

From Bitter to Sweet—the Story of Ruth
God Writes Every Chapter
Ruth 4:1-22
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Preacher: Pastor Roy Summers

“God writes the last chapter”

You may have heard one Christian comforting another with word like these —perhaps you have done this yourself! - “This isn’t the last chapter. God always writes the last chapter” What they mean is that the future will be better than the present. They’re coaching their suffering friend to be hopeful.

And this line of encouragement has support from the Scriptures: For example:

“Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning” (Psalm 30)

“Put your hope in God for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.” (Psalm 42)

And from the story of Ruth, where a bitter life turns sweet. And supremely from the Gospel which promises eternal life in the world to come!

A problem with this line of encouragement, however, is that it begs the question: “Who's writing the present chapter of sorrow and suffering? Is God writing that one too? And if not, who?”

I want to show you this morning from the Scriptures, and especially from the book of Ruth that God writes all the chapters of our lives, the ones we label “good” and the ones we label “bad”.

God’s glorious purposes, for our good and his glory, are being worked out no matter what the season of life looks like or feels like to us! This should be the source of great comfort to God's people.

And its true because God is the Sovereign ruler of the universe. Hear the Scriptures:

“No plan of yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2)

God “does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No-one can hold back his hand or say to him, “What have you done?” (Daniel 4:35

“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” (Romans 8:28)

God “works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Eph 1:11)

God orders all events in our lives for his glory and our good!

Of course this truth raises the question: “Is God, then, the author of evil?”

Heaven is not the author of evil, God forbid the thought! But such is God’s vast power and wisdom that he can overrule evil *in* order to bring about good! And the noblest demonstration of God’s ability to overrule evil for good, is the cross of Jesus Christ.

No greater wickedness has taken place in the history of the world than the crucifixion of the innocent and pure Son of God. And yet God turned around that event for his glory and our salvation:

“This man (says Peter on the day of Pentecost) was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death.” (Acts 2)

A few chapters later we read *“They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.” (Acts 4:28)*

The greatest injustice in the history of the world was turned around by God’s power into the greatest good. And so it can and will be in the lives of God’s people who trust him.

I want to bring you comfort this morning by showing you from the book of Ruth, especially chapter 4, that God writes *all the chapters* of our lives, not just the next one or the last one: (1) ordinary chapters of our lives, (2) chapters when we might have been foolish, (3) sorrowful chapters and (4) future chapters.

(1) God works out his purposes in the ordinary chapters of life—so don’t despise them

The book of Ruth records ordinary events! Boaz falls in love with Ruth, marry, have a child, grandma Naomi is over the moon!

After Ruth asks Boaz to become her Kinsman-Redeemer (KR), another ordinary chapter begins—Boaz goes off to make sure things are done properly according to the customs and laws of the land.

Legal business was conducted at the city gate in those days—not surprisingly, a busy thoroughfare with people travelling to and fro. So Boaz waits there for the KR1 who is first in line.

Remember that Naomi has sold the land that belonged to her deceased husband Elimelech—in those days, ideally, that parcel of precious land belonged to the family forever and ever, with the next generation taking it over. But Naomi had been forced to sell it to make ends meet. Now with her husband and sons dead, the family was in peril: no land and no future heir! Naomi needed a KR to restore the land and the name and line of her family. So Boaz waits at the city gate for the KR who was first in line to undertake that role.

“Come over here my friend and sit down.”

Boaz plans the whole thing carefully. He has fallen in love with Ruth and wants to marry her, but he does not allow his love for her to cloud his judgement or his treatment of the legal transaction. There are two parts to redeeming Naomi and Ruth:

1. There's buying the land from whoever had bought it off Naomi
2. And then there is marrying Ruth to continue the family line.

Most KR's would find owning extra land an attractive proposition - and especially in this case because without any male heirs alive, the land would be his to use for himself. But a KR might find the second part, prospect of marrying Ruth a more challenging prospect, because 1) she was a Moabitess, 2) if she had a son then the land would revert back to Elimelech's family, and not be useful for farming himself and 3) he would be taking on the burden of providing for Ruth and Naomi.

Boaz presents the deal to the KR in such a way that he says yes before he says no: he starts with the land, which he rightly assumed the KR would be interested in.

"Naomi who has come back from Moab is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here.... I will redeem it."

Only after the KR has said yes does Boaz mention the Ruth part of the deal. Boaz is scrupulously honest. The Lord will never bless his people if they deal in an underhanded way in business or in their personal affairs.

"The Boaz said—this is the second part of the deal - "on the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man's widow (meaning Mahlon, Elimelech's son) in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property".

"Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it."

And so using an ancient tradition to "seal the deal" the KR removes his sandal in everyone's presence and the decision is made: Boaz will buy the field and marry Ruth! The marriage takes place, the happy couple have a son—called Obed which means "worship" - the only child in the Bible named by neighbours, rather than mom or dad!

Such ordinary chapters of life: legal matters, marrying, children, grandchildren. And yet God was powerfully working out his great purposes here, preparing for the world an ancestor for King David and for King David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

For the believer there are no ordinary chapters; God is at work in all the rounds of daily life, going to school, home life around the table, work, leisure, business, marriage, children, grandchildren;

*Forth in your name, O Lord, I go,
my daily labour to pursue,
determined only you to know
in all I think or speak or do.*

So let no-one despise the ordinary rounds of life. I add this because some believers elevate “spiritual activities” such as Bible Reading, prayer, evangelism, whatever, above “daily chores”, in effect despising the ordinary. But God is at work in the ordinary...

Illustration

Many of you know that I was brought up in a missionary pastor evangelist home—the story of my parents is a thrilling story of faith—I would encourage everyone to read it.

My dad, not my mom, had a weakness, He was so single-minded in his missionary zeal (would that more of us had some of his passion) that he did not spend much time or effort in the ordinary things of life. And I have spent my adult life trying to redress that balance, how successfully you'll have to ask my family!

(2) God works out his purposes out through foolish chapters of life —so no regrets!

Elimech made a big mistake taking his family off to Moab all those years ago, putting his family among a pagan enemy people, not trusting God to provide for his needs in Bethlehem, but God overruled his missteps and brought about his good purposes! A wonderful daughter-in-law gained, a descendant of King David born.

God accomplishes his purposes in spite of our mistakes and even in spite of our sins. Where sin abounds, grace much more abounds. That's not a reason to go out and make mistakes, but it is a comfort when we do, because we all make them! Perhaps parenting mistakes, perhaps marriage mistakes, employment mistakes. God has the power to take all our foibles and even our sins and overrule them for our good and his glory.

Some believers are burdened with a thousand regrets about what they did or did not do in the past! And while we should sorrow over our sin, let's remember the power of God to overrule them all and bring about good. May the sovereignty of God soothe away our regrets.

(3) God works out his purposes in the sorrowful chapters of life—so let us always be hopeful

What a sorrowful decade for Naomi! Three graves and three widows in an enemy land! But God was working out his sovereign purposes even in this chapter of her life! For without that decade of sorrow in Moab, there would have been no loving daughter in law Ruth, no marriage between Boaz and Ruth, no grandchild Obed? And no ancestor for king David? And no Messiah?! God was at work right throughout Naomi's decade of bitterness to bring about his good plans! So in seasons of sorrow, we can always be hopeful.

(4) God will work out his purposes in future chapters —so trust him

The book of Ruth ends with a genealogy, which zooms out of time and looks way ahead of Ruth and Boaz's short earthly lives:

*This, then, is the family line of Perez:
 Perez was the father of Hezron,
¹⁹ Hezron the father of Ram,
 Ram the father of Amminadab,
²⁰ Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
 Nahshon the father of Salmon,^[d]
²¹ Salmon the father of Boaz,
 Boaz the father of Obed,
²² Obed the father of Jesse,
 and Jesse the father of David.*

Boaz and Ruth and Naomi never knew that their small ordinary parochial story was part of God's much bigger story! Great King David was the ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world.

What is true of Boaz and Ruth and Naomi, is true of all God's people! In some wonderful way, when we serve him in our homes, in our neighbourhoods and local churches, we are caught up in his greater purposes;

“we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:8,9)

But we may never see the fruit of our labours! The conversion of our children who we brought up in the ways of the Lord, men and women, boys and girls, brought into the kingdom through our gospel efforts, believers built up in their holy faith.

Ruth and Boaz never saw any of the fruit of their godly lives.

So we must trust him for all the chapters that will follow our earthly pilgrimage.

End

God is at work in every chapter of our lives, for our good and for his glory, Let us praise him and learn to trust him.