparrow. We often don't understand how God is working in the circumstances of our lives, but often, not always, but often we are allowed glimpses of how all that he does is for our good and for his glory.

We get to look back and say, oh, I see now what he was doing on my behalf and for his glory. The book of Ruth is a love story.

I want to be clear on the front end. It is that, but it is not only that. It is also a story about suffering and survival. So much more is packed into it than the story between Ruth and Boaz.

The theme of it is not wait on your Boaz, to be clear. Ruth presents to us the providential work of God unfolded and should be of great comfort and encouragement to our souls.

God works in the lives of the characters of this narrative, in congruence with their human agency, to bring about astonishing things.

[12:37] Let me show you that by looking at the first five verses of chapter one, and then I'm going to rush us to the end. We're going to look at the end before we read the entirety of chapter one together.

So let me just show you the first five verses of chapter one. chapter one. In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.

The name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Malon and Chulion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah.

They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives.

The name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other, Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Malon and Chulion died so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

[13:43] So it begins tragically, right? Nothing very good is going on in these first five verses, and we'll see a bit today and then in the coming weeks how the story unfolds, if you're familiar with it.

But I want to take you to the end, the first part of this double ending of the book, to chapter 4 and verse 17. We see that there's a child born to Ruth.

So to be clear, a child was born to Ruth. Verse 17 says, And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, A son has been born to Naomi. They named him Obed.

He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. So incapped, right? Here's a thing going on at the beginning, this great tragedy, and we can see where it's headed already.

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a promise of a king whose reign would last forever. This promise is temporally fulfilled in King David and eternally fulfilled in King Jesus.

[15:02] What an incredible providence. We get to see the full display of it in these four chapters. We have the joy of spending the next four

weeks considering it.

So let's look at Ruth, chapter 1 together. Before I read it in its entirety, let me remind you, beloved, this is God's word to us, written for his glory and our good. And so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife, Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Malon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives. The name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years. And both Malon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

[16:16] Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

Lord, grant that you may find rest, each of you, in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, No, we will return with you to your people.

But Naomi said, Turn back, my daughters. Why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters. Go your way, for I am too old to have a husband.

If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.

[17:28] Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Return after your sister-in-law. But Ruth said, Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you.

For where you go, I will go. And where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die. And there will I be buried.

May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you. And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more. So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem.

And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, Is this Naomi? She said to them, Do not call me Naomi.

Call me Mara. For the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?

[18:35] So Naomi returned and Ruth the Moabite and her daughter-in-law with her who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

Now, I just want to observe two things briefly from the text today. As we go on in our study, I'm sure we'll have to access chapter one a bit more. But I want you to see two things.

Number one, a bitter providence. A bitter providence. And number two, an exceptional faith. So verse one begins with tragedy, as I've mentioned already before.

In the days of the judges, there was a famine in the land. And a man from Bethlehem in Judah went to another country, went to Moab, which is modern-day Jordan, so out east of Jerusalem.

he and his wife and his two sons. So right at the very outset of the book, a famine is taking place. And for the sake of survival, one would presume they leave their land and they go off to another land.

[19:47] And then we begin, we learn at the beginning of verse two, the names of those in Naomi's family. Of significance, Naomi means pleasant.

Perhaps this is why her daughters-in-law love her so. There's a name to her. Children, Malon and Chilion. Malon, her oldest son, means sickly.

And Chilion means wasting. Sickly and wasting. So, if we were readers of Hebrew, this is not off to a very good start just in verse two.

And so the tragedy continues in verse three. We see that Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, dies. We don't know how much time passes, but it doesn't seem to be much time at all when they've relocated in Moab and she's left with her two sons.

And then in verse four, these two sons take Moabite wives, one named Orpah and the other named Ruth.

[20:58] Ruth, interestingly, is a Hebrew name, so it could have been a name that was given to her. Orpah, which my computer tried to autocorrect to Oprah again and again and again.

the people of Israel had been commanded not to intermarry with foreigners. Not for ethnic purity, I don't believe, but because of the potential for idolatry.

Listen to this command from Deuteronomy chapter seven, verse two and following. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me to serve other gods.

Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you and he would destroy you quickly. They were commanded not to intermarry being compounded upon us.

Like, think of Jewish readers of this text. They're saying you had to move from the land that was promised to you and then your husband dies and then your sons took foreign wives.

[22:08] What tragedy is being added upon and added upon here in just these first few verses. Now, some have said that perhaps these men died because of this, that it was a judgment on them.

I'm not sure. Certainly, Naomi seems to think so later on in the text. The way she's reading it and understanding it.

Of interest, the name Orpah means stubborn. Maybe she stays with her for a bit because she had decided to and then she turns back and the name Ruth means friendship.

So, Naomi now, at this point in our text, has moved to another country, a foreign land. She's lost her husband. Her sons have married Moabite wives and then added to that both Malon and Chilion die. So, verse 5 says, the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. And I'm just guessing at this point. I don't know for sure.

[23:24] But it seems to me that the author could have said that Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband but doesn't use the word pleasant there because we don't want to see her in a pleasant state.

Right? Great tragedy upon tragedy. The patristic laws of the day meant that Naomi's livelihood was tied to that of her husband and or her sons.

So, with all of them gone and hearing the news that her hometown is no longer suffering a famine, she decides to return. We discover later that she holds the rights of the land of her husband slash sons if a relative will redeem the land which we'll talk a bit more about in the coming weeks.

The first five verses of this story, what you need to be clear about are nothing but tragedy. And note how Naomi feels about this.

Look at verse 19 through 21. So the two of them, this is her and Ruth, went on until they came to Bethlehem.

[24:38] And when they came to Bethlehem the whole town was stirred because of them and the woman said, is this Naomi? She's been gone now for years and years and so they're abuzz about this.

Is this Naomi? And her response to them is, do not call me Naomi. Do not call me pleasant. Call me Mara, which means bitter.

For the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full and the Lord has brought me back empty.

Why call me Naomi or pleasant when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me. Naomi rightly recognizes God's hand in her circumstances but she has failed to remember God's promised goodness.

No one will argue that the loss of a husband and two sons is in itself a good. But we now have the insight an insight that Naomi didn't possess that helps us to call this a bitter providence.

[25:56] Naomi doesn't call it providence at all in chapter one. She is just embittered toward God. She herself has become bitter.

She arrives home weak in faith. I think that each of us can relate in some measure to Naomi.

You may have experienced this measure of loss or something near it. You may not be able to imagine what this kind of loss would feel like.

Either way in some measure we have felt what Naomi feels in the phrase I went away full and the Lord has mopped me back empty.

Now if you're here I think most of you resonate you could say yes I have felt this way at times I have at times been embittered toward God and I have been weak in faith perhaps you have no idea and I will just say to you and you're probably a young person if that's true hang on things are going to happen in your life they're going to tempt you to turn away and have weak faith and to become embittered to experience things and say how could this thing how could this possibly be good they can be beloved because God's promises are sure we need a rich we need a thick theology of suffering to bear up in this world you will at times in your life have to really understand

[27:52] God's providence you don't need to be told that if you just have enough faith the difficult things in your life are going to go away oh no not at all you need to be told that if you have enough faith you will understand that God is working all of these trials in your life for your good and his glory he is working for you even when the providence tastes bitter so hold believe persevere one day we will all see the full reality of his purposes for us Paul says that he doesn't even consider current suffering worth comparing to the eternal weight of glory that's going to be revealed to us Thomas Watson the Puritan preacher once said this is the quotation on your bulletin this morning God is to be trusted when his providences seem to run contrary to his promises so this is a bitter providence that we see in the life of Ruth excuse me of Naomi not not meant to embitter

Naomi toward God but it is a providence that would be difficult to bear up under I'm so grateful that we have the fuller view of what God is doing in these affairs so we see a bitter providence we also see in chapter one an exceptional faith we turn your attention to verse sixteen and seventeen so Orpah has gone back returned to her people and to her people's gods but Ruth says this do not urge me to leave you or return from following you for where you go I will go and where you lodge I will lodge your people shall be my people and your God my God where you die I will die and there will I be buried may the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you may God kill me if anything but death parts me from you

I suggest to you even though we have seen the weakness of Naomi's faith something of her faith is compelling to Ruth across those years that she was part of her family perhaps the journey itself something about Naomi's faith has compelled Ruth to turn her attention to Yahweh Ruth has been exposed to the worship of Yahweh in Naomi's house and we see here this expression of desire to worship the God of Israel she declares that Naomi's God will be her God in verse 16 and then notice in verse 17 she calls him Lord perhaps just maybe we witness the conversion of Naomi in between verse 16 and 17 as she is being pressed to depart and a devotion to Naomi and Israel and God well up inside her perhaps whether or not that's what happens here we can see her faith in this text so why do I call it exceptional well first all faith is exceptional faith because the natural bend of mankind is not towards God but away from him we are all born in sin with the inclination to sin this is the direction that every one of us is headed in all faith is given as a gift therefore all faith is exceptional you or I possess faith this morning we should humbly praise God for it because it was given to us by him additionally in addition to that reality

Ruth was a Moabite here what Deuteronomy chapter 23 and verse 3 says concerning her no Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord even to the tenth generation none of them may enter the assembly of the Lord forever this was a judgment because of what the

Ammonites and the Moabites had done they had dealt treacherously with Israel now I cannot be sure that Ruth was familiar with this text but I imagine that she was she had spent some years under the tutelage of Naomi's house exceptional faith no Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord even to the tenth generation none of them forever may enter the assembly of the Lord and yet she declares in verse 16 Naomi's God will be my God and then she calls him Lord she believed she believed that God could be her God we have seen that God sets her in the middle of his redemptive narrative as the great grandmother of King David he certainly does accept her perhaps even in spite of what her former husband had done he grafts her in to this family and does a significant thing with her she's the great grandmother of King David and then more clearly in the line of King Jesus and Matthew's genealogy of Jesus and I think you'll appreciate flipping with me to Matthew chapter 1 this is the most extensive genealogy that we have in the gospel accounts [34:24] I'm just going to read one verse and half of another so Matthew chapter 1 verse 5 and then verse 6 and we see the addition of two women in verse 5 this additional piece there's a pattern being followed of so and so was the father of so and so was the father of so and so but then we see this addition of who their wife was so verse 5 says and Sammon the father of Boaz play prominently in the book of Ruth by Rahab who was the Jericho prostitute who helped the spies in Joshua 6 and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth and Obed the father of Jesse and Jesse the father of David the king and then Matthew goes on to talk about this is where the Christ this is the lineage of the Christ and we see this beautiful insertion of her in this genealogy this Moabite woman should have been outside of the graces of God

God kindly brings in she expresses her devotion to Naomi and comes and says your God will be my God and she calls him Lord exceptional faith isn't it cool that we get to zoom back and see the story in its entirety and then try to understand them living in this day we see an improper application of an understanding of God's good promises and his sovereign work in them on behalf of Naomi she is embittered towards God glad to see the resolve of the story even in brief this morning and then we get to view this exceptional faith of Ruth as she travels back with Naomi to Bethlehem the story of Ruth is a story of providence unfolded for our good and for God's glory let's pray together