

Last week we were looking at the book of Judges and specifically the story of Gideon. The book of Judges finishes with this verse, **“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.” Judges 21:25** But, as our story continues into the book of Ruth we see that throughout history there have been families who have chosen to live counter-culturally. This story takes place during the times that the judges ruled Israel. And, while the cycle of sin, oppression, the raising up of a leader, deliverance, complacency, sin was going on here is a family that in good times, bad times, and hard times, and believe me they experienced it all, continued to live lives of integrity and lives that honored God. Their trust in God’s sovereignty never wavered.

The story of Ruth is a truly lovely story. It’s a love story at its core and a story of the power of friendship. It’s a great example of loyalty to family and of God’s loyalty to His people. But, it’s also a story of a faithful God who provides, redeems, and restores. Those are the 3 themes I most want to explore in this story this morning. So, the story goes like this: A long time ago, in a land far away during the time the judges ruled, there was a famine in Israel. Elimelech and his wife, Naomi, made a tough decision to leave the land where they had lived their whole lives – a land they loved, a land that had been given to their families when Joshua led them into this promised land – and to set out with their 2 sons, Mahlon and Kilion, to make a better life for themselves as refugees in the land of Moab. It was a land that hated Israelites and relations were not good between the 2 countries. But, there was food there, and so they went. While there Elimelech dies. The 2 sons then take wives, Orpah and Ruth, but shortly after that they both die as well. This leaves 3 widow ladies alone

and destitute. Word then arrives to Naomi from Bethlehem where she was raised that the famine is over and she begins to make plans to return after 10 years in Moab. Orpah and Ruth both say they'll go with her as they've no reason not to. On the way, Naomi tries to convince them both to return as they have no real future coming with her. It's not like she's going to have more sons for them to marry so what's the point. Orpah is finally convinced and decides to return to her family, but Ruth gives this extremely moving speech. **"Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me. When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. 1:16-18"** They arrive back in Bethlehem to great cheers and excitement from Naomi's old friends and family, but they quickly realize something has changed. She asked to be called Mara, which means bitter, because she feels so empty now that her husband and children have been taken from her. Now they have to decide how they are going to feed themselves so Ruth offers to **"go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor. 2:2"** This was a common practice for the poor or immigrant peoples. Ruth was both. She starts picking up grain and they look on her kindly and tell the owner of the land. It turns out the owner of the land, a man named Boaz, was a relative of the family. He then makes sure that his workers purposefully drop grain that she can pick up, he allows her to stay close to his workers, and looks after her. Ruth goes home and reports all this to Naomi and they

have themselves a hallelujah, we're saved party! Then Naomi gets to thinking and puts it all together that Ruth is single and needs a husband and Boaz is single and obviously needs a wife, and who doesn't love a matchmaker! She concocts a plan that Ruth should get rid of her widow, mourning clothes, and put on some perfume and head on down to where Boaz was threshing wheat. The plan is to wait until he goes to sleep and then for Ruth to go and tell him, basically, that he should marry her because he is her kinsman redeemer and then wait for any further instructions from Boaz. Things go to plan and Boaz says, **"I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character. Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I."** 3:11-12

The next morning Ruth heads home and reports all this to Naomi and she says, "wait for it, girl, it'll be settled this morning." Boaz heads to the city gates to meet this closer next of kin. He explains that there is land involved and he can redeem that land by buying it from Naomi – he says great, and Boaz says oh, but you also must marry Ruth. The nameless next of kin says he can't do that and so Boaz steps in and redeems the land, marries Ruth, and saves the day. They have a child and Naomi goes from sad and empty to happy and full of life. And, Ruth and Boaz live happily ever after.

That's the story in a nutshell. If you've been reading along with us through the reading guide then you already read the bits I skipped over, and if you've not been reading then grab a reading guide at the information desk or just go home today and read these 4 chapters in their entirety. But, let's look at the story again to see all the ways that God provided, redeemed, and restored. **Provision**

In the first 5 verses Naomi goes from having it all – a wonderful husband, 2 sons, peace, security, financial stability even in a desperate time and in a foreign land, and a future that looked bright and dreams full of grandchildren to take care of her in her old age. She goes from that to losing everything – her family, her income, life as she knew it stopped. There was true grief, tragedy, pain, despair and loneliness at the start of this story. In fact, Naomi herself says, **“The Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty...The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.” 1:20-21**

Yet even in this season of pain and grief God was at work and provided for her a friend. I stated at the beginning that this story was also one of true friendship and Naomi finds that in Ruth. In Naomi’s lowest and loneliest moment God provided a true and loyal friend.

We aren’t meant to do life alone. Friendship is powerful. Sometimes we overlook or downplay the importance of being a friend. We pray, “Lord if you can use me in any way,” and God says, “could you be a friend to that person?” “Oh, I thought you’d have something important for me!” Friendship is important. Proverbs 27:17, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” King James version reads, “so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” Friends make each other stronger. God gave Ruth to Naomi because He knew she’d need a friend to lean on. It seems like such a small thing, but it’s this friendship that sustains the 2 women through their darkest days.

I'm so grateful for the friendships that God has put in my life. I'm grateful for friends who take the time to pray for me and let me know, who check on me, and encourage me. I hope I'm also that kind of friend to others.

No man is an island, said John Donne, and God himself said of Adam that it was not good for him to be alone. We need others to surround us. It's why we encourage you to be in a Life Group – so that you don't have to do life alone. Friendships seem like such a small thing, but they are one of God's greatest blessings.

Maybe God is providing for someone today through your friendship. Or maybe today you're in need of a friend. King James version translates Proverbs 18:24 like this, **“A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” Proverbs 18:24** If you're wondering today why you don't have a friend then maybe you need to ask yourself – who have I been a friend to?

Be a friend and gain a friend.

God also provided for Naomi and Ruth's physical need for food. Chapter 1:6 sets the stage for this, **“When she heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.” 1:6** They have to believe that if God is a God of provision for others then He will be a God of provision for them as well. The truth is God had already set up a way for these 2 widow ladies to be taken care of. Leviticus 23:22 says, **“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you. I am the Lord your God.”**

Leviticus 23:22 This was the system God had already put into place when He gave Moses the law. In the book of Deuteronomy God instructs them, **“When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.” Deuteronomy 24:19** Ruth didn’t just get a genius idea for how she could get some grain, nor did Boaz come up with a great plan for how to help a poor immigrant, widow. Rather, God himself, long before Ruth or Boaz were born, had put this into place. God had given additional rules for how to treat immigrants in Leviticus 19, **“When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” Leviticus 19:33-34** God himself promises to be the defender of the widow so we can assume that God was indeed looking out for Naomi and Ruth.

Perhaps on the journey back from Moab to Israel Naomi had shared God’s law with Ruth. Maybe she’d already thought about this provision that God had ordained years before. It’s possible that by Ruth’s admission that Naomi’s God would now be her God that it made way for Naomi to begin to teach her the commands of God as they walked back to Bethlehem. I don’t know if they’d already discussed this provisional law of God, but I do know that Boaz’s men were following the commands of God by letting her glean in his fields. Ruth began to understand something about the nature of God by seeing God’s people in action. Boaz says to her, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for Naomi and how you left your father and mother and your

homeland and came to live with a people who you did not know. **“May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” 2:12** Not only did God provide a means for food, but He provided a place of refuge as well. God provided for her safety, for financial needs to be met, for shelter, for protection. God provided all this and more to Naomi and Ruth because He is a God of provision. But, the way in which God chose to provide in this story was through his own people being obedient to the commands of His word.

Sometimes when difficult circumstances arise in our lives our first reaction is like Naomi – why, God? Why have you afflicted me? We freak out trying to figure out what we’re going to do, but just as God had already made a way for provision for Naomi and Ruth through His earlier commands hasn’t He already made a way for us as well? Hasn’t He already told us to **“cast our cares on Him for He cares for us” 1 Peter 5:7** Didn’t God already say that **“He will meet all your needs according to the riches of the glory of Christ Jesus” Philippians 4:19** Didn’t God already make a way for your healing and your salvation when Jesus **“was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Isaiah 53:5** Sometimes we start looking for provision and a sign that God sees or knows or cares everywhere else only to find that God has already spoken in His word. He’s already made provision.

God didn't miraculously or supernaturally rain down food from heaven for Naomi and Ruth, although we have examples of Him doing just that. This time, He used His people who were obedient to the commands He's already given. And, is that any less miraculous? Sometimes, God brings someone to mind, and we think God why can't you rain down groceries on that family – you know they're in need with all they have going on. And, God says, well, I could, but when it's the 4th Sunday of the month I thought I could just put their name in your mind and heart so that you'd go on down to the gym and get a bag of groceries to bless that family. And, is it any less miraculous when the provision comes through God's people? God has already told us to help the poor and needy – to look after those who can't look after themselves. When we are obedient to what God has already said we become God's hands and feet extended and provide the miracle for others.

God also provided **Redemption** These 3 themes of provision, redemption, and restoration overlap throughout the story.

To understand this idea of a Kinsman-Redeemer you have to go back towards the beginning of the story to where God had already made provision for this as well! Remember Abraham and God coming to him and calling him to go to a land he'd never been to and God would let him know when he'd arrived? Ok, so to that Abraham God had promised land. **“Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it**

to you.” Genesis 13:14-17 God also told Abraham **“your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years...In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here.” Genesis 15:13,16** So if you’ll remember that’s exactly what happened. The people end up in Egypt because of famine and they remain for 400 years until Moses leads them out. Again, with this promise to bring them up to a land flowing with milk and honey. They wander in the desert for 40 more years due to a sinful episode. Then Joshua leads them across the Jordan river and they take Jericho and Joshua then divides and gives the land to the people. **“Be sure to allocate this land for an inheritance, as I have instructed you, and divide it as an inheritance among the tribes.” Joshua 13:6-7** **“So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there...Not one of all the Lord’s good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.” Joshua 21:43,45**

This land was a big deal. It was the promise they had held on to for over 400 years. God would give them land. It was tied to their identity, it was given as an inheritance and it would pass from generation to generation as a testimony of God’s faithfulness to His promises. The blessings of God were tied to this land.

But, even before Joshua leads them into the land God had already given instruction on what to do with this land. **“The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers. Throughout the land that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land. If one of your fellow Israelites**

becomes poor and sells some of their property, their nearest relative is to come and redeem what they have sold. If, however, there is no one to redeem it for them but later on they prosper and acquire sufficient means to redeem it themselves, they are to determine the value for the years since they sold it and refund the balance to the one to whom they sold it; they can then go back to their own property. But if they do not acquire the means to repay, what was sold will remain in the possession of the buyer until the Year of Jubilee. It will be returned in the Jubilee, and they can then go back to their property.”

Leviticus 25:23-28 (The year of Jubilee happened every 50 years and was a way to sort of “reset” things. So that the land would be returned to it’s original owner.)

Land was a big deal. It was given to them on loan from God himself. Land was meant to only be inherited – passed from generation to generation. God makes this allowance to sell it to provide for His people, but the ultimate goal was that even if sold it would be returned in the year of Jubilee so that their inheritance from God – their blessing if you will – would still be there for that specific family line. There’s another story in 1 Kings about a man named Naboth and an evil King named Ahab wanted to buy his vineyard, and Naboth’s response was, “the Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.” I can’t emphasize enough how big of deal the land was. So when Boaz meets with the next of kin at the city gate that morning this is what he was talking about and referring to. Naomi had become poor and there was no one to inherit the land seeing as how both sons had died. Women didn’t own property, and besides she has no one to work the land. It was in her best interest to sell the land, however, the nearest relative could redeem the land and

keep it in the family. Once the anonymous next of kin bows out, Boaz becomes the closest relative and so he's able then to redeem Elimelech's land. Redeem means to gain or regain something or to buy back. God makes provision for redemption to come.

In this story redemption is tied to physical land because that's how the people of God inherited the blessings of God at that time, but in our story redemption is tied to the blood of Jesus Christ who through His death and resurrection made a way for us to be called sons and daughters and **"if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ."** **Romans 8:17** Our inheritance is not land that's been redeemed, but rather our inheritance is the promise of Jesus Christ and eternal life. We had sold ourselves into slavery to sin, but Jesus came to buy us back. **"You are not your own; you were bought at a price."** **I Corinthians 6:19-20** The land now belonged to Boaz, and those of us who have been redeemed belong to Jesus. God is a redeemer of all things, including you and me, and now we have access to all the blessings of God. He's redeemed our lives from the curse of sin, and brought us into His family.

God is a God of provision, and redemption, but He is also a God of **Restoration**

In buying the land and marrying Ruth, Boaz, as kinsman-redeemer, makes sure that their family name is restored. They once again have status in Bethlehem.

Through the kinsman-redeemer their standing in the community was restored and they had reason to hope. Through the redemption that is offered us through Jesus we are restored to right standing with God. **"God made him who had no sin to be**

sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2

Corinthians 5:21 In other words so that we might be restored to right standing.

It’s interesting to note that this restoration to position within the community has more to do with Naomi’s family. Ruth came from a whole nation of people who were considered “less than.” She was a Moabite and Moab was the son of Abraham’s nephew Lot – the result of an incestuous relationship with his daughter. It’s a sad, horrible story following the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and you can read it in Genesis 19. A nation that was birthed in sin, yet from it came this woman, Ruth. She does not let her past or her nation’s past define her, but instead chooses to follow the God of Israel – the God of Abraham. Everyone knew the history of the Moabites, yet no one is beyond the redemptive powers of our God. Her faith in Naomi and Boaz’s God redeems and restores her in more ways than one.

You may be feeling like you’re too far gone for God to redeem and restore you, but Ruth’s story shows us that no one is beyond redemption. Ruth’s story let’s us know that even from the beginning God was not willing that any should perish.

In the closing verses we read that Ruth and Boaz have a child and the women of the town let us in on the final restoration that has come to Naomi. **“Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-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 give him birth. Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him.” 4:14-16**

Naomi thought all dreams for the future were buried in a plot of ground back in Moab. But, now her prayers are answered and dreams restored as that child is placed in her lap. It's been a long season of death and despair, but a season of life and hope begins again. God was faithful to provide, to redeem, and to restore to her hope and a future.

On a side note, the scripture said the child was placed in her lap and Naomi cared for him. The truth is this is not her child or even her blood grandson. As a friend pointed out to me – she's really the step-grandma. Can I just say to those that are caring for or raising children that are not your own – God sees that and you are to be commended. God has placed children in your lap – care for them. Maybe you're the father or mother that someone else has failed to be or maybe you're all in this together to raise up that child. But, if God has placed a child in your lap, care for them as your own. The women of the town say Naomi has a son, but that's the final mention of the role that she plays in his life. It may be a thankless job, maybe no one else sees or appreciates the role of the step parent, but God sees and felt it important to say that to you today. A step-parent this morning needs to know that God has placed a child in your lap and He sees the care you're giving.

One final thing. The book of Ruth finishes with a genealogy. It's how this story fits into the bigger story of the Bible. Sin entered the world in the garden, but even in the punishment God began to provide a way for a Savior to come. A plan was put into motion. God tells Abraham that through him all nations would be blessed. So,

Abraham has a miracle son named Isaac,

Isaac has a son named Jacob,

Jacob has a son named Judah

Judah has a son named Perez

and we pick up the line in chapter 4:18

Perez was the father of Hezron,

Hezron the father of Ram,

Ram the father of Amminadab,

Amminadab the father of Nahshon,

Nahshon the father of Salmon,

Salmon the father of Boaz,

Boaz the father of Obed,

Obed the father of Jesse,

and Jesse the father of David.

And, we pick up the line in Matthew 1

David was the father of Solomon.....

And from there we have 14 generations until the exile and 14 generations after that

and then we read

And Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus,

who is called Christ.

God put a plan into action in the beginning of Genesis to Provide a Redeemer

who would Restore us back to a right relationship with himself. Ruth ends with

the promise of a king, and David would be the greatest king of Israel, but Matthew 1

ends with the King of all Kings being born. His name was Jesus because he would

save his people from their sins. God has provided a way for us to be redeemed and restored to a right relationship – a Savior which is Christ the Lord. Regardless of the sin in our past or how we arrived here today, no matter where we come from – Moab or Israel or Tulsa, OK – this morning you can find forgiveness. Jesus has already paid the price to redeem you all you have to do is receive Him. **“To all who would receive Him, to those who believed in His name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12** He’s provided the way, He’s already paid the price for redemption, will you let Him restore you today?

Let’s pray.