



Sermon Transcription • Ruth 2 (ESV)

Rescue Me!

Pastor Mark Burch

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

Ruth 2:1-23,

Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech. And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, "The Lord be with you!" And they answered, "The Lord bless you." Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.' So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest."

Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn." Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" Then she said, "I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants."

And at mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine." So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young



men, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.”

So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. And she took it up and went into the city. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied. And her mother-in-law said to her, “Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you.” So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, “The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz.” And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!” Naomi also said to her, “The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.” And Ruth the Moabite said, “Besides, he said to me, ‘You shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.’” And Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, “It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted.” So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thank you, Tianna. Well hey, It's great to be back in Northview, I have finally figured it out. Pastor Ron said I'm not a guest anymore and Jeff and Jeanne were away on spring break. And it finally dawned on me whenever Jeff doesn't wanna preach, and whenever Ezra and Greg are not available, he gives me a call. So it's like, spring break week, I wanna go away, let's call up Burch guy. Anyway, it's great to be back. It's a privilege to be in this book. It's an amazing book, so let's just jump in cause we got a lot of territory to cover.

Have your bibles open, we're gonna scan through chapter two together as we get going. But this is a great rescue story. And we all love rescue stories. Particularly the ones that turn out well. And as I was thinking about it this week, I was thinking about eight, nine months ago, July of last summer. All the eyes of the world literally were on a rescue mission taking place in Thailand. And as I talk about it, you'll certainly remember those 12 young soccer players who found themselves trapped in a cage with their coach—or a cave rather. And down underground, and then the waters began to rise as the rains come in. And I have to admit, when that first began to get news coverage, I thought, “Man, what's the big deal? I mean, I know yes it's serious, these boys are lost. But you know, somebody will go in and they'll find them. And the water's rising, like how serious can it be?” Until that day that we heard that a Navy SEAL diver had died in the attempt to get into them. And suddenly, the seriousness of this situation really began to press in on my heart. Now, okay, this *is* a big deal. And of course when they finally were rescued, we heard that through black waters, literally, two miles back underground and through water, they pulled these boys out. And the world rejoiced as they came out. It was a rescue story that ended very, very well.



There are other stories that drive you a little crazy. Maybe some of you have seen the 2017 movie, *All the Money in the World*. It's a story that will make you—it'll tick you off, I'll just tell you that. Some of you might even be old enough to remember the actual events back in 1973. The world's richest man at that time, at least one of them, a billionaire oil tycoon named Paul Getty had 13 grandsons, grandkids. And one of his grandsons was kidnapped. Paul Getty, John Paul Getty III. He was held for \$17 million ransom. Which in today's dollars would be nearly \$100 million. But if you're a billionaire, that's not much money. And his grandfather refused to pay on this basis he said, "I have 13 grandkids, and if I start to pay ransoms, the blackmail will never end. I'm not paying." And weeks went by, and months went by, and as the story unfolds. We know now, from history, that he was being tortured by his captors, it kept getting worse, and worse. Until finally one day a newspaper receives an envelope in the mail, and they opened that envelope and there is the severed human ear of this young 16 year old kid. And the message saying, "That if we don't get our money soon, we're going to begin to dismember piece by piece by piece and mail it in." Finally, grandpa sat up and took notice. They settled in on \$2.9 million and he figured out there was some loophole in the tax law that he could actually write off \$2.2 million. He could get a tax receipt! So he paid \$2.2 million, he loaned \$700,000 to his son to pay the rest on this condition, "You will pay it back to me at 4% interest." It is a movie that will drive you crazy. Because in his power was rescue, but he was unwilling.

And the story of the Bible of course is the greatest rescue ever told from cover to cover, the macro theme of this book in its entirety is how God desperately wants his children home. And that we are in over our head, we are unable to save ourselves, and we're standing in the need of a rescue mission. In fact, this simple core truth of Christianity is actually what makes it offensive to human nature. When Jesus' birth was announced and the angel said, "Good news! A saviour is born." You say, "Well, whatever... it's good news I guess if you think you need saving. But who needs a saviour? I'm not drowning, I'm not trapped. I'm doing quite well on my own, thank you very much. But thanks for the news, angels." A saviour has been born. J.I. Packer who's almost as old as Pastor Ron Friesen, has been teaching for, he's been teaching I think 200 years out at Regent College. He said, if you needed to reduce the gospel to just three words, if you had to summarize it down to only three words, you could summarize the gospel with these three words: God saves sinners. It is God's doing, it is not ours, and it is sinful people that he comes after. And so many, many, many songs and poems have been written on this theme. One that I'm enjoying lately, Rend Collective is a band I listen to, and they have a song called "He's Our Rescuer",

"He's our rescuer, He's our rescuer
We are free from sin forevermore
Oh how sweet the sound
Oh how grace abounds
We will praise the Lord our rescuer..."



One of the verses reads like this,

“There is good news for the captive
Good news for the shamed
good news for the one who walked away
good news for the doubter
The one religion failed
For the Good Lord has come to seek and save”

So our study in the book of Ruth is a micro study of the macro story. And it's a story of two women, Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi, who need rescuing. Pastor Greg did a great job last week in introducing this story and, if you didn't listen to the message, or if you haven't read chapter one, I encourage you as he encourages last week, read through the book every week if you can. And I'll just do a quick recap.

The first chapter's basically this: a family, Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion leave Bethlehem, moved to a place called Moab because there's a famine in Bethlehem. They hear there's food in Moab, and so they moved there and tragedy follows them. The father dies, the sons take wives, but they don't have children and 10 years later, they too die. And Naomi whose name means “pleasant”, finds her life bitter. She moves back home to Bethlehem and she says to her friend, “You can call me ‘bitter’ because the hand of the Lord has been heavy on my life.” And these women are in a desperate situation. Unlike our times, the life of a widow was very, very precarious. It was a dangerous position. Very much unlike our times. My dad died when I was 15, and my mom became a young widow at age 48. I know what a widow's life is like in our days. Very different from these days. She couldn't own property, she couldn't take care of herself. If her sons weren't living to take care of her, or she didn't have boys, she might return to her father's home or brother's home, or an uncle's home, or a new husband perhaps, or some distant relative. But if no man would take her under his wings, a widow or a single woman would be left to beg, to steal, to become a bondservant, or worse yet, to resort to prostitution.

And so we're picking up this story where these two women in a desperate situation have made their way back to Bethlehem. And it's the start of the barley harvest. So now into chapter two. Verse one we meet the character who is gonna become the hero of the story, a man named Boaz. Boaz is a relative of Elimelech and we're told in verse one simply, he's a worthy man and we'll see that lived out in the rest of the book. Verse two, Ruth does about the only thing that she *can* do. She can beg, she can steal, she can sell her body, *or...* she can seek to provide for Naomi and herself by gleaning. Now we're gonna come back to that concept later. But gleaning was picking up the remnants that the harvesters have left, they have either left over or they had missed or they had intentionally not harvested the entire field. It was the equivalent of what today we would call the “social safety net”. It was done on purpose, under the law to provide something for the poor and it wasn't simply a handout for the poor, because you had to work for what you got. You had to go into the fields and glean. But something was intentionally left there for you. Now there's a couple implications, we could understand



why didn't Naomi go. We can imply then, Naomi was too old to do a hard day's labour in the fields, more than likely. We can also learn some things about Ruth. She was responsible, she was loyal, she was looking after mother in law. And she was a hard worker.

Verse three to seven, Boaz and Ruth meet for the very first time, and the whispers of God's sovereignty began to fall into this text when it says, she just *so happened*—wink, wink, nudge, nudge—to end up in Boaz's field. She just *so happened* there. And Boaz comes to the job site later in the day, to check in on his crew. And he's like, "Who's the new girl in the field?" And they're like, "Well it's Ruth. You must've heard, Naomi's return from Moab and this is her daughter in law. And she started working this morning, she has worked all day long, except a short break that she take, that woman is a workhorse, Boaz!" And in verse eight, we see and hear the kindness of Boaz as he addresses her for the first time directly and tenderly you might add. When he says, "Listen, my daughter...stay close to the other women and don't go to another field, when my crew moves on, you move on with them. Stay with my girls and drink the water from the well that my men have drawn." And in the next four or five verses you see this conversation spilled out as Ruth falls on her knees in thanksgiving and in surprise, and sensing, "What have I done to deserve such favour like this." And he says, "There's actually two things," Although he didn't say that I have two points, he just told her two things, "First of all, you've looked after your mother in law Naomi and that news has spread through the village. I've heard about the good that you've done for her. But more importantly," verse 12, he acknowledges that she's asked the Lord to look after her. He says, Ruth 2:12,

“...and a full reward be given you by the Lord...under whose wings you have come to take refuge!”

See, Ruth's confession of faith, trusting in the Almighty. And Boaz affirms, and he says, "You've stepped out in faith, believing that God will be your supply. And as an older brother in the faith, I can assure you, the favour of the Lord is on you, he is faithful. He will look after you." The next verses until the end of the chapter, the generosity continues, Boaz on this refugee woman, "Join us for a meal. Come and eat with us. We'll share our roasted grain and our wine with you and eat. Eat 'til your full, there's lots here, take some leftovers home with you to your mother in law. We have an abundance." And as his crew gets back up to go to work, he gives them several directives. He says, "Literally let her glean among the sheaves themselves. Not just on the edges of the field, not what you've pulled out and left behind, but literally give her free reign in the field, and not just what you've dropped, but pull out some of the good sheaves and don't shame her. Don't rebuke her. Don't give her a hard time." And Ruth works hard all day long. She pounds out the grain and she has an ephah, just over a half a bushel. And I know nothing about gleaning, I know nothing about doing this by hand, but commentators tell us that this would've been a really good show for your day's work. And so she bundles it up along with the leftover she has from lunch, and she heads home to Naomi, and Naomi is amazed, "Where did you glean, girl? How did you get so much barley in just one day and this leftover food? This is an amazing days' work!" And Ruth is like, "Well some guy named Boaz...Boaz was kind to me." And Naomi was like, "Well I'll be...Boaz. Boaz. He is one of our near redeemers." And that term "redeemer" or "kinsman redeemer" "a close relative of my family" is critical. "Stay with his



workers, girl. Do just what he tells you to do.” And so verse 23 summarizes, Ruth keeps working. Right through the barley harvest. Right through the wheat harvest. So by the time we reach the end of chapter two, two to three months have passed. And Ruth and Boaz have begun to get to know one another.

Now this story is so rich. And it has so many nuances. And as I studied it, I realized it has such incredible historical rabbit trails, which I love. And so we’re gonna be here ’til noon because there’s just so much here. There are depths of colour and drama, of romance, there’s scandal. We see two women in desperate need of rescue, we see a faithful God. We see how he uses a good man named Boaz. And on the surface it just reads beautifully you can already see where it’s headed. It’s a beautiful love story starting. You can—sparks, the romances beginning to bud and all of those things. If you’ve read ahead, if you’ve done as Pastor Greg asked you to, to read the four chapters, you already know the happy conclusion to the book. There’s a wedding, and there is a baby, and Naomi who has asked to be called “Mara”, bitter, finds her life pleasant again at the end of her years. It is such a great story, somebody should make a movie based on this book.

But, there’s a lot more to this story than first meets the eye. Because in that day, in that context, the first response might have been, “No! No! No, no, no. You got this all wrong.” There are some details here that people would’ve found preposterous or scandalous. The first thing specifically, is the entire premise of how this tragedy happened in the first place. If you go back to chapter one verse one, where it says, “a man from Bethlehem goes to Moab.” And that first audience would’ve said, [waves hand motioning to stop] “Nope! Wrong! Stop. Stop right there. Wrong. That’s wrong. Can’t be. You got that detail—you didn’t—no one moves to Agassiz on purpose. This is got to be wrong. There’s a detail here. Moab? No. Moab bad. Moab’s bad, bad, bad.” Turn to your neighbour and say, “Moab is bad.” Moab is bad. And if you don’t know why, let me pull back the curtain on Moab and its people. Some of you, most of you will know these stories, but if you’ve heard them but forgotten, let me remind you. And if you don’t know these stories, I’m just gonna give you some highlights and you can look them up. But Moab was not a place that any God-fearing Jew would ever decide to move to. Moab was the enemy. Moab had a history. Moab was all wrong. Let me jog your memories.

Do you remember that thing that happened with Lot and his daughters in a cave? After Sodom and Gomorrah? Do you remember that nation that refused to let Israel pass through the land and said, “Nope, go around.”? Do you remember the talking donkey? And I’m not talking about Shrek [audience laughs]. Do you remember the guy named Balaam and this talking donkey? Do you remember the time God sent a curse on his people for sexual immorality and over 20,000 of them died because of that plague? Do you remember a morbidly obese king who oppressed Israel for 18 years. If you remember any of those stories, they’re all in the Bible, if it jogs your memory, the common denominator you will recognize is... Moab. These Moabite people took their name, they were very, very creative from a man named Moab. Sort of like the Mennonites, we’re so creative. Moab was the product of an incestuous one night stand between Lot and his daughters. It’s a part of the Sunday school story that gets censored out for our children. God has rescued Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah; and he and his two daughters who remained have made a home up in the caves. They’ve hidden away



themselves from the people. They won't go down to live on the plains because Lot is fearful. And his daughters realized, "Dad's getting old... and there are no men around. And we are going to be left all alone." And they hatched a terrible plan. A horrible plan. "Let's get Dad drunk and sleep with him. And maybe we'll get pregnant. I'll go tonight, you'll go tomorrow night." Genesis 19:36-38,

"Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab. He is the father of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore a son and called his name Ben-ammi. He is the father of the Ammonites to this day."

And the Moabites and the Ammonites would become enemies of Israel. That's the beginning of the nation of Moab. Four hundred years will come and go, Israel has been time in Egypt, and now they're on their way back to the promised land we bump up against Moab again as they're making their way toward the promised land, and they need to pass through Moab. And the King of Moab, Balak, has seen and heard what the Lord is doing to the nations who oppose Israel, and so he hires a diviner of spirits, a guy— they're into divination or witchcraft—a guy named Balaam to come and put a curse on the curse of Israel. And this is where that talking donkey story comes in if you don't remember. We're not gonna read it. It's Numbers 22, 23, 24 if you want the context. But the short story is this, Balaam is unable to speak words of cursing over these people. Three times he gets up to speak curses over them, and three times instead, *blessings* come out of his mouth. And Balak is going nuts, he's like, "I've hired you to curse these people! Stop blessing them!" And he's like, "I can't help myself! I can only say what the Lord is putting on my heart." And so Numbers 25 says, that Balaam and Balak at the end of 24, they go home, they give up. End of the story, right? No. Not. Because if you move on to chapter 25, you see this, Numbers 25:1-3,

"While Israel lived in Shittim [which is a town in Moab], the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the Lord was kindled..."

And you go, wait a minute! Wait a minute. What just happened here? Balaam could not curse them, Balak goes home. Balaam goes home. And in the next scene we see the people who could not be cursed worshipping Baal? What happened in the in between? And Balaam is what happened. And if you read that name, and if you do a search of that name through the rest of the scriptures, you'll understand what happened. Balaam knew that there was money to be made here. Balak was willing to pay him to curse these people, and he wasn't able to curse them and so he comes at it with another plan. If head on cursing can't be done, then there's something else that might just work. "Send in your women. Send your women in among the Israelite men and seduce them and get them to come and worship your gods." And it gets recorded in Israel's history as "the incident" at Baal-Peor" and there are several references to it in the Bible. Two or three of them, Numbers 31, Moses is saying, don't you remember what those Moabite women did? Numbers 31:13,



“...these, [the Moabite women] on Balaam’s advice, caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of the Lord...”

And twenty some thousand died. Micah 6:5, looking back on this in history,

“O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him...”

You see, they devised this plan. If you get to Revelation, the seven churches, the church of Pergamum also refers back to Balaam and Balak. And you add all of this, Ruth opens up with the phrase, seven words that open this book are: “In the days when the Judges ruled”. And we’re not told which particular judge she lived in, but it would’ve been early in the history of this book. 350 years passed in the book of Judges, and somewhere in that 350 years, her story appears. And there’s this season in the book of Judges where Moab is the oppressor and Judges 3 introduces us to a guy named Eglon King of Moab, who for 18 years oppresses Israel, until God raises up a left handed judge named Ehud. Now you will remember Eglon’s story because he goes down, his claim to biblical fame is this, he was so morbidly obese, well let’s just read the story. Judges 3:21-22,

“And Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. And the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade for he did not pull the sword out of his belly...”

This guy was a big boy.

You say, why take all this time? Get back to our text. Well, we gotta hear what the people of that day would’ve heard when the name “Moab” came up. When the book opens with saying “Elimelech and Naomi went to Moab” everyone had to be saying to themselves, “NO! No! This is wrong. This is all wrong. You don’t move to Moab.” And the scandal of this book is this, that the grace of God extends to his people *even* when they are in the deep end by their own stupid choices. When you’re in the wrong place, at the wrong time, and maybe even for the wrong reasons, *even there* the grace of God can reach you. And some of you, more than likely are in a Moab today. Congregation this size, absolutely, there’s somebody here who’s in the wrong place at the wrong time. And probably for the wrong reasons, and you know that you’re living in Moab. And you might even be wondering, is the grace of God big enough for me? By implication and guilt by association then we understand the scandal of Ruth. Because Ruth would remind these people of everything that was wrong with the story of Baal-Peor. It was the Moabite women who had led the nation into sexual sin. And not only did Elimelech and Naomi go to Moab, but they take Moabite wives for their sons.

So we see Ruth as a hero figure. We read her story and we see her as faithful and loyal and hard working and as a God fearing woman. Her name is a popular Bible name even up to our generation. I’m sure if we took a survey among the crowd, most of us know a Ruth or a Ruth Anne or Ruthie



somewhere. It's a popular Bible name. And yet when these people heard of Ruth, they would—they might even be asking, “Can any good thing can come from Moab? Who is this woman? And why did Elimelech and Naomi go there to begin with? And now why would Naomi bring one of “those” people home with her? Really? Surely she knows the history of Moab.”

And here's where the scriptures do a real number on our minds, because embedded all the way through this crazy story is both the scandal of the law and the scandal of grace. Woven through this story, under old testament law, you might mention, we see a subversive, compassionate, scandalous expressed through the rule of law. We don't have long for this, so let me just quickly highlight three that are in this text. The concept of gleaning, Deuteronomy 24 and Leviticus 19, the same law, Deuteronomy 24:19-21,

“When you reap your harvest [your grains, your olives, or your grapes] in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.”

The law of gleaning provide for the poor. There was care for the sojourner under the law. Exodus 22 and 23. Exodus 22:21-23,

“You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners [you were foreigners] in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry,”

Exodus 23:9,

“You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for *you* were sojourners in the land of Egypt.”

We see other laws that speak specifically to care for the poor. And this concept of the kinsman redeemer, the next of kin, or closest of kin, who is stepping to redeem when someone falls into trouble and poverty. There's a generic application where it literally says, “If your brothers falls into poverty, buy him back, let him move in with you, loan him money, and don't charge him interest. Look after your brother.” There are those that applies specifically to widows and orphans, Deuteronomy 25:5-7,

“If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and...the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.”

It was called Levirate Marriage, and Pastor Greg talked about that last weekend. My point is this in drawing out to your attention. The law “sometimes gets a bad rap”. You will hear people saying, “I'm so glad we don't live under the law anymore.” And I think I understand what they mean. We live under



grace. But the law is sometimes given a bad rap, because the law was given to protect and provide for the flourishing of this people. You see, the law, the Old Testament law, was in essence the articles of confederation for a new nation. It was the Bill of Rights. It was the rules of law, and why? Because these people had only known slavery. For 400 years they've been slaves in Egypt and all they had to do every day was to say "Yes sir, right away sir. How high sir? Whatever you say sir." They had no self government. No rule of law. And now they're being told, "You're gonna start a new nation. All on your own." How do you govern yourself when all you have known for 400 years is slavery? So God gives them the articles of confederation in the Old Testament law. He gives them dietary laws to protect their health. He gives them civil laws, for how to do life together. He gives them ceremonial laws for how to worship. He gives them constitutional laws, what does a theocracy with God as your king look like? He gives them rules for their judges to try various cases. He even gives them things like, agricultural laws, how to plant their crops and rotate their crops and every seventh year you should let the field lie fallow so that the soil can rejuvenate itself. The law answered questions like, well what happens if one of your own falls on hard times? And what should you do if a brother or sister finds himself in poverty? And what should be your response if by accident or by stupidity or even by rebellion. Your relative gets in over their head, what should you do? What do you do with a widow, and the orphan? What do you do with the foreigner who wants to come and live among you? What about the refugees who are fleeing from war or famine or disease? How should you respond to these? And why would I call it the scandal of the law? Because I think there's so much in the Old Testament law that goes against the basic grain of human nature. There is something selfish within human nature that has an essence to rise up and say "Ah, let the poor take care of themselves. Let them get a job! Let them get an education! Why should I care?" I think there's a little Ebenezer Scrooge in every one of us, <gruffy voice> "Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?" Am I the only one in this room that feels like, come on...you're all better than me I guess.

Some people could've been saying, "Why should we be concerned about Naomi? If Elimelech had never left home, maybe none of this would've happened to begin with. Oh, I know he died, so we should have some compassion. But why did he go to Moab? And those boys of theirs, those boys should've known better. They should've come home to get wives from here, not taking Moabite women. And Naomi, I don't want to be harsh, I don't want to be hard on you, *you* said the Almighty made your life bitter. But I don't know, looks to me like a lot of that was your own doing, Naomi. You made your bed...you gotta sleep in it." See what we need to know was that there's more to this story than just the story. Because there's a pointer here to the larger story of the Bible. A story of rescue that the Boaz's, and kinsman redeemers pointing us forward to the great redeemer, Jesus. And the scandal of the gospel's precisely, the scandal of the story. That when we're rebellious, when we've made stupid choices, when we have moved to our proverbial Moab. When we're suffering the consequences of our own decisions, that God in his great mercy *did not* and *does not* give up on us. That is the scandal of this book. That Jesus willingly takes the role of the kinsman redeemer. And the kinsman redeemer is the big story behind the small story. When we needed rescue, when I'm in over my head, when I'm drowning, and the only way out is to cry "Help!" and this is scandalous to the North American mind. To be told that as a Westerner, "You can't save yourself." is an affront to our pride. Now we understand how desperate the state of these women, if we understand the context of



the culture. And we have to know our own desperate state. But somehow we can see that these women had no options but most of us actually think that we do have some options. “I think I can do it myself, thank you very much.”

There are other parts to this story if we had the time, it reveals grace from end to end to end. It's so beautiful. Have you ever wondered about this guy named Boaz? What made Boaz so kind? So tender? What gave him a heart for Naomi and Ruth for this widow and this younger widow alongside. And you can speculate all you want, you can say, “Ah well he was still a single man he hadn't married yet, he was older, he was a landowner, he had a crew, he must've been looking for a wife. And well, Ruth she must've caught his eye. She must've been a looker.” And maybe she was. But there's something far deeper going on I believe, when you understand who Boaz was. What shaped Boaz as a man? Where did he come from? What caused him to express compassion even tenderness towards these two women? And if you know Boaz's story, then I think you'll understand even more. And if you jumped to the end of the book, you see in chapter 4 verse 21, that Salmon was the father to Boaz. Boaz fathers Obed, Obed, Jesse, Jesse David. The amazing part of the story, Ruth becomes the great grandma of King David. But Boaz's dad was a guy named Salmon. And so he's the name of Salmon. And you go, “So?” So who's his mother?” Well there's several versions of Jesus' genealogy and there's one that is unlike any other in the book of Matthew 1. Matthew actually includes five of the moms in the genealogy which was unheard of. And one of those moms, Matthew 1:5,

“... and Salmon the father of Boaz by[...Hm.] Rahab...”

You might be going, “So?” Boaz was the son of Salmon and Rahab. And if you don't know who Rahab was, you need to know who Rahab was. Rahab was one who we meet in Joshua 2, when two spies go into the first city that's going to be attacked, the city of Jericho, and we're told that they hide themselves and where better for a couple of men, strangers in town, to hide than in a brothel? So they go to the home of a prostitute named Rahab and she hides them, and these are stories again, that usually don't make the flannel graph in Sunday school. But later in Joshua 6, when Israel conquers Jericho, we meet Rahab again, but Rahab the prostitute and her father's household, and all who belong to her, Joshua saved alive. And she's lived in Israel to this day because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. Not only had she lived in Israel to this day, she married into Israel. A Canaanite prostitute becomes part of the people of God. She marries a guy named Salmon, and one of their boys is named Boaz.

Now, this part is total speculation, I have no biblical basis for this, so just, humour me, what choice do you got, I'm speaking. But what was Boaz's life like as a kid? Think about that little boy, Rahab's son. What was Rahab's life like now as a part of this new people of God? There must've been talk, there had to have been talk. Human nature is what human nature is. Did Boaz as a young boy, watch his mother struggle to fit in with all the other “good Jewish women”? Did he know about her life before dad married her? He had to, what I believe. Those stories don't die easy. Did Boaz even come alongside his mom to comfort her, as she lived as a foreigner in the midst of God's people? But whatever his home life was like, what we know about Boaz, is he was the son of a former prostitute.



He is the son of an outsider, a Canaanite woman. And Boaz now the man, the landowner is standing in the field, and here is another woman in a desperate situation who is an outsider, a foreigner, and he speaks to her with kindness.

And there's even yet another layer to that story. We're not told, was Rahab still alive? How old was Boaz when he married Ruth, was his mom still alive? But if she was alive, what was the conversation like between Rahab and Ruth? Can you imagine that, the Canaanite prostitute and the Moabite refugee are now mom and daughter in law. They have both embraced the people of God and the God of these people has become their lord. Oh how we need the message of Ruth...at so many levels.

There are tons of practical takeaways. There's lots of great moral lessons. I've heard lots of messages on this text whether you just simply get a moral lesson. The hardworking Ruth, alright, you single women, you're alone, do like Ruth. Work hard. The Lord rewards hard work, and that's not probably a bad message. The refugee deserves a hand up, so we should be gracious and generous towards the immigrant and to the refugees and we should look at the world news differently than the world looks at it, because those people are fleeing, we should have compassion. That's certainly a good lesson. Everybody deserves a second chance. Naomi and Elimelech made some terrible decisions, but who hasn't made some terrible decisions? So let's be gracious to them, let's give Naomi a break, everyone deserves a second chance. I once heard a guy preach on this to single men, challenging them: "Be a Boaz, single men." Be like Boaz instead of just looking for that girl that you wanna date, why don't you actually pray about it and take a serious look among the single women, the single moms, and the widows with children who need to be looked after and be like Boaz. And take one of these women and take her children under your wing. And it was a very compelling message, and probably true. This week as I'm studying, I came across...oh, it was a crazy one. It was great. It was funny, but it was crazy. It was a black preacher and he was speaking to single women! And he said to the single women, "You need to wait for your Boaz. You wait for Boaz. God has Boaz prepared for you. You wait for him. You don't want some other guy, don't get distracted by other men. You need Boaz, not a dumb-az, not a po-az, not a cheating-az..." [audience laughs] And he went on with a whole long list... of all the other "az"es that they didn't want.

So we could pull some moral lessons. And North Americans are great at pulling moral lessons out of a text. We should likely try to practice those things. But... if that's as far as the story goes, then we missed the critical point of the story entirely. We've gotten lost in the weeds of the micro story of Ruth and we have forgotten the macro story of this book. You see, this book, [holds up the Bible] this book...with 66 smaller books in it that make up one great macro story. The story of this book, 39 that we call the Old Testament, 27 that we call the New Testament, in simplest of terms, if you want to summarize the 66 books here, you can simply summarize it: we need a saviour. We need a saviour. That's what this book tells us.

And it is the macro story, in simplest of terms, you say, "A saviour from what?" And if you've not heard this, I need to tell you, you have a disease. It's the same disease I have. And every man and woman and boy and girl in this room has this three letter disease, and it will kill you. It is killing you,



and it will ultimately kill you. It is the three letter disease called “sin”. The sin virus that will slowly eat away at our lives and no amount of money, no amount of education, no amount of personal advancement can cure it. It ultimately destroys and kills and divides and breaks. And it breaks the relationship with God this way [waves vertically], and it breaks the relationship with one another this way [waves horizontally]. It kills everything beautiful and good. And we desperately need reconciliation. But there’s a problem. We have built up such a huge debt, we’ve sinned against one another, we’ve sinned against God. And you all are smart people, you know what happens with debt. It has to be repaid. You can’t just walk away from debt and say, “I’m not paying it.” Somebody pays it. You’re either forgiven it, it’s absorbed by the bank, or you pay it yourself. But who would pay for something that wasn’t their fault? Who would take on a debt that they had not run up. Who would do something like that? Nobody on this side of eternity. You see, the Bible tells us sin will be paid for and there are only two options: we can pay for it ourselves, that is option one—you can take the punishment for your sin on yourself; or, someone else will pay it for you. And you’re like, “What?” And that is the key to the story of the scriptures. That what was originally a beautiful world and harmony with God and man, was destroyed and those wrongs need to be made right and we’re powerless to do them. So God sends a rescuer, God sends...himself. He takes on human flesh and he offers himself as a payment for our debt and for our sin.

And you see, in this micro story of Ruth, we all aspire to be the Boaz. We aspire to be the hero. We aspire to be the one who comes alongside and helps somebody out. To come to the rescue. But in this story, we’re not Boaz. In this story, we’re Ruth. In this story, we’re Naomi. The bottom has dropped out of our world and we need a redeemer. We need a kinsman redeemer and the question is simply this: will you allow Boaz to do his work in your life? Will you allow Jesus to do his job? Will you turn away from all of your own personal attempts to rescue yourself, and will you finally admit “I’m tired of the mess I’ve made, Lord. I’m ready to give you the keys to my life and I’ll take my hands off, because it’s yours.” I said it earlier, but I believe some of you are living in Moab today. You’re in the wrong place for the wrong reasons and you need to come home. Some of you have turned around and you’re headed back. You’re tired of Moab, you’re making your way towards home, you need to see Jesus as Boaz who is ready and willing to redeem you and to purchase you back. And the bottom line, every single one of us needs to say “Yes, Lord.” again today. “Yes Lord, I see it. I get it. I understand it. I agree, I am bankrupt. I’ve nowhere to turn but to the Lord. And so today, Lord, I’m turning to you, I’m laying down all my attempts to control. My life is yours.”

You see, the scandal of the gospel is multi faceted. The fact that God would take our sin upon himself is a scandal. The fact that we’re told up front, that you can’t save yourself, is a scandal to our ears. The idea that it has been done for us as a free gift that costs nothing is a scandal. But this is the message of the gospel. I love how J.K. Chesterton says, it doesn’t happen once for all, it’s a daily thing. He’s like, I go to bed a Christian and I wake up every day a pagan. I need the gospel all over new and afresh today. And if you didn’t wake up today going “Oh Lord, thank you for your grace. Thank you for the gospel that says not only did you save me past tense and permanently, and not only future will you save me, but *today* you are saving me from myself. Thank you Lord, for your gospel.”



J.I. Packer said to reduce it to three words is simply this: God saves sinners. He comes to the rescue when we cry, when we find ourselves at the end of a rope, when the bottom has fallen out, and when we finally reached the place of humility, to say “Yes, Lord. That’s me. I’m a sinner standing in the need of grace.”

Would you stand together with me. There is something in this moment to say, “Hallelujah how we need this message everyday.” I repeat the words of that song that I read at the beginning,

“There is good news for the captive
Good news for the shamed
There is good news for the one who walked away
There is good news for the doubter
The one religion failed
For the Good Lord has come to seek and save”

And the worship team is gonna come and close us off. But I want to pray for three people in the room, I want to pray for the skeptic, cause I know they’re in every congregation, the person who’s not quite there yet, who’s going, “This sounds too good to be true, I want it to be true, but I’m not even sure if I believe this God that you talk about exists.” and if you’re here and that’s the state of your mind, I want to just first of all say, welcome here you’re in the right place. And I want to pray with you and for you that God will open your eyes to see and understand that he is real, he is true, he loves you and he’s pursuing you. And that you would simply pray a skeptic’s prayer that says, “God if you’re real, show yourself to me.” And he will. There’s some others here, and there’s a prayer that we sometimes call “the sinner’s prayer”, that just simply says “Yes, Lord. I finally get it. I agree with you. I finally understand it that I can’t save myself, that I can’t fix the wrongs in my life and I’m willing to humble myself and give the keys to you and to say, Lord take my life.” And maybe somebody here today needs to do that for the very first time. Say “Yeah Lord, the last weekend of March in 2019 was when I finally said yes.” And then there’s a whole bunch of you that have walked with Jesus for a long time. And you need to have some Hallelujah’s rising up in your heart. And I know Mennonites don’t say it out loud, but somehow in your heart, you can say it. That every morning as you crawl out of bed you go, “Oh glory. Thank you Lord that you have not given up on us. That you didn’t in the past give up on us, that you will hold our future secure, and in this moment in today, regardless of what we go through, that you are walking when it’s day, and desperately we need your gospel, your rescue today, Lord. Sunday March 31, I need your gospel today, Lord. As fresh as I needed it the first time I bent my knee to you. And I just gotta say Hallelujah Lord. Cause there should be some joy in that.” So I want to pray for y’all.

So Jesus, I pray for that skeptical man or woman in this room, that is still wondering, “Is this all true?” And Lord, we know how your Spirit draws us to yourself. You’ve said that we lift up Jesus, and you do the drawing. And so Lord even in this moment, I pray that they would be drawn to you because we’ve done what you told us to do, we lifted up Jesus. And you said, as Jesus gets lifted up, people get drawn to you. They’re not drawn to Northview, they’re not drawn to great music, they’re not drawn to



any preacher, they're not drawn to anything but you Lord. And so we exalt you, we lift you up. And I pray for that skeptical mind that if there's some barrier there, that this week Lord that you would show yourself real and powerful to them. That you would make yourself real in such a way that they could not deny, there has to be a God. This story has to be true. And Lord I pray for the man and woman in this room who for the very first time need to finally surrender to you. You've been knocking on the door of their life, but they've been resisting for whatever reason. Maybe they've never heard it this way, or it just hasn't made sense, but today it makes sense. And they realize, "I'm at the end of my rope. I'm tired of the mess my life is in. And I'm ready to lay it down and give it to you. I'm ready to turn away from life as I've been living it, and I desperately need the rescue that you offer me. And so today Lord, I simply say yes." And that even right now, they would just say "Yes Lord Jesus, take my life. May it be yours. May it be used to your glory. May you change the path, the trajectory of my life." And then Lord I pray, for what I know is the majority in an audience like this. I pray Lord restore the joy of our salvation. Remind us again afresh, how wonderful how beautiful, how scandalous this message is. That you paid a debt you didn't owe. You took on sin that wasn't your fault. You went to calvary for us when you didn't need to, in fact it said, we were still your enemies. You came after us, you pursued us. And so anew and afresh if we've forgotten that message, if we forgot to sing and dance and shout "Hallelujah!" Would you remind us of that, Lord? And today Lord, may you be exalted in our lives. We pray all these things, in the precious name of our kinsman redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.