

April 20, 2008

“Ruth: The Bigger Picture”
Ruth 4:13-22

FCF: Hurting hearts needing answers

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because the LORD’s ways and thoughts are so much higher than our own,
(magnet) we should not expect to have all the answers. But we can rest in His care.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

“Defeater beliefs” – perhaps you’ve heard the term. In apologetics, it’s used to describe assumptions people hold that make the truths of Christianity difficult to hear. Because one thing must be true from their perspective, the things a follower of Christ would hold to must not be true. One of the most daunting of such defeater beliefs is the “theodicy” argument. It goes like this. *“You say God is both powerful and good. But what of all the senseless suffering in this world? If He is good, then He must not be powerful enough to stop it. If He is powerful, He must not be good enough to stop it. Either way, He can’t be who you say He is. And we are stuck with senseless suffering.”*

That’s a formidable argument. But not as formidable as it sounds. Think with me as to the assumption behind it. Just because you can’t make sense or see a purpose behind something doesn’t mean it’s senseless or without purpose. It just means you can’t make sense of it or see a purpose behind it. To go any further is to presume a bit much.

We know this from our own experience. Think how often you’ve looked back over times of pain and struggle and realized it was those very times that proved to work and refine you, bringing you to where you are today. The older we get, the more we see this. It’s true for us. And it was true for lady named Naomi some 3,000 years ago.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Ruth 4:13-22](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Back to the theodicy and Naomi. Ruth 1, when you really consider what was transpiring, is painful. It was the worst of times – anarchy and famine. Then the worst of decisions – leaving for Moab. And then the worst of outcomes – childlessness, death, and bitterness ([READ Ruth 1:13b, 20-21](#)). Naomi knew God is sovereign. But not good. She saw His power. But not His love. Now, as things develop, light dawns and she starts to see His provision for her and the care that was there all along. And, as we talked about last week, by the time we get to the end, a great reversal has taken place. Once empty, she is now full. Once bitter, things are now pleasant. What she could not see was now becoming clearer. What she had forgotten she was now able to remember. The LORD is powerful, sovereign over all things. But He is good as well, kind beyond our imagining.

Which is really where the epilogue of this story takes us – the power and love of God beyond our imagining. And it is these very things that can ground us when all seems to give way and to steady us in the raging storm. Think back to what we’ve read ([READ Psalm 62:1, 11-12a](#)). My soul waits for God alone. Why? Because with Him there is power and love unlike anyone or anywhere else! And what is the nature of that love? Again, back to what we’ve read already ([READ Isaiah 55:1, 8-9](#)). Come, buy and eat. Why? Because the power and love of God is greater, deeper, better than anything we could ever experience anywhere else, better than we could possibly deserve or imagine!

But think with me here. This power, this love, being as high as they are will then surprise us at times, right? That stands to reason. So we should not expect to have all the answers. His power and love are such that we should not expect to have all the answers. But they are still such that we can rest in His care. Let’s go a little further with this.

I. THE POWER OF GOD

First, the power of God. Again, this wasn't the focus of Naomi's struggle. But it can be of ours. And since our text speaks to it, I want to take a moment to address it.

For the most part in this book, God is in the backdrop. His presence is assumed by the players but we rarely see an appearance. He is backstage, behind the scenes.

A) *His Rule Over Creation*

That said, there are some exceptions. Look back to Ruth 1 (**READ Ruth 1:6**).

1. The food

The LORD is the one said to bring the food and to finally bring the famine to an end.

2. The famine itself

In fact, in the larger context, this being the time of the judges and with the rebellion of those days, it's safe to say the famine itself was of Him – part of His discipline and love.

The point being simply this – the power of God seen in His rule over His creation.

B) *His Rule Over Life Itself*

But there's more here – not just His rule over His creation but over life itself. This is implied in the barrenness of Ruth and Orpah in chapter 1 and the conception we see taking place in chapter 4 (**READ Ruth 4:13-14**). This is more than just a birth record.

1. The gift

This is a theological statement. This profound blessing and prayer tell us that children are a gift of God, that human life begins at conception, and that life is a gift of God.

2. The hint

But the way this gift comes gives a hint there's something more going on. There's an allusion here to other "miracle births" in the Scriptures, those other occasions when all hope for a child seemed lost and God blessed the womb to advance His plan and show forth His power. The women here recognized this was God's work and spoke His praise.

The way this birth comes about and the way the narrator presents it to us hints that there is more going on here than just Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. It hints that here's a larger picture, a grand mosaic, giving greater hope and a sense of purpose to the pieces.

Application:

The point being we were made with a need to know there is something larger than ourselves going on here. Especially in times of suffering and pain we need to know there is sense and purpose to be found. And we have it. There is indeed a larger mosaic.

Through it all, the LORD knew then what He was doing. Times of famine and harvest, life and death, emptiness and fullness – through it all, the LORD knew what He was doing even if Naomi did not. Again, His ways and thoughts are higher than ours.

He knew what He was doing then. And now – even when we do not. In that struggle in your family, so close to home. In that betrayal of trust, so close to your heart. In the plans you had your heart set on that keep getting put off. In all the things that keep us up at night and distract us through the day, the question is not "*Is the LORD in control when things are difficult?*" The question is "*Will we trust Him as He goes with us through the dark valley and even takes us through it?*" His ways and thoughts are higher than ours so we shouldn't expect to have all the answers. But we can rest in His care.

II. THE LOVE OF GOD

Such is God's power. But again, in Naomi's case the real source of doubt had to do with God's love. Was all this evidence He had abandoned her? We see a healing

beginning back in chapter 2 (**READ Ruth 2:20a**). Naomi had begun to see the reality of the kindness of the LORD through the kindness of others. And the reader sees as well.

A) His Plan for Individuals

Certainly in His particular plans for the individuals here – Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. His plans to bring these three together, to preserve the land and line of Elimelech.

1. For Boaz

His plan to reward the kindness of Boaz with a wife. To work through his faithfulness in the redeeming of the land we spoke of last week. And in that, receiving a line of his own.

2. For Ruth

His plan to supply Ruth with a husband and a child. And, even more, to bring her out of Moab and into a family, out of nowhere into a heritage and a lasting place in history.

3. For Naomi

His plan for Naomi (**Ruth 4:14-15**). Naomi has the love of Ruth. And she has a redeemer in this child. And more (**READ Ruth 4:16-17**). This child, Obed, whose very name means “servant,” was not just Ruth’s. He was Naomi’s as well. She would be there for him as he grew up. And he would be there for her as she grew old.

B) His Plan for Us All

The LORD’s hand was in it all, in all His plans for each individual. And then through these individuals, a larger plan for us all (**READ Ruth 4:18-22**). This is huge.

1. The connections of the genealogy

Now genealogies often bore us. But think with me. They point to an interconnectedness between the generations. Now as with other such lists, this one is not exhaustive. Some names are left out. You can see it’s limited to ten – a signal to a sense of completeness.

2. The nature of the genealogy

Some of these lists even include extraordinarily notorious names. Yet this one has more ordinary and even otherwise unknown people listed giving us a sense of the ordinary.

And yet there really was something bigger going on. Better than anyone could have possibly anticipated. In time, David was to come through Obed. And through David, then too was Jesus. There was so much more going on than anyone could see.

Illustration:

1937 – Walt Disney released the first full-length animated movie: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Producing such a film was a mammoth task. Over one million pictures had to be drawn – each one flashing on the screen for 1/24th of a second. As people saw it at regular speed, it seemed so simple. They had no idea what lay behind it. The LORD’s ways with us are something like that – infinite thought, skill, and attention into every detail. Yet as things move along, we can’t see beyond what’s in front of us.

Application:

Back to the genealogy. Think of the implications. Jesus coming through this line – not that He fell into it but that He formed it just this way. Do you see His passion for us such that He would set out to do it this way? Why did He identify so closely with such a motley bunch? Because of His love for a motley bunch. He is the friend of sinners.

See His passion for us. And His plans as well. Notice again this all seems so ordinary – no angels or miracles, priests or prophets. Boaz was but from Bethlehem. Ruth from Moab. And they became the great-grandparents of David. Just average, ordinary people trying to serve God where He had placed them. God worked through their seemingly small acts of faithfulness to bring about great things. What does this tell

us? That our lives are meant to contribute to something bigger than just ourselves (**READ 1 Corinthians 1:26-27**). He does extraordinary things through ordinary means – us. Such is His love. Such are His ways and thoughts – so much higher than our own.

CONCLUSION:

So, looking back over Ruth 1-4, why did this happen? Was it just purposeless pain and senseless suffering? No. It's not that there was no reason. We see that in the connection of this one story with the larger Story. It's not that there was no reason. It's just that Naomi is never told the reason. She struggles through with her grief and bitterness and along the way, as this great reversal takes place, she is brought to a deeper understanding of the LORD's love for her. And so she is able to rest in His care – power and love beyond her imagining. She was simply called to trust. And so are we. He has provided the “Obed,” the Servant, we need – Jesus. So we can rest in that and in Him.

We need to know there is no senseless suffering or purposeless pain. We need to know He really is powerful and good. We need to know He is working in ways with purpose and sense beyond what we can see, giving meaning to all we endure.

During World War II, the Nazis had a labor camp in Hungary where prisoners were forced to distill tons of human waste and garbage into alcohol used as a fuel additive. But for the prisoners, the knowledge that their labors were helping Hitler was even worse than the smell. Eventually, the Allies bombed the factory. The next morning, the guards ordered the prisoners to shovel the debris and haul it to the other end of the compound. Then the next day they ordered them to move it again. This meaningless drudgery went on for weeks until one old man began sobbing and was led away. Another screamed and they beat him into silence. Another ran towards the electric fence. “Halt!” the guards shouted. But it was too late. The futile labor continued as dozens more went mad and were shot. The guards didn't care. The commandant of the camp had ordered this as “an experiment in mental health” to see what would happen when people were given meaningless work. After seeing the results, he smugly remarked that at this rate there would soon be “no more need to use the crematoria.”

We need to know there is sense and purpose to our suffering and pain. And there is. There always is. His ways and thoughts are higher than ours, beyond our seeing. Coming to grips with the limits of our knowledge here is a good thing. Coming to see more of how much higher He is from us is a good thing as well. We need Him to be.

And He is. And so we can trust Him. Few lines speak better to these things than William Cowper's “God Moves in a Mysterious Way.” We looked at one stanza a few weeks ago. It would seem good to finish with the whole now (**READ Cowper**):

(1) God moves in a mysterious way

His wonders to perform;

He plants His footsteps in the sea

And rides upon the storm.

(2) Deep in unfathomable mines

Of never failing skill

He treasures up His bright designs

And works His sovereign will.

(3) Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;

The clouds ye so much dread

Are big with mercy and shall break

In blessings on your head.

(4) Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,

But trust Him for His grace;

Behind a frowning providence

He hides a smiling face.

(5) His purposes will ripen fast,

Unfolding every hour;

The bud may have a bitter taste,

But sweet will be the flower.

(6) Blind unbelief is sure to err

And scan His work in vain;

God is His own interpreter,

And He will make it plain.

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