

**Sunday evening February 25<sup>th</sup> 2018 at CBC**

**Sermon outline: Ruth 4**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Thriller or love story?

Ruth is a love story, but what is its message within the Bible?

Arguably the answer to that question lies in the beginning and end of the book.

The events of the book are set in the time *'when the judges ruled'* Israel. And the characteristic spiritual behaviour in Israel at this time is summed up in the last verse of the book of Judges: *'in those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.'*

### **[1] THE LORD CAN TURN SORROW INTO JOY**

This is not exclusively the message of Ruth, but it is part of the message of Ruth. At the end of chapter 1, Naomi wants to change her name from 'Pleasant' to 'Bitter', such is her unhappiness. In chapter 4, Naomi's sorrow has turned to joy and her women friends rejoice with her.

This movement from sorrow to joy is essentially a summary of the Lord's message to our fallen world, a message that finds its clearest expression in the appearance and activity of the Lord Jesus Christ – see Luke 2:10-11. Three observations about this 'movement':

[a] It is achieved by God's power and purpose

[b] At its deepest level, it brings people from spiritual death to life through the work of the ultimate 'kinsman-redeemer'

[c] Its eventual outcome is seen in eternity

## **[2] THE LORD CAN ACCOMMODATE THE EFFECTS OF DISOBEDIENCE**

Why was Naomi so bitter that she literally took on the identity of bitterness? See 1:20-21.

Disobedience in the past need not be the end of a person's story. The Lord is gracious – he shows to people the kindness (Hesed) that Naomi herself refers to in 1.8.

And so we find her enjoying blessing in chapter 4.

From having no kinsman redeemer and facing the prospect of poverty for herself and her daughter-in-law she finds herself being promised that her kinsman-redeemer, the son born to Ruth, will renew her life and sustain her in her old age. Her bitterness has passed, her joy has returned. Such are the gracious ways of God.

## **[3] THE LORD CAN MAKE LIGHT SHINE IN THE MIDST OF THE DARKNESS**

The days when the judges ruled were dark days, as we have already noted. But the Lord can make righteousness shine in the darkness and we can find good examples amongst the bad.

### **[a] commitment**

So although Naomi should not have been in Moab, it is in Moab (on the border with Israel?) that Ruth makes her exemplary six-fold declaration of her commitment to the Lord and his people – going, staying, people, God, death, burial (1.16-17).

## **[b] acceptance**

If Ruth models commitment, then Boaz models acceptance by the Lord's people of newcomers into God's kingdom, regardless of their previous background.

## **[c] righteousness**

It is clear that Ruth and Boaz are good, righteous people. They are not perfect, because no-one is, but they are, we might say, two good people who deserve each other and are rewarded accordingly.

## **[4] THE LORD GRACIOUSLY ENGAGES WITH FALLEN AND SINFUL PEOPLE IN ORDER TO FURTHER HIS ETERNAL PURPOSES**

That genealogy at the end of the book appears to be some kind of appendix or footnote. But its purpose is summed up in verse 17:

*The women living there said, "Naomi has a son!" And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David'.*

Here is the whole purpose of the book. It shows how the Lord weaved his purposes into the lives of fallen and sinful human beings such that, in spite of, and because of, the wrongful excursion of Elimelech into Moab, the family line emerges that will lead to Israel's great king, David, and ultimately to the Messiah himself, Jesus of Nazareth who, as you might know, would be born in the very town – Bethlehem – where the events of Ruth chapters 2-4 occur.

In the fullness of time, Ruth will take her place, along with her other mother-in-law Rahab, in the genealogy of the Messiah as

recorded in Matthew 1. A third woman also mentioned in the genealogy of the Messiah is Tamar, who is referenced in Ruth 4.12 as the mother of Perez, the father being Judah. That refers to an unsavoury incident which reflects badly on Judah, because Tamar was his daughter-in-law for whom he failed to make the appropriate Levirite marriage arrangements after she was widowed. She tricked her father-in-law into sleeping with her and the result was twin boys, one of whom was Perez, from whom Boaz was descended. The line of Judah was of course the line from which the Lord Jesus came.

The book of Ruth is yet another reminder of the graciousness of the Lord in using fallen people to fulfil his purposes.

Ruth did not belong to Israel, yet she blessed Israel and was blessed by Israel. And she would never know, in this life, the part that she would play in the purposes of God.

## **CONCLUSION**

And what was true for Ruth is true for all the Lord's people. We are not given to see the big picture – at least not in one sense. We cannot know the part that we play in the purposes of God. But if our trust is in Christ, we can be assured that we do indeed play such a part.

We may think it is insignificant and we may be right – except that the Lord does not see insignificance the way we do. One day, in the new heavens and the new earth, we will see the big picture and we may be surprised at the part we played.