

Sunday 19 April 2015
Otumoetai Baptist Church
Women of the Bible: Ruth

RUTH - HER STORY

(BLACK)

On the ninth of January 1982,
a little girl was born at Royal Berkshire Hospital
in a place called Reading, in England.

Her parents were commoners,
and at one stage both worked as flight attendants.

She was the eldest of three children
and the family had a nice easy upbringing.

She attended a girl's boarding school,
and maintained a fairly low profile.

She had dreams of being a photographer,
and decided to study art at a University in Scotland.

Here, she was **a stranger in a foreign land**,
doing her best to get by
and earn a degree.

But little did she know that her life
would never be the same again.

I'll stop the story here.

I'm sure many of you know who she is,
but for those who don't,
you will need to keep listening till the end.

Today we're focusing on another stranger in a foreign land,
whose life was about to change as well.

We started a new series last week
focusing on women in the Bible.

Brian kicked us off by looking at Esther.

The young woman who became a queen
and discovered that she was born for such a time as this.

Today the young woman we are focusing on
was also born for such a time as this.

Ruth.

(SLIDE 1)

I'm sure many of us are familiar with Ruth's story.

We'll go through some of the details today
but if you're not up to date with it,

let me encourage you to sit down with a coffee
and spend some time reading it.

It has encouraged me greatly and I'm sure it will you too.

If you've got your Bible or tablet or Phone
go to Ruth chapter 1.

Ruth's story is set within a much bigger story.

Her small story of peace is set during
the large and violent time of the book of Judges.

The stories of *Judges* show the disaster that came
when God's people Israel turned away from Him.

Ruth's story shows the blessing that came to a foreigner
who turned towards Israel's God
and became part of his faithful people.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves
so let's dive into Ruth's story now.

(SLIDE 2)

Ruth chapter 1:1-5

*Long ago, in the days before Israel had a king there was a famine
in the land.*

*So a man named Elimelech, who belonged to the clan of Ephrath
and who lived in Bethlehem in Judah, went with his wife Naomi
and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion to live for a while in the
country of Moab.*

*While they were living there, Elimelech died, and Naomi was left
alone with her two sons, who married Moabite girls, Orpah and
Ruth.*

*About ten years later Mahlon and Chilion also died, and Naomi
was left all alone, without husband or sons.*

At this stage in her story,

Ruth seems like a fairly minor character.

The narrator has focused on this man Elimelech
and his two sons.

All of whom are out of the picture now.

We don't know much about Ruth or Orpah,
we don't even know who married which son!

All we know is that they are from a place called Moab.

(SLIDE 3)

Moab was a place foreign to Israel;

a place whose people had oppressed the Israelites;
and a place where Ruth and Orpah call home.

Another piece of information we can take from this passage
is the place of women in those times.

The writer uses the phrase "Naomi was left all alone" twice,
once after the death of her husband,
and then again after the death of her two sons.

But hold on, what about Ruth?

What about Orpah?

Did they leave too?

I assume that they were with Naomi, grieving with her,
yet why are they not mentioned here?

Well, life was about the men in families back then.

They were the leaders;
they owned the finances;
they produced the sons;
they called the shots.

If the husband or patriarch of the family died,
his authority would be passed down to his oldest son.
If his oldest son was dead,
his authority would then be passed
down to a younger son and so on.

But in this instance, both the patriarch
and his only two sons are dead.

So Naomi -
- and Ruth and Orpah as well,
are left all alone,
with no husbands or sons to provide for them.

This meant that life would be pretty tough for all three.

After three funerals, Naomi is left with no man
to hedge against the disasters of widowhood.
As miserable as life would be
in her hometown of Bethlehem,
she decides that going home would be easier
than staying in Moab.

So Naomi embarks on a journey back to Bethlehem.

(SLIDE 4)

On the way she tells Ruth and Orpah
to go back home to **their** mothers,
so they can marry again and be taken care of.

In other words, have a fresh start girls.
You're young enough, you can find another husband,
you don't need to come with me.

Orpah eventually decides to go back home.
But Ruth stays put.

One translation says that she '**clung**' to Naomi.

(SLIDE 5)

It's the same word that describes
Adam's relationship to his wife Eve in the Garden of Eden.

It's also used to describe the committed faithfulness
that God desires of his people, Israel,
in response to his saving actions.

So why is this important?

Because it shows us that Ruth the Moabite,
formerly a worshipper of foreign gods,
is displaying a quality of life here
characteristic of the people of the one true God.

In other words, it's setting the scene for Ruth's character.

Her speech to Naomi is so powerful
and life-changing

that we need to focus on it:

(SLIDE 6)

chapter 1 vs 16 to 17:

"Don't ask me to leave you!

Let me go with you.

Wherever you go, I will go;

wherever you live, I will live.

Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.

Wherever you die, I will die, and that is where I will be buried.

*May the Lord's worst punishment come upon me if I let anything
but death separate me from you!"*

This is an Academy Award winning speech!

And this moment is a HUGE turning point in Ruth's life.

She has decided where her loyalty lies

and has taken her hands off the steering wheel.

She will follow Naomi to Bethlehem,

where she will be an outsider,

a stranger in a foreign land.

(SLIDE 7)

She will have no protection from a husband.

No income from a family.

She'll either have to marry one of Naomi's relatives
or remain single and childless.

In other words, things are looking pretty bleak here Houston!

I was trying to think of a way

to further illustrate this moment in Ruth's life,
and as we've just had our third child,

I've probably got babies on the brain (Not a fourth!)
and been thinking that the birth of a child
kind of does this justice.

In his mother's womb, the child is safe, secure, and happy.

He is warm, comfortable,
and protected from things on the other side.

The child is at home.

Then comes labour and birth.

The child is taken from his sense of peace and security,
and thrust into the outside world. Literally!

Everything has now changed for him

and the child has to acclimatise to his new surroundings.

Well for Ruth, everything has changed
and she too must acclimatise to her new surroundings.

Naomi and Ruth make it to Bethlehem,
carrying little more than the clothes on their back.
And with Naomi's permission,
Ruth goes to work in the fields gathering corn and barley.

Picture Ruth ...
She has left her home, her family, her security,
her gods that she has followed since childhood,
is now living a servant's life,
doing a servant's work
and working in a field.

As we think about this point in Ruth's life,
I wonder what **field** you might find yourself in today.

(SLIDE 8)

Maybe you're in a field of anxiety,
where you are worried about the future
or an important decision you have to make.
How are things going to pan out?

Maybe you're in a field of fatigue,
where you are tired

or you're working yourself ragged day after day,
wondering if anyone notices your effort.

Maybe you're in a field of loneliness,
where no matter if people are around us or not,
it often feel like you are by yourself.

Maybe your field is one of being on the fringes,
of feeling like a stranger in a foreign land,
of not quite fitting in anywhere.

Or maybe you're in a really healthy field at the moment,
life is going pretty well,
the grass is pretty green.

I'm currently in a field of transition,
a field of things changing.

Our third son Judah was born two weeks ago today
and so life at the moment is all about adjusting
to having a new member of the family.

Now he is an angelic child whom I love dearly,
but boy can he cry when he's not happy.

He might be a good singer, he's certainly got the lungs for it!

I don't know if I've forgotten what it's like to have a new-born,
or if I've blocked it out of my memory, maybe both!

Story – Whittaker's Chocolate Milk

In this field of transition, life is about having a new-born,
juggling kids, family, work, down time (what's that?)
and sometimes just getting through the day.

There is a little bit of uncertainty you might say.

Well Ruth finds herself in an uncertain field.

But she is being looked after.

See, this field belongs to a man called Boaz,
who happens to be a relative of Naomi's,
and who just happens to take an interest in Ruth.

Boaz is described as rich and influential,
possibly like a CEO of one of the top companies today.
Boaz goes out of his way to help Ruth
and is extra kind to her,
even though she is a foreigner.

Which went against the culture of his time.

Boaz tells her to work only with the women,
he orders his men not to touch her,
he blesses her for her loyalty to Naomi
and he invites her to have a meal with him.

Ruth,
the stranger in a foreign land,
has been shown great kindness
and her circumstances have changed rapidly.

So what happens next?

Well it's kind of like one of those romantic comedies
where you know the two characters
are going to end up together
but they have to go through a few things first.

We have Naomi coaching Ruth
into helping the relationship with her and Boaz along.

We have the social divide that needs to be crossed
for Ruth, the worker and servant,
to become betrothed
to Boaz, the landowner and boss.

And we have another potential husband
enter the scene.

But, like most romantic comedies,
Ruth and Boaz do end up together,
Ruth becomes pregnant
and Naomi is blessed with a grandson.

It is Naomi's friends who have the final say:

(SLIDE 9)

Ruth 4 vs 14-15

"Praise the Lord!

He has given you a grandson today to take care of you.

May the boy become famous in Israel!

*Your daughter-in-law loves you, and has done more for you than
seven sons.*

*And now she has given you a grandson, who will bring new life to
you and give you security in your old age."*

Today has been a fairly quick glimpse into Ruth's life,
but some details stick out to me.

Firstly, Ruth's life and her actions have been **noticed**.
(SLIDE 10)

She was a stranger in a foreign land,
yet Ruth was noticed by Boaz.

Boaz took more than just an interest in her.
He invested into her life.

Secondly, Ruth's life and her actions have been **recognised**.
(SLIDE 11)

Boaz recognised the loyalty and devotion
Ruth showed to Naomi in her darkest times.

Widowed at an early age
and faced with a decision
either to abandon her widowed mother-in-law
or risk life in a foreign land,
Ruth chose the more difficult path of commitment.

But she not only chose to stay with Naomi,
she completely changed her life around for her.
She chose to live with her and follow her God.

Boaz also recognised the loyalty and devotion
Ruth showed to him.

When Ruth chose to go to him, he said to her:
*"You are showing even greater family loyalty in what you are
doing now than in what you did for your mother-in-law.*

You might have gone looking for a young man, either rich or poor, but you didn't."

Ruth chose Boaz and put her trust in him.

Thirdly, Ruth's life and her actions have been **appreciated**.
(SLIDE 12)

Boaz appreciated the loyalty and devotion
Ruth showed to him and he embraced her for it.

Boaz became Ruth's redeemer.

In Ancient Israel, a deceased man's brother
was obligated to marry his widow
and raise a son in his name.

Since Ruth's former husband had no living brothers,
a distant relative could, if he chose,
act as what is known as a 'kinsman-redeemer',
fulfil the duties of a brother
and keep the family line going.

And Boaz chose to.

He was a man of integrity
who kept his word and fulfilled his responsibilities.
Ruth became pregnant and had a son called Obed.

Naomi had the grandson she had been waiting for.
A grandson who would help ease the pain of her loss.

Obed had a son called Jesse.
Jesse had a son called David.

David became the great king David,
a man after God's own heart.

In her loyalty and devotion,
Ruth played a small part in God's larger plan of salvation.

And I guess that's where I want to finish up today.
With our great redeemer.

I believe that Boaz being the kinsman-redeemer for Ruth
illustrates the ultimate true redeemer for us all.

Jesus.
Jesus is the one who sees all our efforts,
all our struggles,
all our sacrifice.

He notices *us*.

(SLIDE 13)

He recognises *us*.

(SLIDE 14)

He appreciates *us*.

(SLIDE 15)

And so whatever field you may find yourself in today,
know that ultimately it is God's field
and He is working things out.

Ruth's story is a story that reminds us
not only that God works visibly through miracles,
but that he is invisibly and mysteriously working
all of the time, even within tragedy.

Her story is a story for those of us who have, are, and will
suffer tragedy, loss, or pain.

It's a story for those wondering where God is
in the midst of terrible suffering and uncertainty.

Her story is the story of an everyday woman
who endured great suffering,
who lived with uncommon loyalty,
and who chose to follow the one true God,
despite the personal cost.

Ruth, the stranger in a foreign land,
was noticed by Boaz,
invited into his family,
and she became King David's great Grandmother.

And what about that young woman I spoke about
at the beginning?

She was studying art in Scotland,
another stranger in a foreign land?

Well, Kate was noticed by Prince William, a future King,
invited to become part of his family,
and her life will never be the same again.

You and I are also noticed by a King,
the Eternal King,
Jesus Christ,
and once we accept him as our Saviour
we are included into his family,
and our lives are never the same again.

Let's pray.