

A Bigger Story

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good evening. It is a privilege to be able to share the Word of God with you this evening. Like Ian this morning, I am afraid I have to apologise. I am not the person who was built in for tonight.
- And if you want to hear Graham speak, you'll have to come next week and hear him open up our next series in Titus. But for the moment, we're in Ruth chapter 4.
- Before we think of Ruth 4 anymore, I want to take a moment, and for us to take a moment together, to consider how God is at work in each of our lives.
- Perhaps for some of us, we are sceptical. Maybe we don't believe in God at all, or perhaps you think that he is some distant person.
- Having set the universe in motion, he now sits back and watches from afar, impersonal, unmoved, uncaring. Perhaps you're struggling to see God's hand in your life at all.
- [1 : 0 7] Maybe there's a lot of mess, a lot of tragedy, and you're just confused about what God is up to. Or perhaps your life is just plain comfortable.
- You're busy, and you really aren't sure what God is up to. And if we're really brutally honest with ourselves, that's just an intellectual question. Work comes and goes day by day.
- And what God is doing in our lives is perhaps just a thought, and not a reality. I suppose if you wanted to twist the question around, we could ask this.
- Do we believe that God cares and is intimately involved in both the big story and in our little stories?
- And if we keep that in the back of our minds, we'll return to that idea later on. Let's recap where we've been. We've come to the last chapter in Ruth, chapter 4.
- [2 : 1 1] And over the past four weeks, we have seen how Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons left Bethlehem for Moab.
- Disaster after disaster befalls our little family. And after ten years in a foreign land, only Naomi has survived.
- And with one Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth, she travels back to her native home. We find her at the end of chapter 1, bitter, discouraged, hurt.
- And without much hope, it would seem. In chapter 2, we see how Ruth goes and seeks to provide for herself and Naomi, her mother-in-law.
- She works hard and she gets noticed by one of the extended family. And through the kindness of this man, Boaz, Ruth and Naomi are well provided for in the short term.
- [3 : 1 2] And behind the scenes, I hope that we have begun to see how God is at work through his care and providence, but also through his people.
- In the third chapter, we found Ruth and Boaz following God despite questionable circumstances. And coming to the end of the chapter, we see again Boaz providing for Ruth and for Naomi.

And he promises that he will be their provider and redeemer if at all possible. But there's a complication. And we left it on something of a cliffhanger.

Someone else has the right to redeem if he wants to. And we left these two widows waiting to see how their situation would work out. For Ruth, this must have been particularly nerve-wracking.

She knew she would have a prospective husband by the end of day. The only question was, who would it be? Just before we go any further, let's pray together.

[4 : 19] Father, and as we dig into chapter 4, let's see what God has to say to us. Let's pray. Father, if we are honest with ourselves, we realise that we need your insight and clarity this evening.

We need you, by your Spirit, to enable us to see your care and providence for us. And so, as we come to this incredible chapter of your word, would you give us ears to hear, eyes to see, and would you equip us to live for you this day, this week, and for the rest of our lives.

Father, we need you and you alone. And so we pray, would you speak in power this evening. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Let's jump to the end of the chapter.

Verses 16 to 22. We'll just read it again just now. And we'll see that God caused the king's story. Verse 16 says, This then is the family line of Perez.

Perez was the father of Hezron. Hezron, the father of Ram. Ram, the father of Aminadab. Aminadab, the father of Nashon. Nashon, the father of Salma.

[5 : 58] Salma, the father of Boaz. Boaz, the father of Obed. Obed, the father of Jesse. And Jesse, father of David. As we've come through the story of Ruth, we've seen a continual thread through the story.

Interwoven throughout, we've seen that God has been working behind the scenes. And although the narrator never even mentions God, he makes amply clear through so-called coincidences, through the interactions of the characters and through the structure of the book, that nothing here is happening by chance.

And in these verses, at the end of the story, we see what this book is really all about. We see why it's actually included in the Bible at all and what its primary purpose is.

We're given a genealogy from Perez to David. And I wish I could say with a clear conscience that I love genealogies. That every time I come to one, I start, you know, just getting wet at the mouth.

But sadly, that's not true. I struggle to read through these lists of names. But if we're paying attention to this genealogy, suddenly this book begins to fit into the bigger picture of the Bible.

[7 : 22] Where at the start of the book we found ourselves in the days of the judges, we now see that this book is a bridge right back from the patriarchs of Israel. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and his 12 sons right through here to the beginning of Israel's monarchy.

About 800 years of history are represented here. And what we could so easily read as a vaguely interesting but ultimately irrelevant fable about the hardship of a widow's life in Israel is actually the vital link in the Bible to teach us where God is going to bring his chosen king from.

Boaz is going to be the great grandfather of the greatest king in Israel's history. And Ruth is going to be David's great grandmother.

But there's been a lot of intricate planning for this to fall into place, hasn't there? Ruth has moved nations. She's converted from the idols of Moab to having true faith in Yahweh.

She's proven her faithfulness. She's caught the eye of this obscure farmer from Bethlehem. And I hope that we don't look at that all and go, well that's wonderful chance.

- [8 : 46] I hope that we see clearly that God is behind all of this. Despite the plans of questionable merit or outright disobedience.
- Despite all the social problems, the personal hardships that we find in this little story. And despite all of the general immorality and chaos in the background of this book.
- Despite it all. God caused the king's story. God had a plan for his people Israel. And that plan involved the king called David.
- And this was a little part of that incredible tapestry of events. That led to King David being God's choice as king of Israel.
- That ought to be such a comfort to us here this evening as Christian people. To know that our God has everything under his complete control.
- [9 : 48] And that he is able to bring together his plan. In an utterly unexpected and surprising way. From our point of view.
- From within the story it all looks like a mess. There's national problems. There's insecurity. There's family tragedy. And there's personal struggles.
- And sometimes we look at from within our lives. And maybe the words of Naomi in chapter 1 are all too fitting for us. Life is better. And we cannot see how anything good will come of our hurts.
- And of our worries. And of our struggles. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not making light of our pain. And of our hardship. But we can be utterly confident.
- That God is in control. That he does have his grand plan in hand. He is building his church. And nothing will stand in his way.
- [10 : 57] But perhaps all this isn't actually the struggle in our minds here this evening. Maybe we trust that God is able to work on the grand scale of human history.
- Yes, he can deal with kings and important people. Yes, we can picture him as some sort of divine chess player. But we struggle to see how God is at work in our lives.
- And so we find a second theme in our story. God not only caused the king's story. But he also cared for the widow's story. God cared for the widow's story.
- In our passion to skip to the bigger story. Sometimes we can do what I've already done this evening. We skip over the story, the narrative.
- And we get right into what we think is the meat. And we miss out the people. We miss out their circumstances. And in our quest to get to the kernel of truth.
- [12 : 03] We forget that there are people involved. But God cares for the widow's story too. How did he care?
- How did he show his care for these two ladies? He isn't really mentioned here much at all. Well, we see that God cared for the widows through a man. Here are these two widows.
- And they await the news of what is going to happen to them. And so the story continues. Continues as we've read. Boaz goes up to the town gate. And remember that this is like the town hall.
- This is where all the legal proceedings of the day would happen. And Boaz gathers all the necessary parties. He gathers the other relation. The quorum of elders.
- The witnesses. And then Boaz. This righteous man. He makes a business proposition to his friend. Here's land. And it doesn't have a legal heir.
- [13 : 05] It's a great investment. It's real prime property estate. And initially the other relation jumps at the opportunity, doesn't he? But wait.
- There's a snag. There's a duty that comes with the land. Boaz is just a little bit crafty in how he puts it all across, isn't he?

Yes, you'll have to marry Ruth. Ruth the Moabite. He's very explicit in that. And what he's saying to this other fellow is that this definitely isn't kosher.

He'd be investing in this land. He'd be investing in this land only for the child of this foreigner to inherit a double portion of his own estate.

What began looking like a great investment turns out to be awkward socially and makes very little business sense. And this other redeemer cannot redeem this land.

[14 : 06] Have you ever noticed that this other man's name is never mentioned? I love how the writer puts this across.

This man, he's concerned with his estate. He's concerned about his name. But he's always referred to as just the kinsman redeemer. I'm not saying that this man was a bad person from what little we have.

I conclude he's just an ordinary man. Just a normal guy. Just playing it safe. He's following his head and he's probably following his heart as well. What's presented to him is not an attractive offer.

And so we start to see that this whole interaction is dripping with irony. This man is unnamed. He's the kinsman redeemer. But he isn't.

He's the kinsman redeemer. But obviously he isn't the kinsman redeemer. Because he doesn't redeem anyone. He has a name but no substance.

[15 : 10] And without the name he fades into obscurity. Through his safe choices and his good investment plans.

But Boaz buys the land. He takes on this care of duty. And there's all sorts of weird and wonderful things happening with sandals.

I was going to wear a pair just to show you. But I decided that was too much for anybody. And through Boaz we see that God cared for what happened to these widows.

God had provided laws which enabled Boaz to redeem them. And their land and to give them security as part of his family.

But laws don't work without people who are willing to put them into action. And Boaz here takes the initiative. And he is God's instrument for caring for Naomi and Ruth.

[16 : 09] And perhaps here we need to take a moment to think about how we are carrying out our Christian duty to care for the people around us. We all know that God has this incredible plan, don't we?

We know that God has this plan primarily to save people from their sin. And to bring them into relationship with himself. But God has chosen the weirdest way of giving legs to his plan possible.

He has chosen to use us, his people, to make this known to the entire world. God has thousands of angels at his control.

But each one of us is the ambassador of Jesus Christ. And we have been entrusted with this incredible good news. But if we don't make this good news known, we act more like the nameless man in this story than like Boaz.

Think of it this way. If we believe that every Christian has the calling on their life to go and to make disciples, how often is it irony that I would be called a Christian?

[17 : 30] How often do I look at the investment required, or to the loss of my name, or to the social awkwardness of the situation, and rather than show true care and love for the people around me, people who desperately need the gospel that I have, how often do I stay quiet and play it safe?

God cares for the widows, for the poor, for the oppressed, and for the needy. He cares for the abused, and the marginalized, for the hurt, and for the broken.

And he has provided us as the church with the necessary message, and manpower, and above all else, his spirit within us to go and to act in his name.

So we must reflect. We must reflect, personally and corporately, how are we fulfilling God's call on our lives? God cared for the widows through a man.

But we see that God cared for the widows in a son. We read this blessing from the elders of the town. May God make this woman like Rachel and Leah who built up the house of Israel.

[18 : 57] These two women were wives to Jacob, the first man who was called Israel, about 500 years or so before in Boaz and Ruth tie the knot.

And this was the highest compliment that you could get in Israel as a woman. This was the highest compliment that could be paid to Ruth. She's gone from being the Moabites to being one of, blessed as one of the matriarchs of Israel.

This incredible turnaround. And it seems odd to us. It seemed odd to me because I looked back to the story and the story is filled with strife and contention.

And for about a week I wondered, was this really a blessing or was this a curse? But we look back to the opening verses of Ruth 1 and we find that Ruth was married for 10 years before in Moab and there were no children.

And maybe we start to see a little bit of a parallel between Ruth and Rachel, a woman who was barren for many years and who cried out countless times to God.

[20 : 12] God cared about Ruth and about Naomi. These women who have suffered through so much tragedy.

And we read these incredible words about Ruth. The Lord enabled her to conceive and she gave birth to a son. What joy there must have been in the household with the birth of this little one.

The ladies of the town gather together to bless Naomi now. And it's interesting how much further they're willing to go than the men. The men say, oh, we hope that you'll do well in the local area.

The ladies say, we hope that this person's famous in all of Israel. They have the knack for blessing people. And Naomi takes this child as if it were her own son.

And they speak of this child as if he is the redeemer. As if this infant was the one who would save Naomi from her situation. This grandchild gave her the hope to keep on going.

[21 : 27] He renewed her vigor for life and would care for her in her old age. And you can see the joy and we can wonder in it.

But sometimes when we read a story like this, we think quite mechanically, don't we? At least I know I do. And we need to remember that nothing would undo the tragedies that Naomi has already gone through.

This child doesn't replace Elimelech, Mahlon and Kilion who died. And we need to be careful not to think that the tragic Moab years would have been erased from the mind with this child being born.

But it does point forward to a new beginning for this family. We see a hopefulness in this. A looking forward to better times.

And a reprieve from the sadness that has marred so much of these ladies' lives. I'm sure there's many of us that can look back and we can see God giving us similar reprieves through the hardships.

[22 : 43] Perhaps we didn't recognise them at the time. But God has been quietly providing us with the hope and the joy even in the middle of darkness.

Maybe in our case it looks very different to how it does here. But again, what comfort we can take in knowing that God cared for these widows through a son.

As we begin to pull everything together here, as we begin to conclude this chapter, we need to come back out from the little story and look again at the big story.

I'm sure that Ruth and Boaz would have been surprised enough to know they were great-grandparents to a great king. If we remember the law, a Moabite wasn't even meant to enter the temple or into the tabernacle for ten generations.

And yet their great-grandson would build the temple. But little did they know that they appear in an even greater king's pedigree.

[24 : 05] In Matthew 1, we find the genealogy of Jesus Christ. And we find that this little story of Ruth was a link in the chain of God's eternal grand plan to bring his son into the world to freely give salvation to all people who would accept him.

And as we think back to our initial questions about God caring for both the big picture and the little picture, ultimately we find our answers to these at the cross, don't we?

rather than seeing God as some impersonal cosmic chess player, one who cares nothing to sacrifice a few pawns to win the game, we find that he cares so much that he sends Jesus into this world that is so broken.

And he suffers all the pain that we deserve to enable us to come into an intimate relationship with himself.

You see, God's big story had a purpose. And that purpose is to break into each and every one of our little stories, so marred by all our sin and folly.

[25 : 28] and to care and to provide for us and to redeem us. God cared.

God caused the king's story and God cared for the widow's story. And God brings it all together in the end at the cross.

And so, I would invite you just to take a moment as we finish and consider again, how is God working in your life? And how is that knowledge going to change your attitudes and how you live this week?

Amen.