



Sermon Transcription • Ruth 4:1-17 (NIV)

The Final Act

Pastor Jeff Bucknam

[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.]

We watch TV differently this time of our lives than we maybe ever have. This time in the history of humanity, television has taken a turn. We get most of what we watch on streaming services now; like Netflix or Amazon Prime or Crave or all the myriad of other ones that have come out and try to compete with them. Television watching has changed because of that. One of the ways that they keep you watching of course, when they make these television shows for a streaming service is that they try to end each episode with a cliffhanger, and that's so that when it's 11:30 at night, and you're sitting there, and you're looking to your loved one, and you're thinking, "We really should go to sleep now because tomorrow morning we have to be up early to go to work..." But one of you says to the other, "Well we can't stop *there*. Like, we have to find out what happens. We'll just watch 20 minutes of the next, and then another hour..." But they put another cliffhanger at the end of the next one, and the next thing you know you called in sick the next day right? Because... you had to finish watching whatever show it was that you wanted to watch.

Ruth chapter three ends in a little bit of a cliffhanger. An ancient story cliffhanger, so maybe not as exciting as you might think. But it does end in a cliffhanger. Trying to leave you for Ruth chapter four. If you've not been here for the last number of weeks, I'm going to give you a recap of the book of Ruth. We've been doing this every week. So if you've been every week, you're like, "Stop with the recaps!" Alright, we just want to be hospitable and kind to the people who are kind of new to the game here. So let me tell you what the book of Ruth is about, and what's gone on up to this point. It starts, the camera opens on Naomi, who is a Jewish woman, she's married to Elimelek, and there's no grain, no food in Israel at the time. And so they decided they're gonna move, and they move to Moab. And that when is said, or when you read that in the Bible, you're supposed to shudder. <aghast voice> "Oooh.. Moab..." Cause Moab was not a nice place. The people of Moab worshipped a God who they sacrificed their children to, for example. The Moabites were often described as the enemies of the Israel, they did despicable acts, all sorts of things. They were often on very much the other side of God's desires. And so, here you have these Israelites moving to Moab, because they have some grain there. The harvest are still going on in that part of the world, and so they move over to Moab. And the worst possible thing happens, Naomi's husband Elimelek dies. Ten years later, her two sons also died. They are married at the time, neither of them have children, so Naomi has no grandchildren at all. But they're married to Orpah and to Ruth. These three women are left all alone, in a world that can only be, you can only be provided for if you have a man around. Men were the only ones who can



do the work, and therefore can get paid, that's the only way you're gonna be able to survive. So you have these three widows together and they're trying to decide their future and Naomi says to Ruth and Orpah, "Listen ladies, you need to go back to your fathers' homes so that your fathers can take care of you because I can't provide you anything. I'm a dead end as far as you're concerned. So, go back." Orpah, in tears says, "Yes you're right. I have to go back." And so she does that. But Ruth says, "No. I will not go back. I will not leave you all on your own. If it costs me my life, I will stay with you until your dying breath, Naomi." So they stick together. They end up going back to Israel, because they feel there's more safety there. They go back to Israel, and the harvest have started up a little bit more again. The grain is growing, and so they go back to Israel and they have nothing. So the only way they can get anything is by following the harvesters after they do the harvesting and just picking up the leftovers off the ground, they call that 'gleaning' in those days. And Ruth is the only one who's able to do it, presumably because Naomi is an older lady at this point. And so Ruth goes out there and she's picking up some of the grain behind the harvesters. You have to understand, a Moabite woman in Israel is not gonna be treated well. She's an outsider, she's the enemy, and I'm sure she's being harassed by the other ladies who are collecting that, so the other poor people are collecting that, who are full Israelites. But this Boaz, this man, in whose field she just sort of wanders into, notices her. He asks about her, and he takes compassion on her, and he says to his harvesters, "Everybody stop treating her poorly, and I want you at some point in fact, to leave some specifically for her as she's following behind. Wherever she is, I want those people who are doing the harvesting to just occasionally throw some stuff over the side so she gets more than what she would normally get." And so she is blessed because of this. So normally you leave a day of gleaning with maybe a handful of grain, well she goes home at the end of the day with an entire basket full of grain. She shows up to her mother in law, who's destitute, she shows up with this massive basket of grain. And Naomi said, "What happened?" And Ruth says, "Well I met a man....And what a man."

And Naomi says, "Ooo...kay...Do you know that Boaz," She says, "Is part of our family? He can actually serve the function in our community of what they call a 'kinsman redeemer'. He can redeem us. He can actually come along and save us. And take care of us. He's qualified to do it. Did you know that?"

Ruth's like, "No."

"Oh, we're gonna get to work."

So they get to work. So for a period of time, Naomi says, "Listen what I want you to do is, I want you to go when his guys are done harvesting at the end of season, you're gonna go down and you're gonna make yourself smell really good, and I want you to lay down at this man's feet, in the middle of the night, and I want you to see what happens." Mothers don't make this advice. Don't give this advice to your daughters, ever, right? But it happens here, and she does. She goes down and she's laying at Boaz's feet, who wakes up in the middle of the night, freaking out. "What is this? Who is this?"

"It's Ruth."

And right there, on the spot, Ruth proposes marriage to him. On her one knee she's holding a ring. And Boaz is like, "...Yes! Absolutely! This is... Thank you! But there's a problem. You see, I am a guardian redeemer for your family, I am one who can come along and can redeem your property and



you and all of this stuff. But...there's another one who is closer to you in the family line. And I have to ask him first."

And so we're left at the end of chapter three wondering, "Is this new guy who's being introduced into the story going to ruin everything, going to take this love story and dash it upon the rocks?" She goes home, Ruth does, and tells Naomi in Ruth 3:18, what goes on, what happened with Boaz. That he's gonna go check to make sure that this other guy doesn't want to do the redeeming. Ruth 3:18,

"And then Naomi responds, 'Wait my daughter until you find out what happens for the man will not rest until the matter's settled today.'"

And the story then shifts from love story to courtroom drama in chapter four and that's what I want to look at with you for the next few minutes, alright?

So we're gonna tell the story, just finish the story out and then I want to make three applications of the whole of the book. So here's the story. Ruth 4:1-2,

"Meanwhile [So while Naomi is talking to Ruth and saying "Don't worry about it, he's going to sort it all out.]" Boaz [our hero] went up to the town gate and sat down there just as the guardian-redeemer [this other guy who's closer to them in the family line] he had mentioned came along. Boaz said, "Come over here, my friend, and sit down." So he went over and sat down.

Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, "Sit here," and they did so."

So there's a little bit of going on here to set the stage. It's a little different than what we're used to. So let me explain to you what's happening and why it's happening in this particular place. You noticed that what's mentioned here is the town gate. So Boaz goes up to the town gate. Every town, or city worth itself in those days were surrounded by a wall. That's how you kept the intruders out, that's how you kept your things, your people safe. While you and a lot of men would go out to work, if you want to keep the women and children safe. You keep them behind the walls, so the intruders can't come in and kill them and take everything that is important to you. So the walls would surround the city, there's one way in one way out. That was the town gate. It was only open during the day, oftentimes, and not even all the time then. If you would either to go out to your field, you go through the town gate. If you needed to come back to your house, you go through the town gate. If you wanted to go to the marketplace, it was always around the town gate. It is the place where everybody meets, right? It's the Mill Lake of that day, actually, Costco of that day, right? It's the place where you see everybody. This is the Costco food court. And you see everybody that you know in your town there. It was the only place in the towns, in fact, that had any space. Most of the cities because they didn't want to build massive walls, they had little towns had lots and lots of houses shoved together quite a bit. And so the only place that you had room in fact for a marketplace, or meeting place and stuff was at the town gate. And that's what's going on there, there's a lot of people bustling around in those places. It was the place that you did most of your kind of legal transactions. Kind of like today when



we want to do something on Craigslist, we pick a popular populated place so the person doesn't drug us and drag us off to the woods or whatever. So that's what's going on here, he's gonna go to the spot where he can find this guardian redeemer, this other guy. And where if he finds him, he can actually initiate a judicial session. He can actually get a bunch of witnesses around, and they can start the proceedings to figure out who gets to do the redeeming.

So he finds this guy, who just happens, you notice the language there, *who just happens* to be coming by. That's a wink from the narrator here, saying, "Yeah, yeah.. it just was a massive coincidence Just like Ruth going into the field of Boaz, was a massive coincidence, [winks] wink wink." Yeah, God's involved here. Bringing these people together. And when he sees him, when Boaz sees this guy coming through the gate, he says, "Oh my friend." That's the language that's used here, but the actual Hebrew here is better translated as "Hey, Mr. So-and-So." Now the guy's got a name, right? These are family members. I imagine them, most of you who have not forgotten the names of your cousins recently unless you're quite old. But I—these are family! I'm sure that Boaz knows his name, and he probably used his name, but the narrator does not include the name. So in your mind, you should be thinking, "Why?" Hold on to that. There's an answer. "Hey, Mr. So-and-So. Sit over here." Then he goes and gathers 10 of the elders, you know, the important people who can make good judicial decisions. He sits them all down next to him, and he starts his case. "Here's the problem, Mr. So-and-So," says Boaz. Ruth 4:3-4,

"Then he said to the guardian-redeemer [Mr. So-and-So], 'Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelek. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line.'"

And the guy then, in this moment says, "Yes. I will do it." Now, okay, some background to this. There's some rules. I've mentioned the language "guardian redeemer" already. Here's the way it worked, that if somebody in your family got, had a massive hardship of some variety, usually financial so that the property that your family owned was in peril. Somebody else was gonna buy it, or come in and steal it somehow, or maybe you got in such financial difficulty you had to sell yourself and go into slavery. The responsibility of the next closest kin, next closest family member was to come and to redeem you or the land. To keep it in your family's name. They would be your guardian, kinsman, or your guardian redeemer. So what Boaz is saying to this guy is, "Listen, Elimelek died and so we have a responsibility here to come and to take care of Naomi, but the good news is, that all of Elimelek's land is now for sale at a really, really cheap price. You just have to assume that you know, care for Naomi, and you will get all of this productive land." Can you imagine if someone came to you today and said, "Here would you like a whole bunch of land for a few bucks?" You'll be like, "Yes. I will do it. Absolutely." So Mr. So-and-So of course accepts it. And you say, "Well why? What's his motivation?" One of the commentators on this passage, Victor Hamilton he said,



“One can easily imagine him smiling to himself at his good fortune. For very little money, he could carry out a respected family duty and perhaps enhance his civic reputation [Right, people are gonna think, “Wow you’re really committed to your family!"]. Financially, the investment was a bargain without risk. There were no known heirs of Naomi’s husband to reclaim title to the property later, and elderly Naomi was certainly unlikely to produce any... Hence, his little investment would develop into years of productive, profitable harvests and enlarge the inheritance of his heirs. How could he lose?”

What a deal! One of the things you guys don’t probably know about my dear African friend Ezra, who works at our church, is that Ezra is a complete deal maker. Listen, if he comes, you’ve been warned, if he comes to you and wants to make a deal with you, just know that this is going to last a while, this negotiation. He often will tell me about his exploits with Telus,

<African accent> “Dude, dude. I was on the phone with Telus for like a month. Dude, dude. I am now getting my cable for free!” [audience laughs] You know, or like

<African accent> “It’s a dollar! One dollar!”

“Whatever! It’s not a dollar!”

<African accent> “It is a dollar!”

“I prob—“

<African accent> “Dude. Dude. Dude.”

He always said it over again and again.

<African accent> “Dude, you see this car?”

“Yeah, I see your car.”

“Five dollars!”

“No, Ezra, didn’t cost five dollars!”

<African accent> “Dude. Dude. Dude.”

Loves to tell about his exploits. This is a <African accent>“Dude.”</accent> moment, isn’t it? I mean. Can you imagine telling your friends? “You see all this land? Five bucks.” Right? This is this moment for this guy. Of course he’s gonna jump at it. Notice though, that Boaz has withheld from his point of view, the most important piece of information and that is Ruth. So, Ruth 4:5, you know before you read verse five, you need to understand this guy’s acceptance of this deal should be sinking your spirits if you love a good love story. Because Ruth and Boaz were supposed to be together and now this guy jumps in and all of a sudden he says, “Oh yeah I’ll take care of it.” Argh!! What! There’s not gonna be any kiss? There’s not gonna be anyone running to the airport—What! My wife would not like this story at this point, she would be very angry. But Boaz, Ruth 4:5 said

“[Oh by the way...] Then Boaz said, ‘On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite [the *Moabite*], the dead man’s widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.’”

Now he’s appealing to a law in Israel, the Levirate marriage law, means brother marriage law. Here’s the way it worked, Deuteronomy 25:5, here’s the law in that day,



“If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son [so no heir], his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband’s brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears [because of their union] shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.”

So look, if your brother dies, you have a responsibility to take his wife if she has no kids. You have a responsibility to take his wife, make her your wife and provide an heir for your brother so his name doesn’t die out in the land. That’s the law. Now they extended this beyond brothers, it was usually considered the next closest male family member. So Boaz, can you imagine Boaz at this point, the guy’s ready to sign the document or make a public declaration, “Yes, I will take the land for <African accent> ‘Dude’ </accent> nothing!” Right? And Boaz is, “Oh... just a second. Actually... there’s one more thing. Ruth, the *Moabite*, you know, Moab? Ew...? She comes with it. So I don’t know what you wanna do about that. I mean..don’t..do anything about...” Ruth 4:6,

“At this, the guardian-redeemer said, ‘[Oh...]Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it.’”

“I got an idea. Boaz, you could redeem it! Cause I can’t do it.” So what’s he on about? There’s a reason he’s turning this down now is basically if he redeems the property and he redeems Ruth, and he provides the heir that he’s supposed to provide right? By this marriage relationship, he’s only basically looking after the property until the heir is old enough to take it off his hands. So it’s basically a rental agreement. So all the investment he’s putting in the property will eventually go to this heir that he’s supposed to provide. In the meantime, he’s gotta take care of Ruth and Naomi and the heir, which is gonna cost him a bucket of money now, and in the long run all the heirs that come through Ruth will split the inheritance of all his already existing family. So he’s thinking dollars, and the cost is going way up. And he’s like, you know... this sounded really great at the front end, but now? Man, I’m out. My estate and my name, my name. Don’t underestimate the racism. There’s a reason that Boaz points out that she’s from Moab. My name, I don’t want to be married to a Moabite. And I don’t want to give my inheritance, I don’t want to threaten my estate like that. You do notice how different this guy is then than Boaz. Because this guy’s only concerned for himself. And for his name, and his reputation. And Boaz is only concerned about Ruth. By the way which of these two men, which one of their *names* do you know? Isn’t that crazy? The guy who’s trying to protect his name is *unnamed*! But if I asked you who Boaz is, you’ll be like, “Yeah, he’s a hero.” Hmm... So Ruth 4:7,

“(Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. [This is a great idea right? You want a piece of land? Here’s my shoe. Right?]) This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.)

So the guardian-redeemer [Mr. So-and-So] said to Boaz, “Buy it yourself.” And he removed his sandal.



Then Boaz announced [This is the way that you made a formal declaration of a legal land arrangement in those days. This is how you did it. Cause they didn't have copiers or court reporters or anything like that. So here's what you'd do, you get a bunch of people together and you <loud voice> announced it loudly! </voice> This is what he says] to the elders and all the people, <loud voice> "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelek, Kilion and Mahlon [his boys]. 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!"

Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, 'We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel [These are the people who began the nation right? I mean they had a bunch of kids and 12 tribes that became the entire nation of Israel. May you be so blessed Boaz, that Ruth has kid after kid after kid that we can say that in the future that there's a Boaz nation]. May you have standing in Ephrathah [That's like saying standing in the Fraser Valley, it's a region] and be famous in Bethlehem [Like the town, may you prosper in the eyes of all of us!]. Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.'"

You guys notice all the Jewish names they're blessing her with? In other words, she's no longer a Moabite! Because Boaz has redeemed her, she is brought into the full communion, full membership and the community of God. And the final verses cover the whole year. So Boaz...My wife at this point was, like, "Oh come on.. Can't we have more detail?" Cause this is their whole marriage. Ruth 4:13-17,

"So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife [<womanly voice> "What about the wedding? And what did the bridesmaids wear? </voice> You know like—It's only one line! But we're thankful that there's only one line in the next phrase]. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer [This little boy]. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons [Yes? Would you like to have a daughter in law like Ruth? Yes, please. I see the elbows [elbowing] to the sons, like "Yes! Get one of those!" She's so great! She loves you and she's better to you than seven sons], has given him birth."

Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. The women living there said, "Naomi has a son!" And they named him Obed. [Oh by the way...] He was the father of Jesse, the father of David [the King]."



So when I was a young, young boy, my dad used to listen on the radio to this guy named <drawl> Paul Harvey </drawl>. And Paul Harvey used to have this thing he did on the radio, he'll tell a little story about <drawl> "how this man became..." </drawl> at the end of his story, <drawl> "how this man became the president of the United States." </drawl> And everyone will be like, "Whaaattt! That's an amazing back story!" And then he finished by saying, <drawl> "And that's the rest of the story." </drawl> And that's what's happening here at the end of this. Do you know that this story is about the grandparents of the great King David? Who becomes the family line of the Messiah. What a great story. <heavy sigh>

So, look, three applications. There's more, but I'll give you three, so you can have lunch today. What do we learn from this whole book?

[Don't Get Stuck in a Moment]

Number one, I think we learn to not get stuck in a moment. Don't get stuck in a moment. When you take Naomi, and you take a snapshot of Naomi in chapter one, here's what you see: you see a woman who is moved away from her family, she's moved away from her people, she's gone to Moab, her husband dies, and her two sons 10 years later die. She's left to basically with nothing. It's the worst fear that many women have. That everything they hold dear is gone and ripped away. So you find in Ruth 1:20-21, she comes back to Israel and people are saying "Hey Naomi! Welcome home!" And she says, "Don't call me Naomi..." Ruth 1:20-21,

"Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me [Look at my life! It's deadness everywhere]."

You ever felt that? She's looking outside the door of her house, and trying to see if there's a future, and it's all fog. It's all... nothing. She can't imagine how she's even gonna deal with the next day, much less the next year of her life. "I'm a dead woman. Leave me, Ruth! Leave me, Orpah! I'm bad news. I'm cursed by God. Call me Mara." And then Ruth sat in the fields with Boaz, and she just so happens to be taken, he takes notice of her, and then the threshing floor, and then the whoa... who are you, and will you marry me, he's at the gate, and there's a meeting, and...it all works out. And at the end of chapter four, what you get, when you take a snapshot of Ruth 4 Naomi, what you get is the women, Ruth 4:14-15,

"The women said to Naomi: 'Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.'"

Naomi has a son! The grandfather of David. So why is Naomi so overwhelmed with sadness in chapter one when chapter four is on the way? And the answer is because she doesn't know chapter four is on



the way. She doesn't believe chapter four is on the way. She's just stuck in a moment. You gotten stuck in a moment before, have you not? Some of you *are* in a moment. Ever get stuck in chapter one? Some of us are there because of a relational challenge in our lives, because we've been left behind by someone we held dear. And they've turned their back on us, and there we sit and we wonder how we possibly going to move forward. We have children to care for, and we have needs to be met, and there doesn't seem to be any open windows where this door's been closed. "Call me Mara" we say. Some of us are dealing with the death of people very near to us. And our hearts are broken. "You've dealt bitterly with us [raises fist], Lord." Some of you is flat disappointment. Your life was supposed to go *that* way, and now you're over there. Well, how did I get here? How hard would've it been Lord for you to show favour upon me, but all I'm getting is bitterness and sorrow? My hopes and dreams are dashed upon the rocks of your providence. There's no hope moving forward and there you are, we take a picture of you, chapter one Joe. Chapter one Jeff, Chapter one Sarah. There you are. The problem is...you're not reminding yourself that chapter four is on the way. Christian, chapter four is on the way!

And we know that God works all things together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose, yes? That's a good chapter four. And he's gonna work that through, and it should have some bearing on your feelings in chapter one. Don't get stuck in a moment. You don't have to get stuck in a moment.

When I asked my wife to marry me, this is a story that I remind her of frequently. The day I asked my wife to marry me, I had planned to do it in a place called Bellevue Park on the east side of Seattle. Right next to Bellevue Park is a ring store like a jewellery store, and next to that is are really great mall called Bellevue Square Mall. And so, I said to my wife, my girlfriend at the time, "Hey would you like to go to shop for rings?" We had already talked about getting married, "Would you like to go shopping for rings? And then maybe go to the mall and we can do some shopping for clothes?" And you know, coming out of my mouth, that was like, "Oh yes, we'll do it." Cause I'm not gonna offer that normally right? So, we're gonna go and do this lovely day of shopping, have a lovely lunch together and stuff. So we set out and we started to do the ring shopping and... The guy at the ring store wasn't paying any attention to us. And I was a little bit agitated and I wanted to leave almost as soon as we got there. There's a reason for that, I had gone in to that very ring store about a week earlier and purchased the ring that was now sitting in my pocket, waiting to be presented to her at Bellevue Park after we're done with the shopping and lunch. So I want to get to Bellevue Park. And she wants to do ring shopping. So she's frustrated with the guy, and I'm not defending...you know, I'm not defending her to the guy, cause he and I are kind of winking [winking] at each other. Cause I bought it from him the other day, and she's angry, <angry gibberish>. "Honey, let's just go.. and we'll shop for some clothes." "Okay, fine. Cause I'll feel better. We'll go shop..." And then when we're at the clothes store, I'm like, "Why am I shopping for clothes? When I got this ring in my pocket, let's just get to this stupid park." And she's like, she's got piles of clothes around her. "Can we just leave all of this here and go to lunch? I'm hungry." "Well you said that we were gonna come out of here and do this..."



“Oh... you know what,” I said to her, “Listen, you’re gonna be really sorry in a little while for being mad at me.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Why don’t we just go and have lunch?”

“Where are we gonna have lunch?”

“I don’t know, Subway. let’s get some Subway and go to the park.”

“What are you—we came out for Subway? <angry gibberish>...” [angry hands]

All the whole way. We ended up getting to the park, she sits down with her Subway, and she’s still angry. And I get down on one knee, POW! Right there right? She didn’t... I presented the ring to her on one knee, and I said, “Will you marry me?” And she didn’t answer. She still hasn’t answered to this day. But all she did was, <ecstatic gibberish>, starts crying. “Oh..I’ve treated you so poorly!!”

“Yes, you have...”

“But I didn’t know!” She said, “I didn’t know you were doing this!”

“Right! You didn’t know.”

You and I get stuck in moments when things aren’t going our way all the time because we don’t remember Christians! That the future is gloriously bright in the hands of a God who promises us there’s a chapter four! And what a chapter four it’ll be.

I thought about that. My, you know, me asking my wife to marry me, that happened like two years almost exactly after the day that a girl who I was dating at the time; she came back from Mexico, and I sat across the table at her house, and she dumped me. And I thought she was fantastic at the time, and I remember driving down the street, just not knowing—what? What just happened there? Feeling completely rejected. I pulled over to the side of the street cause I’m crying my eyes out. And I’m saying to God, “God, call me Mara! You’ve been so bitter to me! How... I’m not gonna get married for years!” And I can see God being like, <grunts> “Arrrh.... Wait ’til you see chapter four.” And some of you seen chapter four’s in your life, you have. And you’re sitting there, nodding right now going, “Yes, I am so thankful chapter one happened because it got me to chapter four. But at the time, I didn’t know chapter four was on the way.” And some of you haven’t seen chapter four come, and maybe you won’t see it happen in this life, but *God will bring it*. He will work all things together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose. So Christian, you need to hug that. You will hear me say this over and over again, from this pulpit for years to come, because it’s all over the Bible: the providence of God and the promises of God that he will bring to fruition for you. You rest your hope on that in the middle of the “mara” moments, of the chapter one moments.

But can I add one piece to this? I’m a little bit fearful that some of you here don’t believe in the Lord Jesus and don’t follow him. And my fear for you is that you’re gonna apply that to you and you’re gonna say, “Yeah, God’s gonna work everything out in the end.” Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute. Romans 8:28,

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who *love* him, who have been called according to his purpose.”



God doesn't have a covenant relationship with you so that he is obligated to fulfill his promises. You *could* have that, but I want you to *feel* the danger you're in, nonbeliever. I want you to realize that you don't have...I know people tell you "Oh, it can only get better." Really? Can it? Do you have control over the world in such a way that you can make that happen? Cause God does. And he promises it for those who follow him, and the only thing stopping you from being one of those, is your decision to follow him. So why not follow him? Chapter four could be the result. Don't get stuck in a moment.

[Do the Next Kind and Loving Thing]

Second, do the next kind of and loving thing. This whole story, do the next kind and loving thing... this whole story is about a bunch of people who are really kind being really kind and loving and self sacrificial to each other, you know that right? So when you go back to chapter one, what you find is Ruth self sacrificially giving herself for the sake of Naomi. "I'm not gonna go anywhere even if you die, I'm gonna be at your side, Naomi! I should go away, yes, but it's gonna cost me everything to be with you.... But I'm with you!" Chapter two, Boaz sees Ruth the Moabite woman who he should show no interest at all, show no compassion to. Moab has never been kind to Israel, and Israel should never be kind to Moab. But he shows compassion to this undeserving woman in the fields, she collects more grain than she should, she's sent home to Naomi with a basketful of grain. He's a kind man, who is doing the self sacrificial thing in a moment when it presents itself. And then in chapter three, Ruth goes to the threshing floor and for the sake of Naomi and Boaz, offers herself in marriage and Boaz responds by not having sex with her there, but saying to her, "Listen, I'm gonna honour you and keep you pure until we do this right. In fact, I'm so committed to doing it right, that I'm gonna actually follow through with this other guy who's closest to you as a guardian redeemer." Everything that these people do is honourable! They're faced with challenges and they choose *always* the path of self sacrifice over the path of self fulfillment. So if you're gonna learn something from this book you should learn that God *honours* self sacrifice. He honours faithfulness.

And in the lives of people like you and me... What kinds of specific things am I thinking about here? Well, I'm thinking about the girl who goes off, and she gets pregnant, and it's an unwanted child. And she's faced with a decision in front of her, about whether or not she's gonna abort the child, because that seems like the way forward, and it's gonna preserve my life and the things I want to do for the future. Or she's gonna choose to keep that baby even though she can't see beyond that choice. She looks down the future path there and thinks, "It might ruin this... it might ruin this...I don't know." But she chooses to keep the child. Throwing herself in the hands of a sovereign God. And I'm telling you, you cannot out sacrifice God. He will honour that. Thinking about the business person who owes money. And he's trying to think, "I owe this money to this person, and if I pay it, it's gonna mean all these difficult things, and it's gonna cause harm maybe to me personally.. and all these sorts of things. I'm gonna keep my word, but I can't see a future. It's all misty over there. And if I don't do it, I can plot a course for myself. This one is gonna be self fulfilling, but that other one of paying it, is gonna be self sacrificial." I'm telling you, that *God honours self sacrifice*. It will *not* go unnoticed. God might in fact be using your self sacrifice to do something remarkable. He brings about kings that way...and Messiahs.



Here's what I don't mean though. I'm a little bit concerned that you're gonna hear me wrong. I'm not saying that you do something and then God now owes you because you've done it. You and I sometimes think that. You know, I think that. I think that there are hidden cameras following me all the time. So when I pick up a piece of trash [pretends to pick up trash] I'm like, I'm gonna... [looking around] I'm gonna throw this away now. And I expect you know, the guys with the camera are gonna come out, "Congratulations! You won a million dollars cause you picked that up!" You've seen those TV shows before? Some of us think that's the way it works. "So I'm gonna go do some good things for God, and he's going to reward me for these good—" That's not what I'm saying here, right? You're not gonna obligate God by your goodness, you're not good enough. But what I am saying is that God takes note of faithfulness. He always takes note of faithfulness. And he will provide what you need, as you're being faithful. The whole book of Philippians is essentially about that. Paul's in prison, and the Philippian church at great sacrifice to themselves, send him a bunch of money and a friend while he's in prison. And he, Epaphroditus the friend takes care of him there. And Paul responds, glowingly, saying "Thank you so much" in the letter to the church in Philippi, and at the end of it he says, Philippians 4:19,

"And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."

You cannot out give God, is what he's saying. Do the next kind and loving thing. Whatever it is.

[God Works with Little People in Little Places to Achieve Big Results]

Don't get stuck in a moment, do the next kind and loving thing and then finally, God works with little people in little places to achieve big results.

These are not the most important people in the world. And I hate to tell you this, Bethlehem is not the most important place in the world at the time. It's a little village, little hamlet, where nobody good. And nobody in the time expect anything good to come from it.

I was actually, my son was involved in a baseball team last year with some folks on the North Shore. And he joined their team, and so he went up there. And they asked me, "Where are you from?" And I said, "Abbotsford." And one of them audibly said, "Ew..." And I said, "Whoa...." So as I got to know them, I kept that in my mind, I got to know them over the weeks that we spent together. And one day we were in Ontario, and I stood next to the guy who said "Ew..." And I said, "You know remember you said 'Ew...'. I just want you to know that I grew up in Seattle and that's what we think of the North Shore. Right, you guys grew up in a—" But isn't this the way that it works? Everybody looks down on some other town, right? I mean, Seattle looks down on Vancouver, and Vancouver looks down on Abbotsford, and Los Angeles looks down on Seattle, and New York looks down on Los Angeles, and Paris looks down on New York, and... Abbotsford looks down on Chilliwack, and Chilliwack...looks down on no one. I'm totally kidding. I am. I really like Chilliwack, right?



It's just the way.. there are important—If God put us in charge of changing his world, we would immediately say “Right. Let's get all the really important people together from the really important places. And they do important things, and we'll get them on board. And then it'll all trickle down.” Right? Find the New Yorkers, find the Los... the culture makers, get all those people together. They can make the difference! And here I'm telling you God doesn't do that. Guys, he picks... a Moabite woman! And a farmer from Bethlehem. That's like, that's like, Sumas. Chilliwack looks down on Sumas. That's actually...[audience laughs]. These are nobodies from nowhere. And yet God uses these people. And this is what the Lord does over and over and over and over again. 1 Corinthians 1:26-27,

“Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.”

God loves to take little unimportant people and do remarkably big things with them. So here's what Ruth is about. It's about a woman, Ruth from nowhere, she's a Moabite, she deserves nothing. She's cursed in fact by God. But she is redeemed by Boaz, her guardian redeemer who includes her into the full community of the people of God. Not because she's great, but because he's gracious. Does this sound familiar to you? This book is about you and me. This book is about our better Boaz, Jesus, who has taken we nothings and brought us into his kingdom. You see that don't you?

So here's the thing if you realize that you're a nobody and that you've made all sorts of errors and things that you do don't always work out right, and you tend to mess things up, and you're not the first choice, and blah blah blah. And all of that is true of you and you know it's true of you...Congratulations, you qualify to be one of God's. God has grace on the humble. He opposes the proud. And that's what Ruth is about.

Let me pray for us. Lord I'm so thankful for your grace. I'm so thankful for our Lord Jesus, our true and better Boaz. And I know Lord, that he has made a way for us. And I pray Lord that we would take it. Those of us who are on the fence, and wonder if we should follow God, there's so much to be gained by following, by accepting the gifts. The God gifts. Would you move in our hearts that we might repent of our sins, and turn away from the former manner of life and receive what it is that you have to give. Commit ourselves to follow you the rest of our days on earth that we can spend the rest of eternity with you and the joy of your Father. It's in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.