



Happily Ever After

Ruth 4:13-22

After a twisting and turning plot, with a tragic start and a few happy surprises along the way, at long last Ruth and Boaz are married. Soon after Ruth conceives and gives birth to a son, a son who is viewed as a great blessing to Naomi and who is the grandfather of the great King David. Everyone loves a happy ending, but Ruth is more than just a well told and happy story. Ruth has much to teach us as we look at our own lives and meditate on how God interacts with His people, and how they respond and should respond to His work.

In our final lesson, we are going to review where we have been as this story wraps up. We will see how the characters are rewarded and trace the hand of God in everything that has happened. It's true on one level that this story has a "happily ever after" ending, but what we see here is more than that. We see God rewarding these characters with an immediate blessing – the joy of a new child – and of an ultimate blessing – the lineage of David and ultimately Christ.

What has been the most interesting, convicting, or helpful part of this study for you?

What We Learn from Naomi (4:14-17)

We've mentioned this before, but in many ways the book of Ruth could be thought of as the book of Naomi. Although this book is named after Ruth, and although Ruth is the heroine of the story, Naomi is the focus at the beginning and the end. Once Ruth and Boaz have a child the focus is turned once again to Naomi as she cares for the child and the women of the city recite a blessing over her. As we look at the life of Naomi, we see God's gracious working in the life of someone who had become bitter and despondent with the hand she had been dealt.

Naomi was embittered when she felt abandoned (Ruth 1)

Naomi and Elimelech left the land of Israel and then their two sons married foreign women. After those choices tragedy after tragedy follows, to the point where Naomi wanted to be called "bitter" because in her mind the Lord had dealt bitterly with her (1:20). She told her daughters-in-law to go back to Moab because "it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me" (1:13). Many people today feel bitter because of the difficulties they must face. Sometimes those challenges are a result of their sin (Hebrews 12:1ff) and sometimes they are merely a result of God's sovereignty bringing

trials into their lives. Those that view God as abandoning them, however, will face those trials with bitterness and hopelessness.

Was Naomi right to blame God for what was happening to her?

Even if God was behind these bad things happening, how should she have responded?

Naomi was hopeful when she saw God's work (Ruth 2-3)

The turning point for Naomi is when Ruth comes home with a ton of food, much more than Naomi could have dreamed of. Not only that, but the generous man behind this wonderful day of harvesting was none other than Boaz, a close relative. We can almost here the excitement in Naomi's voice when she said "Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead" (2:20). Once she hoped, she began to plan (3:1-4), and her plan ended up leading to a happy marriage and a grandson.

Many people today have given up hope that God is at work in their life. They see situations that look hopeless, and they've stopped trying and planning because they've stopped seeing God in the picture.

How can we help people to have hope in God who seem to have lost hope?

What does it look like to live with a hopeful view of God's working in our lives?

Naomi was blessed by God (Ruth 4)

God's goal in bringing pain to His children is never driven by some dark desire to see people hurt. It's always done with a heart to see them restored to a place of blessing and usefulness. Naomi had a hard path in life, but it's a path that ultimately led to the joy of a grandson and a family that cared deeply for her. God worked through the disasters in her life to bring her to a place of dependency and hope. Even those around her recognize that the birth of Obed is a grace of God to her. God has a good plan for our lives. Sometimes that plan takes more twists and involves more pain that we might expect (or want), but that plan is always good.

Why do you think the book of Ruth concludes with a focus on Naomi rather than Boaz or Ruth?

How do you think watching Naomi's story impacted those around her, including the group that speaks to Naomi in 4:14-15?

Anything else from the example of Naomi that stands out?

What We Learn from Ruth (4:13, 15)

Ruth says very little in the book of Ruth. In fact, among Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi, Ruth has the least to say. Yet her character drives the central plot, because although she may not speak as much, her actions say

plenty. Ruth is an example for all of us of a quiet, submissive spirit of someone who takes big steps of faith and works hard, ultimately seeing the blessing of God.

Ruth steps out in faith

In what ways does Ruth show faith in this book?

Ruth takes three important steps of faith in this book. First, she leaves behind the security of her home and family to follow Naomi into a land where she will be looked at as a foreigner (and a foreigner from one of Israel's least favorite neighbors). She then showed faith by going out and gleaning in the fields as a single, foreign woman. Finally, Ruth took a step of faith by following through on Naomi's advice and proposing to Boaz, despite being younger, poorer, a foreigner, and a woman.

Why do you think it was that Ruth was willing to step forward in faith? How can Ruth be an example for us?

Ruth is submissive but decisive

Many people think that to have a submissive spirit means someone sits back and doesn't do anything unless they are told. We see in Ruth someone who is quiet and submissive, but not passive. Ruth does what she's told, from requesting Naomi's permission to listening to her mother-in-law's council, from asking for permission to reap to doing what Boaz instructs her to do. But Ruth is not lazy. She's a driven, motivated go-getter. She's smart and hard working. She's quiet but her actions speak so loudly she doesn't need to.

Why do we often equate submission with passivity?

Can you think of any other examples of people who were submissive but ambitious and driven?

What other characteristics of Ruth stand out to you from the story? How else can Ruth be an example of a godly believer?

What We Learn from Boaz (4:13, 17-22)

Boaz is an admirable hero. He seeks to honor not just the letter but the spirit of the law. He desires to take care of Ruth and to do things honorably. Boaz is a picture of what God wants us to be, and he is a shadow of the ultimate noble hero we see in Jesus, who likewise understands God's laws and the spirit behind them, does things honorably, and is blessed by the Father.

Boaz demonstrates God's heart (Ruth 2).

The first time we meet Boaz he steps in and makes sure that everyone is entirely clear how foreigners are to be treated in his fields: with the royal treatment. Boaz goes above and beyond to provide for Ruth by

telling the men to leave more for her to gather. This exceeds any requirement of the law but fits within the purpose of the law: to show God's heart for the outcast and the poor.

How can we show Boaz's same heart to care for the weakest among us?

Boaz does things honorably (Ruth 3-4)

When Ruth proposes to Boaz, it's clear that he is honored by her request. But he knows that he is not the one first in line to redeem. So he tells her to wait, and that he will figure things out. Rather than circumventing the law and simply marrying Ruth, Boaz seeks to behave honorably, being willing to lose Ruth in the process if that is what it means to act honorably.

How might we be tempted to take shortcuts to get what we want, perhaps even for something that might seem good?

What does it look like in America to behave honorably as Boaz did?

Boaz leaves a godly legacy (Ruth 4).

Boaz left a legacy of godliness. He sought to meet the needs of others, He pointed the attention of those around to God, and for his reward was made the ancestor of the great King David. The genealogy at the end of the book is more than just a random add-on. It points to part of the reason for this whole story by pointing forward to David, showing that the godliest king Israel ever had came from this unique family and this unusually godly man.

No doubt little David heard the story of Ruth and Boaz from his grandfather Obed, and hearing tales of daring faith helped him decide at a young age that if it was worth it for his great-grandparents to follow God, it would be worth it for him, too. People are constantly watching us, and we too will one day leave behind a legacy. Although not all will have children, all of us have the responsibility to model for the next generation what faith in God looks like, and those who do have children have a unique responsibility to do this.

As a culture, we are less concerned with leaving a legacy than the culture during Bible times. Why do you think this is?

Why is it important to leave a legacy of godliness and what does that look like?

What We Learn about God

God is in many ways a silent character in the book of Ruth. The author never directly acknowledges Him until the very end of the story when we are told that the Lord gave Ruth conception (i.e., Ruth became pregnant as a result of God's gift). Everywhere else in the book what we read of God comes from the

speech of the characters.¹ We might wish to get more of the Bible's perspective on things. What was God thinking? Why did He do things this way and not another way? But a careful reading of this story will reveal much to us about God and how he works in our lives.

God's sovereignty

As we just mentioned, throughout the whole book of Ruth, God is only mentioned as a character directly by the author one time (4:13). Yet on several occasions others recognize that God is at work, and it's clear that the author wants us to understand that God is at work.

Why do you think it is that the author holds back from directly telling us what God did or what God is thinking throughout the story?

In many ways, the book of Ruth is like our own lives. We don't get a divine commentary on why everything happens the way it does. Instead, we have God's Word and our life, which we are told is under God's control. It is up to us, then, to come to God's Word in faith and seek to trace God's hand in our lives as best as we are able, realizing we will never get the full picture until we get to heaven.

In what ways was God at work in the book of Ruth?

What can we learn about God's sovereign working from the book of Ruth that can be a help to us?

God's kindness

When we realize that God is behind everything in the book of Ruth, we come to realize that He is a very good God. He is working to bring out a good end for everyone involved. We see a God who is patient with Naomi's bitterness, who honors Boaz's desire to do things right, and who richly blesses this foreigner who abandoned her gods for Him. You can almost see a smile on His face as He draws up this plan to richly bless everyone involved in this story. Too often the God we picture is one who likes to make us miserable. Who brings us through trials simply because He thinks it's fun, or because He thinks we're not good enough for Him. The God of the Bible, and specifically the God of Ruth, is a God who loves, who is kind, and who proves Himself strong on behalf of those who fear Him. If our first mental picture of God is folded arms and a big frown, we've got a pretty warped view of God.

Why do many people tend to be suspicious of God?

How can we come to truly believe that God's posture toward us is one of kindness?

In a short four chapters, the story of Ruth has painted a story that seems far removed from us in terms of culture, society, and customs, but on which we are at the same time very familiar with. It is a story of love, loyalty, and redemption. We see characters that we all have met a hundred times over, and which describe

¹ The one possible exception to this is in Ruth 1:6, where the passage reads "...she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread." Even here, however, the statement is a report of something Naomi heard, rather than the direct statement of the author as in 4:13.

us to one degree or another. But even more than these fascinating characters, we see behind all this a God who is at work, using people to accomplish His incredible plan in ways that to them seem very ordinary. In the end, Ruth is a story about all of us and the choices we face daily: do we respond to the trials and problems of life with a risk-taking faith, or do we shrink back in unbelief? That question was the question before Naomi, Ruth, Orpah, Boaz, and the kinsman, and it continues to be the question faced by all people throughout the ages.