



PART 1

Ruth is an amazing book. I would encourage you to read it by yourself (as or as family) this afternoon. It is just four chapters and it covers the everyday routines of life; the need to work, joys of family, pains of bereavement, parting from relatives, relationships with mothers-in-law!

MAIN CHARACTERS

Naomi: A lot of sad things happen to her. At one point she even suggests changing her name to 'Mara', "sad" or "bitter" because of the sad things that happened to her. **Ruth** is the name of the

book. But also, God does an amazing work in her life in the midst of difficult circumstances. **Boaz** is honourable, strong and gentle and provides sacrificially. **Sandal Boy** is what this service is named after! We don't know his name, but for today (you'll see why later), we're calling him Sandal Boy.

KEY LOCATIONS

Bethlehem is a modest farming community built on a ridge in the Judean hills. The name means "house of bread" because of the farming of wheat and barley. It was a community that operated with elders and they worshipped the same true God we worship today. **Moab:** The land sat at a higher elevation than Judea, allowing it to catch more rainfall and maintain successful agriculture. The people who lived there were distant relatives of the Israelites, so they had a similar language. However, they worshipped different false-gods and idols.

STORY

Naomi lived in Bethlehem with her husband Elimelek. They had two sons. There was a famine in Bethlehem (house of bread) so rather than trust God, Naomi and Elimelek went to Moab where there was food. Their sons married Moabite women which was unlawful. One son married Ruth. Sadly, after some time, Elimelek and his two sons died! Not good, no welfare, no work for them. Poor Naomi was very sad and decided to go back to Bethlehem since famine was over. And Ruth went with her despite being from a country that did not worship God. Ruth said this to her Mother-in-law "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." This is amazing, Ruth was not only leaving her homeland forever; she is not only living with her mother-in-law forever but she was committed to the worship of the true and living God. It is also important to see that the witness of Naomi to Ruth in this time of pain and difficulty must've been incredible. God used Naomi's faith and witness to point to God's rule and goodness so much so that Ruth comes to faith. I've read that "A God who makes himself known in the valley of the shadow of death can be trusted in the more comfortable days too." Let us not waste our difficulties! Many of you in this room have faced great difficulty and grief. I also know that there are some in this room who are following Jesus because of the Godly witness of others in the midst of their grief. Just as Naomi was a great witness to God's goodness to Ruth when they were suffering, God can use us too. In our pain and suffering we go to God, the only true comfort, the one who can truly give us rest, strength and hope in grief. And as we do, as we sit at the foot of the cross in grief and are strengthened by the Lord, the watching world looks on and they see Jesus. Let us not waste our suffering, difficulty or pain.

So Ruth and Naomi go back to Bethlehem where Ruth picks up the left-over grain and meets a distant relative, named Boaz who treats her kindly, provides for and protects her. Ruth goes to meet Boaz where he is sleeping and they have a long chat and it seems that they fall in love. However, Boaz reveals that they might be in love, but there is someone who is ahead of Boaz in the line of people who should take care of Ruth and Naomi. If this other person chooses to take up his responsibility, Boaz would have to step aside. This man's name is...

PART 2 SANDAL BOY!

Isn't that so annoying. Have you ever been there? You try and do the right thing and you end up in a difficult situation with 'Sandal Boy'. In our Bible reading, Sandal Boy is called, verse 1, "the Guardian [Kinsman]-Redeemer." I prefer Sandal Boy whose role is similar to what we would call the next of kin. Someone in the family, who can help out and support the family member when they are in difficulty. (Leviticus 25:23-28) So Boaz is a next of kin but there is a nearer next of kin: Sandal Boy. In our passage we learn that Naomi is giving up the last little bit of land she has because of the poor state she is in. In these circumstances, it is the role of the guardian-redeemer, or next of kin, to purchase that land to keep the property within the family. This was an age-old law given by God through Moses Bible. If a woman is

widowed, without bearing a son to carry on the family name, it is the role of the next of kin to have a child with that woman to continue the name of the dead man. So there are two things that the next of kin must do: buy the land and have a child with Ruth. This is what Boaz brings before Sandal Boy. Sandal Boy is happy to buy the land, as an investment. But if he is to have a child with Ruth, that child will ultimately inherit the land. Therefore, Sandal Boy's investment will be lost. Imagine having a distant cousin who has fallen on hard times. They can't keep up their mortgage payments and are about to be kicked out by the bailiffs. You hear of this and you have the money to buy the house. Therefore, your cousin doesn't need to pay any mortgage. You might think, not only is this a good thing to do for a family member, but it is also an investment. When the cousin doesn't need the property anymore, you can rent it out or resell it. However, in this case, it is not an investment, it is a loss. The way it would work is the redeemer would foot the bill to buy the property, but then would have to give it up to a child born not in his name. It will be a costly sacrifice.

Sandal Boy wanted the property, but when he realised that the condition was costly to him, he changed his mind. Maybe Sandal Boy loved his wealth too much; liked his comfortable way of life. We don't know. All we know is he didn't take up the responsibility. Instead of us promoting him to be called 'Sandal Man', he remains a Mere 'Sandal Boy'. Responsibility is costly, it is sacrificial. But this is good news for Ruth and Boaz. After their midnight meeting, love is in the air. "Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelek, Killion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses!" (Ruth 4:9-10) Not only does Boaz say he will bear a child with Ruth, he declares he is going to marry her! This is above and beyond the letter of the law. He is fully aware of the cost and the reality of the situation, but he does so gladly, simply out of love and care for Ruth.

We see that although this book is short, it has many twists and turns. It covers the everyday routines of life, the need to work, joys of family, pains of bereavement, parting from relatives, relationships, sacrifice. There are setbacks and there are celebrations. This is all too familiar to us too. This sounds like our lives. This is why Ruth is a book of hope. It helps us see meaning in the mundane and the painful. It helps us trust in the God who oversees both the suffering and rejoicing in our lives.

We could read the book of Ruth and walk away happy because it is a short story with a happy ending. We've read that things work out for a handful of people in Bethlehem 3,000 years ago. But Ruth is far, far better than a simple short story. This 3,000-year-old story is relevant for us today. It helps us to see that the life of a believer is not a smooth road to salvation or plain sailing to the shores of heaven. But through the famine and the grief, the God of grace provided. Where there was famine in Bethlehem there was food in Moab. Where Naomi lost her sons, she gained a daughter and son-in-law. In poverty, Boaz provided for her. God was good. And God is still good. When the family seemed to do what was wrong by moving to Moab and allowing their sons to marry women of Moab (something God's people were told not to do) God was merciful and kind beyond belief, granting one of those wives to be Ruth, who would later become a believer by the witness of her mother-in-law. When the family were struck by hardship beyond their control God was merciful and provided for their needs through Boaz. Then it seemed like things were going wrong because Boaz was righteous and didn't want to jump the queue of the next of kin, God was loving and enabled Boaz and Ruth to end up together.

So today whether your suffering is self-inflicted, other-inflicted or righteous-decision-inflicted God cares. He is merciful. Cry out to him and he will meet you where you are and provide for you. He will comfort you and strengthen you. The book of Ruth helps us see that God really cares for our needs and is deeply involved in our lives, working his redemptive purposes in our lives. We must lift our eyes to the horizon. Look up and behold God's great redemptive purposes for all his people. If you read the end of this book you will see that Boaz and Ruth had a son whom they called Obed. Obed had a son he named Jesse. Jesses had a son he named David. This was King David, the greatest king Israel would ever have. One of David's descendant was Jesus. God's own son, born as our kinsman, in flesh. Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer of Ruth, had a descendant who is the kinsman-redeemer of the world: Jesus"! Boaz saw the cost, saw the sacrifice and embraced it, for the love of the one he was redeeming. So too did Jesus. Jesus saw that the cost of redeeming his people from sin was his own death. Praise God that Jesus was no Sandal Boy. The life of a believer is not plain sailing but let us depend upon the same God who sustained, protected and provided for Naomi and Ruth. We've also seen that there is a greater redeemer than Boaz who is offering us our eternal redemption. Jesus has paid the cost for our freedom from sin and death. Will you believe and trust in Him?