

Matthew 1:1-3 ; Ruth 1:1-7 ; Ruth 4:13-22

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[0 : 00] a bit about Ruth and the story of Ruth. We're going to sing again, and we're going to sing from Psalm 19, and we're going to sing verses 7 to 11 of Psalm 19. The perfect law of God revives the soul of man. His statutes which are sure make wise the simple one. Let's stand and sing to God's praise.

God's brilliant commands shed light on what we see, that the hope of God is pure, and that's eternally. The standards of the Lord express His perfect truth and righteousness.

Of thy more worth and gold, and that pure gold they are, than honey from the cold, than honey's sweeter far. They warned the servant of the Lord, making Him then His great reward.

So what about Harry and Meghan? Who's been consumed by Harry and Meghan over this past week? I had put on my bit of paper here, we all love a good love story. I'm not sure if that's true.

I don't know if everybody loves a good love story, but we can't help but have been at least aware of the news of the royal engagement. And it was, it was kind of sweet when Harry was asked, when he knew Meghan was the one. And I don't know if you saw the interview, but with a boyish enthusiasm, he said, oh, when did I know she was the one? The very first time we met.

[3 : 03] Isn't that nice? Well, the book of Ruth is a love story, a story about the love of Boaz and Ruth.

I don't imagine that Boaz would have said that he knew Ruth was the one the very first time they met. In fact, I'm sure he wouldn't have imagined that, or even the second time. But in time, he did come to that conviction and indeed that affection for the woman who would become his wife.

But the book of Ruth is about a bigger love story, the story of God's love for rebels and outsiders, his love for you and me. It's a story of salvation, but of salvation that is rooted and grounded in the wonderful reality that God so loved the world that he sent his one and only son, Jesus, to be our redeemer. Now, it's possibly a rash, maybe even foolish endeavor to try and preach one sermon in the book of Ruth, but that's what I'm going to try and do. And the manner in which I want to do this is to, first of all, highlight two big truths that are found at the beginning and at the end of the story.

We read from the beginning and we read from the end. So, I just want to pick up on those readings and highlight or point out two big truths, very much connected truths that we find at the beginning and at the end, truths that point to the big picture of God's love for us. And then we'll spend a little time enjoying one very special short story of love and salvation in the body of the book, the story of Ruth and Boaz. Of course, that little story of two real people in love also points to and illustrates the big story of God's love for you and me. So, let's start at the beginning. And the beginning of the book is a beginning that points to what we might call our need of a Savior, Israel's need of a Savior and our need of a Savior. Notice how Ruth begins, the very first verse of chapter 1, in the days when the judges ruled. Now, those are words that could easily pass by unnoticed, in the days when the judges ruled. They say, or some people say that a good story, a good novel, needs a memorable opening line to catch your attention, something that will grip you. I'm not sure if the opening words of this story fit the bill in the days when the judges ruled. Well, it may not be gripping, but it is very instructive. For the informed reader, these words speak volumes, the days when the judges ruled. Charles Dickens begins his novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, with the line, it was the best of times, it was the worst of times. And it would be the second part of that sentence that echoes the words that begin the story of Ruth, the worst of times. All you need to know, or nearly all you need to know about the days when the judges ruled can be found in the preceding verse. Now, you say, well, what are you talking about the preceding verse? That's in the first verse. Well, the preceding verse of the book that comes before Ruth. Notice what is said there, and this is the book of Judges. It speaks of the time when the judges ruled. And at the very end of the book, it gives the summary of those times. And what do we read there in the last verse of chapter 21 of Judges? In those days when the judges ruled,

Israel had no king. Everyone did as he saw fit. Everyone did as they saw fit. These were times when men and women did as they pleased. These were times when God had been firmly placed to one side.

[7 : 07] Many people still believed in God, but simply felt that His opinions were largely unwelcome, like the way children might have been treated in the not-too-distant past. God was to be seen and not heard. These were dark times. They were times of moral decline and the suffering that accompanies such decline. They were times of injustice and oppression, the inevitable consequence of replacing the rule of God with the rule of man, and the fruit of replacing the selfless love of God with the selfish ambition of man. And the words that begin the story point to Israel's great need.

Israel stood in need of a righteous king. There at the very end of the previous book, the book of Judges, in those days Israel had no king. Everyone did as he saw fit. Israel stood in need of a righteous king.

Israel stood in need of a forgiving Savior. And that's the story of Israel, but it's also the story of mankind, of humankind. This is our great need. This is your great need. We're all bent on living the life of a rebel in one way or another, in greater or lesser measure. We all imagine that life is best lived as we see fit. And everyone does as everyone sees fit. This is a description of Scotland in 2017 as we fast approach 2018. It's all about me, my life, my decisions, my body, my money, my time, my happiness, my freedom, my rules, my feelings, my truth, and we could go on. This is a description of your heart. This is a description of every human heart, of every generation, of every culture. This is what we are as fallen human creatures. We do as we see fit. We need a righteous king that we can submit to and be ruled by, and we need a forgiving Savior in whom we can find rescue and refuge. So, the book of Ruth begins by identifying this big truth. Israel needed a Savior. And this is the big truth that you need to recognize.

You need a Savior. And all those around you need a Savior. Well, that's the big truth at the beginning of the book. Let's now go to the end of the story and see what we find. And there in chapter 4, in verses 13 and 14, we are presented with this very homely picture of the birth of Obed, a son to Boaz and Ruth. Boaz and Ruth, they marry. Ruth conceives, and the child is born. And their home is lit up by the birth of their firstborn child, a son called Obed. And the birth of little Obed provoked scenes of joyful celebration among the women folk of Bethlehem. I'd like to think the men folk were also happy, but it is the women folk who are mentioned specifically here in the story.

But listen to what they say as they celebrate the arrival of Obed, a firstborn child, to the newlyweds. And we read the celebration, the praise of these women.

[10:50] Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman redeemer. They're addressing Naomi, the mother-in-law. Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel. He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. The women identify little Obed as a redeemer. They describe him as a redeemer. This little child has been born a redeemer, a redeemer for Naomi, a redeemer for Ruth, a redeemer for that family line, a savior. Now, much could be said about the significance of this expression that they use, kinsman redeemer, and what the women would have understood by that expression. But for the purposes of grasping the big picture or the big truth, suffice it to say that this child is identified as God's provision of a savior. So the story begins with this stark picture of the great need for a savior. This was in the days when the judges ruled, when there was no king in Israel, when everybody did as they pleased. There was this great need of a savior. And the story ends with God providing in this little child, one that is described by the women as a redeemer, as a savior.

But Obed, Ruth's firstborn, as far as we know, lived a fairly unremarkable life, a life unmarked by any great saving acts on behalf of his people. So we need to look beyond Obed. And of course, the story, the writer of the story does just that as he continues in describing what goes on there in verse 16, the women living there said, Naomi has a son, and they named him Obed. But notice what is then immediately said, he, Obed, was the father of Jesse, the father of David. And that's King David.

God had promised in the Garden of Eden that he would provide a savior, one who would strike the head of the serpent. And God was intent on keeping that promise and providing his savior. Now, King David, who is mentioned here in this line of Ruth, King David served in a measure that God-given role of righteous king and powerful savior or deliverer for his people. But the story of Ruth doesn't end with Obed or even with David, even though his name is the very last pen stroke of the author there at the end of verse 22. For the end of the story, or really for the climax of the story, we need to turn to the first chapter of Matthew's gospel. Now, we've already mentioned the genealogy there, but we haven't, this evening, turned to it or read anything of it. But we'll do that now.

Because really it's here that we find the climax to the story of Ruth. And let's read from verse 5, picking up really the genealogy from where we left it last week, where we met Rahab, the prostitute from Jericho. And in verse 5, as we make our way through this part of the genealogy, we read as follows.

And we'll read right through to verse 16. Salmon, the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz, the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed, the father of Jesse. And Jesse, the father of King David. All of that we knew already from the final verses of the book of Ruth. But then, of course, the genealogy continues. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife.

[14 : 36] That's who we'll meet next week. Solomon, the father of Rehoboam. Rehoboam, the father of Abijah. Abijah, the father of Asa. And so, it continues. Generation after generation, off to exile in Babylon, return to Judah. And then we pick up in verse 16. And Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ, Messiah, promised Savior, and Redeemer. You see, the birth of Obed, a Redeemer for Naomi in the little town of Bethlehem, points forward to the birth of another in the little town of Bethlehem. At the birth of Obed, the women praised God. Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a Kingsman Redeemer. And the angel echoed those words of praise and celebration with the message that was delivered to the shepherds today in the town of David in Bethlehem. A Savior has been born to you.

He is Christ the Lord. Obed was, in one sense, a Savior for Naomi. But Jesus, the one who would be born of the seed of Ruth and Obed, Jesus is a Savior for all, including Naomi. So, a Savior needed and a Savior promised. But having seen the beginning and the end of the book, that I think, on the basis of what we've identified, really gives us the big picture of what God is doing. He's keeping His promise of providing a Messiah, providing a Savior, that which we all stand in such need of. And He does it in this wonderful way. He weaves into the story this woman called Ruth. And we want to go into the middle, as it were, and think a little bit about this love story that is part of the big story, this story of Ruth and Boaz. And what we'll do is we'll think about that story by focusing on perhaps the tenderest and arguably the most telling words in the book from the lips of Boaz. In chapter 2 and verse 12, Boaz is addressing Ruth. This is when they first meet. And Boaz is speaking to Ruth, and he addresses her with these words. In chapter 2 and verse 12, may the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel. And then listen to what Boaz says, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

Under whose wings you have come to take refuge. And what I want to say now about this story will be said, and we'll limit ourselves to what we can say, but it will all revolve around these words of Boaz addressed to Ruth. Speaking and describing what she had done, she had found refuge under the wings of the God of Israel. And as we think about Ruth, and as we think about her romance and wedding and marriage and life that began with Boaz, it helps us to, as we do so, enables us to explore, first of all, the reach of God's wings of refuge that Boaz speaks of as he addresses Ruth. The reach of God's wings of refuge. But it also helps us to understand something about the nature of God's wings of refuge. What is to be found? What is to be discovered under the wings of refuge of our God? But I think the story of Ruth

Ruth also tells us something about the means by which God extends his wings of refuge. So let's think, first of all, about the reach of God's wings of refuge. The picture of these wings under which refuge can be found is a very visual one. But I suppose the question that I would ask is how far, how far, how wide do these wings of refuge stretch? The wings of the God of Israel, how far do they stretch in providing refuge and protection? Well, they stretch certainly to Ruth. They stretch to Ruth the Moabite. Now, the history of the Moabites is not a happy one. In the Bible, we're told of their origins and something of their history. They owed their origin to the incestuous sexual encounter between Lot and his oldest daughter. And that very seedy tale is described for us in Genesis chapter 19.

That is where they owed their origins to. And it was the Moabites, as they became in time a tribe of people, it was the Moabites who refused to help the Israelites as they made their way through the wilderness and approached the Promised Land. Not even a glass of water was extended to them by the Moabites. Indeed, not only did they not help them, but they hired Balaam to pronounce a curse on God's people. This was the doing of the Moabites, the people to whom Ruth belonged. Indeed, as a consequence of their opposition to God's people, of their hostility to the Israelites, the Moabites were banned from the assembly of the Lord. And in Deuteronomy, we're given the reasons for that. And yet, God's wings of refuge stretch to Ruth the Moabite. They stretch to Ruth the hopeless one. Ruth was a childless widow. Ruth was a stranger in a strange land. Ruth was a woman with a painful past and seemingly a joyless future.

[20 : 33] But the wings of refuge of God stretch to Ruth. And what is God saying by drawing Ruth under his wings of refuge? What is God shouting out to the world if God shouts? Well, what he's shouting out to the world, what he's shouting out even tonight to you and me is this, there is a place under my wings. For anybody and for everybody, there is room. It doesn't matter who you are, my wings can stretch that far. It doesn't matter the life that you've lived. It doesn't matter the mistakes you have made. It doesn't matter what others think of you, whether you're worthy or unworthy. Whoever you are, the wings of refuge of God stretch out to offer you and provide for you refuge and protection. This is the whosoever of John 3 16, for God so loved the world that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.

Martin Luther spoke of that verse, John 3 16, as the gospel in miniature. Well, the book of Ruth in some ways is the gospel in miniature as it pronounces to us, as it declares to us this love of God, the wings of refuge of God that stretch out. They stretch as far as Ruth the Moabite and they stretch as far as as any who would but come and seek his protection. There's room for you. Now, maybe many of you here this evening, indeed I know that many of you here this evening are already sheltering under the wings of refuge of God. But I suppose the question that I would pose to you, you're comfortable there, you're enjoying that refuge, you're enjoying that protection, and is there room for others there?

Is there any room left for others? What do you think? Or is there only room for you, only room for us, only room for those who are already there? What do you think? Is there room? Of course, there's room. There's plenty room. And so, who will you invite to join you under the wings of refuge of the Almighty? Ruth reminds us of the promise of God to Abraham that through his seed, the nations of the world would be blessed. And Ruth points forward to the coming of Jesus and the ingathering of the nations into the family of God. And so, in this story of Ruth and Boaz, in the story of this woman who finds refuge under the wings of God, we are given an insight into the reach of God's mercy, into the reach of God's grace. But also, I think we're given an insight into the nature of God's wings of refuge. What does Ruth discover under God's wings of refuge? Well, she finds certainly a place of tender refuge. The picture is a tender, even a maternal one.

Listen to the psalmist's delight in the wings of God as a place of a tender love. In Psalm 36, in verse 7, we read, we sing, how priceless is your unfailing love. Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. And so, the wings of God, they're presented as a place of unfailing love, of tender care. That is what Ruth discovered under the wings of the Almighty. She finds a place of tender refuge, but she finds also a place of secure protection. Again, listen to the psalmist. In Psalm 91, in verse 4, he will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge. His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. So, she discovered under these wings not only tenderness but she discovered this secure protection. In the face of any danger, in the face of whatever storm, in the face of whatever enemies might appear, she was safe and secure under the wings of refuge of the God of Israel. This is what the widow from Moab needed more than anything else, tender refuge and secure protection. And that, of course, is what we all need more than anything else. But then the third thing I want you to notice here, the insight that we're given in the story of Ruth and in the language of these wings of refuge is the means by which God extends his wings of refuge. By what means does God bring Ruth under his wings? I think maybe two words can help us. The words trust and the word commitment. Ruth is brought under God's wings of refuge as she places her trust in the Lord, the God of Israel. Now, we're perhaps familiar with the story. Some perhaps are, some perhaps aren't, but in the measure that you are familiar with the story, you'll remember the memorable words of Ruth addressed to her mother-in-law

Naomi as they're making their way or as they begin the journey from Moab back to Judah. Of course, that's home for Naomi, but it is not home for Ruth and her sister. And yet, they've begun this journey. And Naomi is saying, you know, you go back to your families. You know, you'll be better off with your families. Don't come with me, an old widow. I have nothing to offer you. And of course, we know how Ruth responded to her mother-in-law.

[26 : 26] There in chapter 1 and verses 16 and 17, we read, but Ruth replied, don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go. And where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die. And there I will be buried. And so, Ruth demonstrates in this commitment to Naomi, the trust that she is depositing in Naomi's God, in the God of Israel.

Your God will be my God. We may wonder what Ruth knew about the God of Israel. Perhaps she knew very little. But we cannot doubt that her words reveal a simple yet heartfelt trust in the Lord. And as Boaz acknowledges in these words in chapter 2 and verse 17, around which we're speaking, he acknowledges that Ruth is the one who had come to take refuge. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge. You came to him. You came and sought refuge. You deposited your trust in this God. And your trust was rewarded. And you were brought under his wings as you put your trust in him. But the trust of Ruth is then accompanied, we might say, by the commitment of Boaz. God uses a wedding in the life story of Ruth to cement her place under God's wings of refuge. Now, it's true that Ruth commits to Boaz, but only after Boaz agrees to commit to Ruth. And it is in this marriage that Ruth's place under God's wings of refuge is sealed.

And so, I want to just comment just a little about this wedding, this marriage that seals Ruth's place under the wings of the Almighty. What does Ruth find in this marriage with Boaz? Well, she finds a place of redemption. Ruth, the widow, and Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi, another widow, they stood in need of a redeemer, one who would redeem them from their bitter and seemingly accursed lives. And Boaz is that man. Now, there's much more to the significance of Boaz being described as a redeemer than that very brief description. But that is sufficient for our purposes this evening. They were in need of a redeemer. And Ruth finds a redeemer as she marries Boaz. That's what she finds.

But she also finds in her marriage to Boaz a place of committed love. Boaz commits to Ruth. Who would have thought that Boaz would have looked tenderly on Ruth, the Moabite widow? Surely he could have done better for himself when it came to finding a wife. But he fixes his eyes on Ruth. And not only does he fix his eye on Ruth, to take pity on her, it's not just that he feels sorry for her, this poor widow from Moab, I'll be kind to her. Maybe that's how it began. But not only does he take pity on her, not only is he kind to her, but he comes to love her and to commit his life to her. And that's what he did. He commits himself. He makes a loving and lifelong commitment to Ruth, exemplified in, of course, marrying her. And so Ruth finds in this marriage not only redemption, but also committed love. But she also finds in this marriage a place of fruitfulness. The childless widow becomes the joyful mother of Obed, as we've read towards the end of the story. And in this marriage, and in the person of Boaz, we are being given a picture of Jesus. The one who would be born of the seed of Ruth, and who would redeem his people from their sins. The one who would cling to his people with committed love, a love that went even unto death, and death on a cross in the place of those he was committed to.

The one who would draw his people not only to a place of refuge, but to a place of fruitfulness. The marriage of Ruth and Boaz illustrates the very heart of the gospel that Jesus Christ, the mediator of God's covenant, came to extend the blessings of Abraham to those who were without God and without hope, those who were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and stranger to the covenants of promise. They were to be drawn in. And the story of Ruth points to that great reality. And Jesus does this. He draws in those who are rebels, those who are outcasts, those who are foreigners, those who are undeserving. He does this by bringing us, by bringing sinners into a covenantal marriage union with Himself. We are, as God's people in the very language that we find repeatedly in the New Testament, the bride of Christ. We are married to Jesus. We have been brought by faith into union with Christ. He has committed Himself to us, and we are brought into union with Him. He has redeemed us. He has committed to us.

[32 : 14] And He will make us fruitful in Him. And so, given this wonderful reality, let us all, like Ruth, be ever seeking and finding and experiencing refuge in the shadow of His wings. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank You that You are a God who loves deeply. We thank You that in the Bible, we read that You are love. You're not only a God who shows love, who's capable of love, but You are love in Your very being. And that is reflected and made evident, and wonderfully so, in the manner in which You deal with Your people. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your promises. We thank You that there is nothing that stands in the way of the fulfilling of Your promises. And throughout history, we find, and we see, and we stand in admiration of the manner in which You weave the story in such a way as to fulfill Your purposes of grace towards us. We thank You for Your Son, Jesus. We thank You for His birth.

We thank You for all those who came before Him, and all those You weaved into Your story of redemption. We thank You for Ruth and Boaz. We thank You for the love that they were able to share one with another.

But we thank You especially for how in them we are given an insight, a glimpse of a far greater love, of Your love for us, of Your commitment to us, of Your purposes for us, of bringing us to Yourself, and granting us refuge and protection under the shadow of Your wings. And we pray all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.