

Open to Ruth 4

- WELCOME: People here, people online

This morning we're nearing the end of our study in the book of Ruth.

- SERIES: Hope as a Way of Life
- Each week, we've examined a different facet of our Hope in God as revealed by old testament book of Ruth.
- The narrative, characters, and themes found in Ruth are powerful echos of the Gospel, and reveal to us the enduring hope that we find in Jesus.

This morning as we begin to conclude this remarkable story, we will be examining the relationship between hope and our renewal.

- Reading & Teaching from NIV

RUTH 4:13-15 (NIV)

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴ 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! ¹⁵ 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."

PRAY - Thanks, illuminate, non-christian.

Every Year, millions of American adults suffer from a condition known as HGTV Syndrome...

- A chronic condition where as you get older, your life becomes increasingly consumed by cable television shows about home renovation.

Symptoms of HGTV Syndrome include:

- A sudden and unexpected urge to drive to your local Home Depot, just to "browse"...
- Crippling anxiety when deciding between quartz or granite countertops.
- Breakouts of swatches all over you home.
- Excessive use of interior design cliches like "Shabby-Chic", "Mid-century Bohemian", "Farmhouse whimsy".
- Consult your doctor immediately...

From fixer upper to property brothers, from Extreme Home Makeover to Hometown Takeover, from Chicago flippers to American Pickers, there is a seemingly infinite stream of home restoration programming 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

- In fact, behind cable news, HGTV is the most watched network in all of cable television!
- We just can't get enough home improvement. Why?!

In one sense, these shows inspire our minds...

- They inspire our creativity.
- They help us to figure out what we like and don't like (color palettes, decor styles, remodel ideas).

But there's also more to it...there's something deeper.

- Several years ago Author Melanie Rainer wrote an article why we love HGTV and she says...
- "We love these stories because they echo the desire in all of us to be rediscovered and remade." -*Melaine Rainer*

These shows don't just inspire our minds, they also inspire our hearts.

- They tap into a longing buried deep within us.
- They lead us to believe that restoration and renewal are possible. Achievable.
- They dare us to hope and dream that things once broken and forgotten can be brought back to life.
- That somehow value and worth really can be reclaimed.
- And isn't that what all of us long for, not just for our homes, but for our lives?
- Perhaps this is why we get so much satisfaction out of fixing up a vintage car, or refinishing that piece of antique furniture, repairing that surfboard, or repainting that wall in our living room.
- Because in that restorative work we are doing something that we long to have done in us.

One of our greatest needs, whether we realize it or not, is for renewal.

- We know deep down that something within our being is broken, worn-out, and frayed. We've got rust in our soul.
- Broken relationships, age, failure, loss, pain, sin—all of these things contribute to our spiritual decay.

- And the greatest problem of all is that there is nothing we can do to fully reclaim it in our own strength.

This what Ruth learned, this is what Naomi learned, and this is what we learn from their story.

- When we first meet Ruth and Naomi in Chapter 1, they are broken, battered, beat up, and worn down.
- A famine forces Naomi and her husband Elimelek to sell their land in Judah and emigrate to the hated region of Moab.
- Soon after, Naomi loses her husband and becomes widowed.
- And then after ten years of barrenness, both of Naomi's sons die tragically.
- Left with no fortune, family or future in Moab, Naomi's only option is to move back to Judah and become a beggar in her homeland.
- But before she leaves, Ruth, her daughter in law insists on accompanying her back to Bethlehem.
- This is because she realized that God was committed to her. And this changed everything.

By the time we get to Chapter 4 (the end), we see a completely different picture of Ruth and Naomi.

- They've gone from begging to blessing. From being used-up to being lifted-up. From the depths of despair to the peak of promise.
- Through divine providence, radical obedience and surprising faith against seemingly insurmountable odds Ruth and Naomi find themselves restored and renewed.
- But

The book of Ruth reveals to us that our spiritual restoration and renewal are not only possible, they are promised.

- Even though (like Naomi) we might not always see it, God is at work renewing and restoring our hearts and our lives.

Last week we examined what the book of Ruth reveals about our redemption.

- In marrying Ruth, Boaz (The Guardian Redeemer) willingly agrees to purchase back the land belonging to Naomi's family.
- Boaz's choice to marry Ruth and buy back the land of her mother-in-law is a picture and a foreshadowing of what Christ, our redeemer has done for us upon the cross.

- ▶ We, like Ruth have been purchased in love. And like Naomi, our debt has been paid in full. We have been redeemed.

Our passage this morning shows us that on the other side of redemption is renewal.

- ▶ This final scene of the book of Ruth reminds us that just as much as our past has been redeemed, our present and future is also being renewed and restored.
- ▶ And though we might not always see it clearly, God is doing a home renovation work inside of our hearts. And it's more beautiful than we could possibly imagine.

Our text this morning reveals to us that God satisfies three of our deepest longings for renewal.

- ▶ Renewed identity
- ▶ Renewed community
- ▶ Renewed strength

First, we learn that God satisfies our need for 1. Renewed Identity.

Notice how the women refer to Naomi by her given name in Verse 14. Why is that so important?

It's important because Back in Ch1, she pleads for a different name.

- ▶ When Naomi arrives back in Bethlehem, she is completely and hopelessly defined by her sorrow and her suffering.
- ▶ She is so worn out, so beat up, so broken down that her own people barely recognize her. "Can this be Naomi?"
- ▶ She even demands that the women of the village call her *mara* (which means "bitter") instead of Naomi (which means pleasing), because, in her words
- ▶ **RUTH 1:20 (NIV)**
"...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. "
- ▶ She has literally become her suffering.
- ▶ She has become so entangled with bitterness and sorrow that she can't even identify with who she was before she left Israel ten years prior.

Naomi had settled for a lesser identity.

- An identity defined not by God, but by everything that had happened to her.

At its core, the Book of Ruth is about the restoration and renewal of her true identity. Her true name. The name of Naomi.

- It is about God methodically and providentially sanding away the mara from her heart, showing her that even if she was finished with the name of Naomi, He wasn't done with it.
- Even if she had forgotten who she was, He didn't forget.
- Even if she lost all value in her own mind, she still had worth in His mind.

Toward the end of the story we see a beautiful picture of a restored Naomi.

- How do we know that she is restored?
- Notice how the women address her. They don't call her Mara! They call her Naomi! Her true name! This is an indication of her restoration!
- The bitter one (mara) has become Naomi once again.
- You can almost picture Naomi there, surrounded by these women, beaming with delight as she remembers the blessings of God, dreaming of a future full of life and love and hope.
- She has indeed been renewed.

This restoration of Naomi's identity is an echo of how the Gospel restores our identity.

- Like Naomi, all of us have in some way settled for a lesser identity.
- We've allowed something else, something lesser to define us.
- Perhaps like her, it's our circumstances.
- Or maybe it's our failures. Or our successes.
- Maybe it's what others say about us, or what they think about us. Or what we think they think about us.
- Maybe it's our sin.

The Gospel wholeheartedly rejects all of these sources of identity. The Gospel says that you are not defined by your situation or your condition. Who you are is not wrapped up in what you've done or what's been done to you. Your worth and your value are not dictated by what others say or think about you. The Gospel says that your redemption is what defines you!

- That is the good news of the Book of Ruth and that is the Good News of the Gospel...that we have been redefined!

- Our identity has been restored and remade by our redemption.
- Through His sacrifice on the cross, and by His resurrection from the grave, Jesus has given you a new way to be defined.

The reality of the Gospel forces us to ask: Where is our identity? Where is your identity?

- Is it in your career? Is in being a husband? A wife? A mom? Being a good friend?
- Is your identity wrapped up in your pain? Your anger? Your guilt?
- All of these things might be true for you right now.
- BUT...
- For the one who belongs to God, these are not the truest thing!
- Naomi's suffering was a part of her life.
- Those ten, hard years in Moab were indeed a part of her. They shaped her.
- But there was something MORE TRUE for Naomi, and there is something more true for us!

What Naomi discovered, and what we discover is that above anything else, we are Children of God. His love for us never fades, and he never abandons us. We belong to Him.

- We need to be reminded of this every single day.
- No matter what you've been through, no matter what you've endured, no matter how you've failed...
- If you are in Christ, your identity as a beloved son, a beloved daughter of God is the truest thing about you. In Jesus, you have a renewed identity!

But it's not just our identity that's been restored...

We discover from the text that God also satisfies our need for a 2. Renewed Community.

Notice what the women of the village say to Naomi in verse 14:

- **Your daughter-in-law, [Ruth] who loves you...is better to you than seven sons."**
- What's so significant about this?

When Ruth arrives at the gates of Bethlehem, she is a complete outsider.

- Naomi had at least *some* extended family there in Judah.
- But Ruth, she had NO ONE.

- Any family, any community, any relationships that she had were left behind in Moab.

From the get go, Ruth is defined by her exclusion from the family of God.

- The author or Ruth and every character in the story refer to her for most of the book as "Ruth the Moabite"—a reminder that she is a foreigner, an outsider—an alien to the culture and the family of Ancient Israel.
- Naomi might have had some extended family in Judah, but Ruth, she had NO ONE, save Naomi.
- Any family, any friendships, any cultural familiarity that she had were left behind in Moab.

But in the eyes of the community, Ruth was more than just a foreigner and an outsider, she was the enemy.

- The Moabites were despised by the Jews. Their practices, their culture—everything about the Moabites was anti-god. They were idolaters.
- By being in Bethlehem Ruth is not just excluded, she is in danger.
- Boaz immediately recognizes this when Ruth shows up on his property in Chapter 2
- He implores her to stay close to his female servants and not glean from another field because he knows that in the wrong hands, Ruth could easily be manipulated, abused, or even killed for the simple fact that she was a Moabite.
- Throughout the story, Ruth the Moabitess is defined by her Moabite-ness

Yet at the end of the story, we see that Ruth is no longer excluded *from* the family of God, she is esteemed *within* the family of God!

- She is better than seven sons!
- We are a lot less shocked by this than we should be...
- The value system of ancient Israel doesn't always compute evenly in our westernized, individualistic minds.
- This is a radical statement of inclusion. Why?
- Because, in ancient Israel, sons were everything.
- Sons were the means by which you carried the future and survival of your family and your property
- Sons were the means by which you protected your societal influence and your standing within the community.
- As strange as it sounds to say today, back then, without a son, you had nothing. No future, no influence, nothing.

- Without a son you were dead in the water.
- This is the primary reason why Naomi finds herself in a place of such hopeless desperation at the beginning of the story.

For the women in the village to say, "your daughter-in-law; your foreign, Moabite daughter-in-law is better to you than seven sons" is the most unthinkable endorsement of Ruth's inclusion within her new community.

- Ruth now has a renewed position within the family of God.
- She has a new standing within her community...
- A standing not based on what she's done or accomplished, but based only on her relationship to the redeemer.
- Through marriage she is one with Boaz, and this changes everything for Ruth.

Friends, this is what the Gospel has done for us.

- Like Ruth, we were once far off. Like Ruth, we were once excluded from the Family of God. But our redeemer has brought us near.
- In our union with Christ through his death and resurrection, we, like Ruth, have been adopted and grafted into a new community. A new family. Not a perfect family, but a family in the process of restoration.

And not only are we adopted into a new community, we have a role and a purpose within this community!

- Just like the women remind Naomi of our true identity, our role as a community of faith is to remind one another of our true identity in Jesus!
- And in the same way that the women spoke of Ruth's value to Naomi, we as a community also have a responsibility to lift one another up!
- Next week we will see that the community is even tasked with the naming of Ruth and Boaz's son as well as raising him!

All of these things reveal the importance of community and family within the kingdom of God.

- This is why we put so much emphasis on community groups!
- We have the opportunity, week in and week out, to participate in this community of restoration!
- To remind each other, through worship, fellowship, and scripture of what is most true about us.
- This is what it means to be a renewed community.

For us who have put our hope in Christ, we now live with a renewed identity within a renewed community. But at the end of the day our renewal doesn't come from those around us; nor does it come from within us. Where then does it come from?

Finally, we see from this final scene that God satisfies our need for **3. Renewed Strength.**

- ▶ **"May he (the redeemer) become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age..." v14-15**
- ▶ The book of Ruth reveals to us that hope is not a one-off. Hope is more than an event or a flash in the pan. Hope is something we carry. Or perhaps, better said, hope is something that carries us.
- ▶ Our hope in God is not merely something that saves us, it's something that both renews and sustains us.
- ▶ That phrase in v15 could be translated this way:
- ▶ "He shall be unto you the repairer of your soul and will nourish you all the days of your life."
- ▶ What are the women doing here?

They're reminding Naomi of the source of her hope and her strength.

- ▶ When Naomi showed up on the doorstep of her homeland, she was running on fumes. Her tank is Empty.
- ▶ She even admits as much: **"I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty."**
- ▶ And yet, through the provision and the sovereignty of God, through the obedience of Ruth and the kindness of Boaz, at the end of the story Naomi stands full once again.
- ▶ Naomi came to Bethlehem looking for physical bread, but toward the end she has found spiritual bread. She finds nourishment for her soul.
- ▶ God has renewed her strength.

And as much as the women of the village are encouraging her to remember that truth, they're also exhorting her to remain in that truth.

- ▶ Naomi, you've been renewed! Keep being renewed!
- ▶ Don't forget who sustains You! Don't forget where your nourishment comes from!

And just like Naomi, we have one who nourishes us.

- We also have a repairer of our soul and a nourisher of our hearts.
- We have a sustainer! And the well of His strength and power will never run dry!
- He is our Daily bread. Our spiritual nourishment.

And, Like Naomi, we must remain in our Redeemer.

- We must not forget where our strength and our nourishment comes from.
- We must always remember our bread.
- In Jesus we have one who has not only redeemed us, but one who also promises to fully renew our strength, our hope, and our spirit.
- This is why devotional practices matter!
- This is why we read the Bible, this is why we pray, this is why we worship....in doing these things we draw upon the one who is the source of our strength and our renewal.

So, is there hope for our renewal? Is there hope for our restoration?

- We learn from the story of Ruth yes, there is hope for our renewal, if we allow it.
- Let's look at verse 14 one last time:
- "Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him (the redeemer) birth." (v14-15)
- Who are the women talking about?
- It's not Boaz! Boaz is already famous in Israel! Plus He couldn't have given birth to himself...
- If not Boaz, then who is this redeemer?
- It would seem that the author of Ruth is cluing us in to the *real* redeemer of the story—the child born in Bethlehem. Not the grandson of Naomi or the son of Boaz, but the Son of Man. The living God made flesh.
- The savior of the world who, like his ancient mother Ruth, stepped into our humanity all that we might be restored.
- The king of heaven, who, like his ancient father Boaz, was willing to lay down his wealth and his reputation so that we might be declared valuable once again.
- The great repairer of our soul who is not content to merely purchase the old scuffed furniture of our hearts, but who will not rest until we are fully restored renewed.

PRAY

The same encouragement and invitation into renewal that was given to Naomi is also available to us today...