

Message Series: The Whole Counsel of God, Message 10
Moments Leading To Redemption. Book of Ruth
Pastor Roger Ridley, Gretna Baptist Church – March 18, 2007

Can you think of some moments from your past that helped bring you to your current walk with God?

When I was eight years old, walking to the entrance of my school, a man handed me a small Gideon's New Testament. Inside, it provided the plan of salvation, and a sinner's prayer. I read both and prayed the prayer. I was very excited and told a lot of people but there was no one around to tell me what to do next. Through the years, there were other such moments and looking back now I can see how God was leading in all of them to lead me to a settled relationship with Him.

We find something very similar in the life of a young woman named Ruth in the Old Testament book of the same name. In each chapter of the book there is a key moment God used in Ruth's life to bring her into a settled relationship with Him.

Please open your Bible to the first chapter...

In verse one we learn that the setting for the book of Ruth was in the time of the Judges, but what a difference! The book of Judges left us feeling shocked, but the book of Ruth leaves us feeling very good; as we realize that even in the darkest of times God is still at work bringing people to Himself.

I. On the Road

For Ruth, her first key moment took place on a road heading for the Land of Promise. See 1:16-17...

Those are fairly familiar words to us, many have used them in their wedding vows, but for Ruth they expressed a moment that changed the entire course of her life. I want to bring to your attention the circumstance God used to bring her to that point.

It all started ten years earlier with a couple who lived in Beth-Judah, Elimelech and Naomi. Keep in mind this took place in the days of the

Judges; a time when people did what was right in their own eyes. God had promised the people of Israel that if they turned from Him one of the ways He would punish them was through a famine, and there was a famine in the land. A famine was meant to cause the people to recognize their sin and turn to God once again, but this couple decided that circumstances were better elsewhere, so they left the Land of Promise for the land of Moab. This clearly took them out of God's will. It is interesting what Elimelech's name means: God is King, but at this time he was not living up to his own name, if he was he would have stayed in the Land of Promise. By leaving, not only was he attempting to run away from his problems, but also God.

They arrived in Moab but their circumstances did not get much better, in fact they got worse. Maybe you have noticed how that seems to happen. We really can't run from our problems, the longer we try, the more complicated life seems to get. Sooner or later we must face up to our problem and come clean with God if things are ever going to get better.

While they were in Moab, Elimelech died. Their two sons married women of Moab and then they both died as well. And suddenly any hopes of a better life were gone. Can't you imagine how the woman must have felt? When things are difficult and you do what you can to make them better, and they get worse than you thought possible, life becomes miserable.

Later, this woman returns to her hometown and when the people begin to recognize her she tells them do not call me Naomi, which means sweetness, call me Mara, which means bitterness. She gave two reasons: the Almighty had dwelt bitterly with her, and the Almighty had afflicted her.

Maybe you've been there before, when your circumstances all seemed against you and as a result you felt God was as well. I've been there. But I always try to remember God is never working for my harm but always for my good. A favorite verse of mine has been Romans 8:28...

When bad things happen to us, sometimes because we live in a sinful world, and sometimes because of our own sinful actions, God promises to somehow work it to our good, and God was working in Naomi's life. This will become obvious by the end of the book. He was also working in Ruth's life.

After the death of her sons, Naomi decided to return home. On the road back to the Land of Promise we find a touching scene. Her daughters-in-laws had

become very attached to Naomi and the thought of separation was difficult. Verses nine and fourteen tell us that they both wept, but eventually Orpah decided to return to stay in the land of her people. This meant the Moab way of life and faith. However, Ruth continued to cling to Naomi. And on that road to Beth-Judah she experienced a decisive moment in her life. Look again at what she said in verses 16-17...

This was no fleeting emotional moment. Verse eighteen tells us that Naomi could see Ruth was steadfastly minded, determined, taking a purposeful stand, and there was no going back. Ruth wanted what Naomi had, even though Naomi didn't know what she had at the time. This happens more often than we realize. If you know the Lord, people can see the difference He makes in your life even if you don't. If you don't have nothing it is easy to spot when someone has something. That's why 1 Peter 3:15 tells us to always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us.

Was this the moment of salvation for Ruth? Not entirely, because the whole book illustrates the process, but certainly it was a critical moment when she left her world and her gods behind, and put the God of Israel, Almighty God, before her.

Has there been such a moment in your past when you put everything behind you and gave your heart to the Lord?

II. In a Field

We quickly learn that was not the end of the story for Ruth, a second key moment takes place once they arrive in Beth-Judah and she decides to go to work in a field. See 2:1-3...

In these verses two things are taking place at the very same time which is important to recognize. First, it is harvest time and Ruth decides to go out to the fields and glean. In the Law, God made provision for the poor and the stranger in the land. In Leviticus 19:9-10 He instructed the people not to harvest the corners or the edges of their fields, or to pick up the gleanings, the leftovers of the crops in order to provide for the poor and the stranger in the land. Ruth fit both, and so she went into the field. She was getting in line with God's blessing, laying claim to His provision. Keep in mind that for any of us to enjoy the blessings God has for us, we must claim them.

Verse 3 says her “*hap*” was to end up in the field of Boaz. Now that gives us the impression of chance, a stroke of luck. Too often when good things happen to us that is the way we treat them, “*Boy, I was lucky today!*” But for the person who has put their trust in God and is claiming God’s provision, nothing happens by chance.

That’s the second thing I see happening here. On the one hand Ruth is being responsible. On the other hand God is leading behind the scenes. He is making things happen.

All through chapter two that is the implication. In verse twelve, Boaz’ understanding was that Ruth had put her trust under the wings of God. If you want a blessing, take your Bible concordance, look up the word “*wings*”, write down the references, and start to read what it means to come under the wings of God. It is a place of mercy, refuge, fellowship, and blessing. The moment Ruth went into the field to glean she demonstrated whose wings she had come beneath. At the same time God demonstrated His provision by what happened.

Toward the end of the chapter when Ruth gets home and reports what happened, look at what Naomi says in verse 20...

Ruth happened into the field of one of the few people who could actually help them, and Naomi knew it wasn’t chance, it was God’s leading.

That needs to be our testimony too, that we are acting on the promises of God and that He is leading.

III. On the Floor

Chapter three brings us to another key moment in Ruth’s life. It happens on the threshing floor. See 3:1-9...

When Ruth went down to the threshing floor late at night and lay at the feet of Boaz, there was nothing improper about that, in fact it was just the opposite. In verses ten and eleven Boaz speaks of how honorable she was. Again, she was claiming one of God’s provisions, that of the kinsman-redeemer.

Here's how it worked. When an Israelite had hit on hard times and had to sell his land or even himself, God's provision was that a close relative to redeem or purchase them back. The requirements were simple: he had to be a blood relative, have the necessary resources, and be willing to redeem.

On the floor, Ruth was claiming that provision. The only question that remained was whether Boaz was willing. In verse thirteen his answer was yes. When Ruth reported this to Naomi, her instruction to Ruth in verse eighteen was, "*sit still.*" There were some things that only the kinsman-redeemer could do.

I hope you see the illustration in this of God's provision of redemption from sin for us. Sin has put us all in the slave market and there is nothing we can do to change our condition. We don't have the ability or the resources. Jesus Christ is our Kinsman-Redeemer. He has done what only He could do to change our situation. When He took upon flesh, He met the first requirement. As He lived among us without sin He met the second requirement. And when He willingly went to the cross in our behalf He met the third requirement.

Jesus has fulfilled the part of the Kinsman-Redeemer. He has done what only He can do. The question that now remains is whether you and I will claim God's provision as Ruth did on the threshing floor. Romans 10:13 says, "*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*"

Has there been such a moment in your life? I hope so.

IV. At the Gate

There is one more moment in Ruth's life that we need to consider. It is found in chapter four at the gate of the city. See 4:1-10...

What is being described in these verses is also one of God's provisions, and it does represent the completing moment of redemption for Ruth.

In Deuteronomy 25 God provides for the woman whose husband dies without an heir. A close relative could purchase, redeem her as his wife so that she could bear a child in her dead husband's name, and thus insure a future, a posterity for that family.

Because there was a closer relative than Boaz, the opportunity to redeem had to first go to him. He was willing to redeem the land but not produce a child in someone else's name. So he gave the opportunity to Boaz. In that moment Boaz publicly declared his purchase of Ruth as his wife, thus bringing to completion her redemption.

Now this whole process has centered on physical things: property and posterity, but there's a spiritual element to it as well. Throughout the book Ruth is designated as Ruth the Moabitess, she was not part of God's people, she was outside the commonwealth of Israel; she was a stranger. But in that moment when her redemption was made complete all that changed. She began to experience blessing as one of God's people. That must have been beyond her imagination!

She and Boaz bore a son who would become the grandfather of King David. Not only that but in Matthew chapter one, we learn that this was the godly line through which God the Father would send His Son Jesus Christ, our Kinsman-Redeemer!

Because of a few key moments, Ruth's future was changed forever. She could sing, *"I have a home prepared for me, since I have been redeemed. Where I shall dwell eternally, since I have been redeemed!"*

What a contrast with Orpah who went back to her people, and the gods of Moab!

Where have the moments of your life brought you: closer to God, or further from Him?

Perhaps this moment can be the difference for you...