

Ruth

Sermon #2: Redemptive Hope

Ruth 2:1 – 3:18

Kevin Maurice ---- February 19, 2023

In 1992 the Summer Olympics in Barcelona provided one of the greatest moments in sports history. In the men's 400-meter race a British runner named Derek Redmond was poised to achieve his lifelong goal. He was a favorite to medal and potentially bring home the gold medal. As the starting gun sounded he had one of the fastest starts of his career. But as he rounded the first turn something seemed off. And around sixteen seconds he pulled up, he grabbed the back of his right leg, and he slowed to a stop. And then in this moment of pain and frustration and anger and sadness, he knelt to the ground.

But watch what happened next:

Link to Derek Redmond Race: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2G8KVzTwfw>

Derek fights to his feet. He knows his dreams are dashed. Any hope of a medal is gone. But he begins hopping. And on the home stretch a man runs out to meet him, and it's his father. The microphones actually picked up some of their conversation. The son tells his father, "I just want to finish the race."

And the father with his arms stretched around his boy said, "Then we'll finish it together." And they did.

Derek Redmond walked away from the '92 Olympics with a loss. He was not victorious. He suffered a career-threatening injury. He endured four years of hard work to get to that moment for no reward. He lost his dream. But he crossed the finish line. He crossed the finish line because his father stepped into that moment to be with him and to give him hope—not hope to win the race, but hope to finish it.

We all need hope—hope to begin or to begin again, hope to finish or to finish well, hope to carry on when life doesn't go the way that we thought it would. We all need hope.

Today we're going to continue studying the Book of Ruth, which I think is one of the more misunderstood books of the Bible. Because sometimes Ruth is described as this love story that's filled with drama and romance. And in a way, sure, the middle two chapters do have a romantic element to them. But that is not the purpose of this story.

The purpose of the story is for us to see what God is doing in the midst of loss. How is God at work when it just doesn't feel like He's there? And where is God in the ordinary stuff of life?

And as we'll see today, Ruth is a book about hope. It's a story about ordinary people in an ordinary place at an ordinary time doing ordinary things. But God does something extraordinary.

So today we're going to focus on chapters 2 and 3. Last Sunday we explored Naomi's story. And as a first point of application, please read the Book of Ruth for yourself. Read God's Word for yourself between now and next Sunday when we finish this story. Read Ruth from front to back. Get to know the story.

Last Sunday we focused on Naomi. This morning we're going to study Ruth herself. And in these two chapters and from Ruth's life we're going to learn three significant truths about hope. One—we must choose to hope. Two, in God's providence. And three—for our redemption. We must choose to hope in God's providence for our redemption.

So, let's return to the story. Please go ahead and open up your Bibles to Ruth chapter 2. We're going to move fairly quickly through the text. We won't cover every verse. But it would be great to have it in front of you.

We Must Choose to Hope

And we're going to explore first why we must choose hope. Last Sunday we saw that Naomi suffered significant loss. She had her husband and their two sons moved from Israel to this foreign country called Moab because of a famine. And when they're there Naomi's husband dies. She loses her husband. She still has her two sons. They go on and marry. After ten years there are no grandchildren. And then her sons die. And so, in one chapter Naomi loses security, her home, her husband, her dreams for the future, and her two children.

And so, she tells her daughters-in-law, "Just go. Go home, be with your own family." And one of them does. But the other, Ruth, stays by her side and she vows to go with her

wherever she goes. So, the two of them travel back to Naomi's hometown. But Naomi gets there and she tells everyone, "Do not call me Naomi. That means 'pleasant.' Call me Mara. That means 'bitter.'" And from this we see Naomi's perspective on life. She cannot see any good. There is no light, because she's chosen to live in lament. She's dwelling in the despair of her situation. And Naomi has lost all hope.

And yet, in spite of Naomi's bitterness, chapter 1 ends on a hopeful note, as if the sun is rising on this dark story, because the author gives us these three clues for what is going to happen. First, we have Ruth who swore this oath of steadfast love and loyalty. She says, "I will go with you wherever you go." And then the two of them go back to Israel at the start of a harvest. The famine has ended. And then the third clue is that they return to a place called Bethlehem.

Ruth 2:1-2

Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ² And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."

And that brings us Ruth chapter 2, starting in verse 1. Please read along with me in your Bibles: "Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, 'Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor.' And she said to her, 'Go, my daughter.'"

So, we have our two main characters. We have Naomi who is back in her hometown, and we have Ruth, an immigrant, living in a completely foreign country. And both of them have experienced loss. Both of them are widows. Both of them are childless. They are both in the same desperate situation.

And Ruth says, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain." This is a Jewish law. It's in the Old Testament in Leviticus 19, which said that if you owned a field, you had to allow poor people to come and pick up any leftover grain. So, at harvest time you would

cut down the stalks, you'd gather up these big piles. But anything that fell to the ground you were not allowed to pick up. Leave it so the poor can take it and eat it. It's this brilliant law called gleaning. And God gives it to His people. And it's this responsibility to the wealthy and to the needy—those with and those without—to both give and to work.

Now why is this important? Because of these two women, who goes out to glean? Is it the Jewish woman who grew up with this cultural practice and knows this law? No. It's the foreigner, the stranger to this custom. Ruth goes out, but not Naomi.

Why doesn't Naomi go work in the field? Because she's stuck. She's lost hope. When we're in the midst of suffering or we feel that life just isn't fair, that it's not as it ought to be, when we've agonized under loss and tragedy, we can become paralyzed by it. You sit with your grief and lament and anger for so long, you lose hope.

You lose hope for the present because circumstances just seem hopeless.

You lose hope in the future because you just don't see how anything could ever get better.

You lose hope in yourself. *How am I ever going to begin again?*

And you lose hope in other people, because you're afraid of loss or disappointment or more hurt.

Have you ever allowed your loss to paralyze you? Have you lost hope? Maybe you thought you were going to get married, but then there was that devastating breakup. Or after years of drifting apart your marriage finally came to an end. Maybe you were blindsided, you were humiliated, even, by job loss or a serious financial setback. Maybe you still haven't recovered from that illness or that injury and life just doesn't look the same. Or maybe you're still grieving that tragic, untimely death.

Grief and lament are good things, but if you've been living for too long there, it's not healthy. Maybe your loss is paralyzing you, and you're beginning to lose hope. If that's you, or if that has been you, Ruth is an example for us. Because Ruth could have curled up into a ball. She could've lost hope and stayed home. She could have become bitter. And that would have been easy, because that's the example that she had. That's what Naomi is doing. But look at Ruth. She doesn't do that. Ruth makes a choice. She gets up and she goes. She walks out that door.

And that's the important thing about hope. Hope is not a feeling. It is a choice. It is the choice that Ruth makes to get up and go. It's the choice that Derek Redmond made to stand back up and to start hopping.

Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all ... As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength.

--- G. K. Chesterton

The British author G. K. Chesterton says this: "Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all ... As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength."

In a world that's filled with loss and lament, we must not lose hope. We must choose to hope.

Hope in God's Providence

And listen, the reason that we can choose to hope is that we have a reason for hope. As Christians, as followers of God, as His people, we have a particular kind of hope, because we place our hope in the providence of God. Let me show you what I mean.

Ruth 2:3

So [Ruth] set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.

If you go to verse 3, we're told that "Ruth set out and went and gleaned in the fields after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech." Now hold onto that phrase --- "she happened." It is so important. We're going to come right back to it.

Ruth 2:4

And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, “The Lord be with you!” And they answered, “The Lord bless you.”

Ruth happened to be in this field belonging to Boaz. And look who else just so happened to be there too. “And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, ‘The Lord be with you!’ And they answered, ‘The Lord bless you.’”

So, Boaz arrives. We’ve heard about him three times in three verses. He finally shows up and his character and integrity are immediately on display. He greets his workers with a blessing, they bless him back.

And then he sees Ruth. And he asks one of his employees about her. He finds out who she is and he already knows the story. Everybody in town knows the story of the foreign woman who came back with her mother-in-law.

And then Boaz treats a stranger with kindness. He goes to Ruth and he tells her, “Don’t go to any other fields or farms. You stay right here to glean. Because I’ll make sure that you have plenty and that you have protection.” And then he invites her to have lunch with him.

Ruth 2:12

“May the Lord repay you for what you’ve done and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

And he tells her, *I know your story, I know what you’ve done.* “May the Lord repay you for what you’ve done and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

Ruth works all day; she heads home and tells Naomi about what’s happened. They don’t just have food to eat, they’ve got food to spare. They even have food to sell. And Naomi’s shocked. She asks, “Where did you go?” And Ruth tells her, “I worked with Boaz.”

And immediately, Naomi begins to see a reason for hope. She tells Ruth, “That man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.”

Already twice we’ve been told that Boaz is from the clan of Elimelech. That means he’s a relative of Naomi’s deceased husband. And then Naomi says, “He’s one of our redeemers.” In your Bible translation it might say “guardian-redeemer”; or I really like an older translation that says “kinsman-redeemer.”

And according to Old Testament law, outside of your immediate nuclear family, your larger family relatives were called your clan. And the men of your larger family circle were called your kinsmen-redeemers. One of their duties was financial. So, if a member of the family experienced some economic difficulty and they had to sell off some land to pay some debts, it was your job as a redeemer to go buy that land back for the family so that it stayed inside the family.

Another obligation was familial. And this is significant for Ruth, because if a man in your clan got married and he didn’t have any children, and then he died, it was the kinsman-redeemer’s duty, a sacred job, if they were single, to go marry that widow, have children, and carry on the family name.

And of all the fields that Ruth could have found, she ends up in this one. “Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine ...”

What a coincidence, right? Do you believe that? No way.

“Ruth set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz.” That is a great phrase ... “she happened.” Ruth just so happened to go the field that just so happened to be owned by a guy who just so happened to be related to Naomi’s husband, who just so happened to be their only hope.

Some Bible scholars say that this verse is the key to the entire story. And we miss the drama of what God is doing if we skip over these words “she happened.” Because God, in His sovereignty, His power for a plan with a purpose, is weaving a story together.

And when God is at work in the Bible and in our lives, there are typically two ways that He does that. One is visible, and we call them miracles. We pray for healing to happen and it happens.

My wife and I have friends who were in this financial situation where they couldn’t afford diapers or groceries. And they didn’t tell anybody, but they prayed. And that day groceries

and diapers were delivered to the doorstep. Or maybe you've had a situation where you just prayed, "God, I want an opportunity to share the gospel with my neighbor." And that day they say, "Hey, I've been wanting to ask you--Why do you believe in Jesus?" That is when God's power is on display. Have you seen God work like that in your life? It's a lot of fun when He does.

Here's the other way that God works in our lives. And I believe this is how He most often works in our lives. It's not visible; it's invisible. It's called God's providence. And providence means that God knows and He uses the little details of our lives—nothing's too small or too ordinary to be used by Him. And providence is the working together of situations and circumstances that almost seem coincidental, but they are far too orchestrated and organized to be an accident. When God is arranging things for your good and for His glory, that's called providence.

And God's providence is our reason for hope. Now hoping in God's invisible work in our lives doesn't mean that we lack agency. It doesn't mean that we just sit back and do nothing and expect that God will just work everything out.

Hoping does not mean doing nothing. It's not fatalistic resignation. It means going about our assigned tasks, confident that God will provide the meaning and the conclusions. It means not having to work at keeping up appearances with a bogus spirituality. It's the opposite of desperate and panicky manipulations, of scurrying and worrying. Hoping is not dreaming. It is not spinning an illusion of fantasy to protect us from our pain. It is a confident, alert expectation that God will do what He said He will do. It is a willingness to let God do it His way and in His time.

--- Eugene Peterson

The pastor Eugene Peterson does a great job explaining this. He says, "Hoping does not mean doing nothing. It's not fatalistic resignation. It means going about our assigned tasks, confident that God will provide the meaning and the conclusions. It means not having to work at keeping up appearances with a bogus spirituality. It's the opposite of desperate and panicky

manipulations, of scurrying and worrying. Hoping is not dreaming. It is not spinning an illusion or fantasy to protect us from our pain. It is a confident, alert expectation that God will do what He said He will do. It is a willingness to let God do it His way and in His time.”

That is what hope in God’s providence looks like. And that’s what we’re seeing in Ruth, because Ruth made the choice to get up and go. She didn’t lose hope. She goes out to that field. But Ruth didn’t just so happen to stumble into Boaz’s field. And Boaz didn’t just so happen to be there that day, and he didn’t just so happen to see her. None of that is by chance. There are no coincidences in this story.

Have you seen God’s providence at work in your life? Or have you just chalked things up to chance? And are you missing how maybe His hand has brought you to where you are today and is guiding you still? Because we trust and hope in a sovereign God who has a plan and who is at work in our lives. And His providence is why we don’t lose hope. It’s why we choose to hope.

Hope in God’s Providence Leads to Redemption

And hope in the providence of God leads us to the purpose of hope, the outcome of our hope, which is our redemption. Because hope in the right direction, hope in the right things, points us toward redemption.

Ruth 3:1-5

Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? ² Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. ³ Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴ But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do.” ⁵ And she replied, “All that you say I will do.”

Let me just show you in Ruth’s story. Ruth and Naomi experience this thrill of hope. Boaz represents a brighter future. And bitter Naomi isn’t so bitter any more. She’s excited. She

even comes up with this mother-in-law plan in verses 1 through 5 in chapter 3. It says, “Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, ‘My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor. But don’t make yourself known to the man until he’s finished eating and drinking. But when he lays down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do.’ And she replied, ‘All that you say I will do.’”

What is going on here? Remember, Ruth and Naomi have both been grieving great loss. Ruth is a widow. And so custom dictates that she would dress and present herself outwardly as a widow. She’d dress all in black. But what Naomi is saying is, *Now the time for grief is over. Take a shower, change your clothes. If we want Boaz to redeem us, we need to let him know that you’re interested and available.*

Naomi’s plan is to “go lie down at his feet, he’ll tell you what to do.” There are many ways that this passage has been interpreted over the years. A lot of them, I think, are wrong, because at a basic level, Naomi’s plan is simply this. She wants Ruth and Boaz to meet again privately.

Ruth 3:6-9

So [Ruth] went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. ⁷ and when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. ⁸ At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! ⁹ He said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.”

Now look at what Ruth does. She doesn’t follow every part of the plan. Picking up in verse 6: “So Ruth went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down.

At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! He said, ‘Who are you?’ And she answered, ‘I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.’”

Ruth follows most of Naomi’s plan except for a major change. She does not wait for Boaz to tell her what to do. She tells him what she expects him to do. Her hope is not in a man who may become her husband. Her hope is, ultimately, that God in His providence has orchestrated all that’s happened for her good. Ruth has her eyes on redemption.

Listen, if this was all about finding a husband, Ruth could have gone out with hope in her own beauty and hope that Boaz would find her attractive. She could’ve gone to Boaz that night hoping to seduce him. She could’ve gone hoping that he would pity her—he’d just feel bad and say, “Okay, I’ll take you in.” Ruth could’ve gone out with hope in any number of things, and she doesn’t do that.

Nowhere in Ruth’s interaction with Boaz that night is there even a hint of sexual enticement. In fact, later on, Boaz is going to call Ruth a woman of noble character. And nowhere in this midnight meeting is there any sort of manipulative language. She’s not saying, “Hey, you owe this to us. You have to do this.”

Ruth’s hope is that God has a plan, and it’s a plan for her redemption. And we know that because of what she asks from Boaz. She asks him to redeem. She says, “I’m Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.”

Ruth is asking Boaz to step into her world and provide a covering of protection. She’s asking him to step into her world to be with her—not to replace what she’s lost. You can’t do that. But to redeem, to make things new, to provide a future, a hope.

Now this phrase “spread your wings” is this protective language that throughout the Bible you see associated with God himself. In fact, we already saw it in chapter 2. In Ruth and Boaz’s first interaction, he commends her integrity. He says, “The Lord repay you for what you’ve done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you’ve come to take refuge.” There it is again—God’s wings. God’s wings are a place of refuge and shelter.

Psalm 91:4

He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge.

We see the exact same phrase in Psalm 91. And again, it's all about God protecting and covering His people. "He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge."

Redemptive language is reserved for God, because, ultimately, redemption is something that God does. It's why He gave this cultural practice of kinsman-redeemer to the Israelites. It's a practical symbol. It's a reflection of a God who redeems.

Ruth's hope is in that God who redeems. Our hope is in the same God who redeems. We just live on the other side of how He's done that, because we know that Jesus is our redeemer.

The Book of Ruth is a signpost in the Old Testament, and it's pointing us directly to Christ. Remember in chapter 1, Ruth chooses to be with Naomi, to love her, to go with her, to be with her. Ruth represented Jesus to Naomi. And now in chapters 2 and 3 it's Boaz who represents Jesus to Ruth. Ruth puts her hope in a redeemer; you and I put our hope in the redeemer.

Luke 13:34

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!"

And Jesus uses this exact same language. Jesus uses this exact same phrase that we find here in Ruth. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus looks at a city that's filled with people that He loves, with people that He created, people that He's going to die for, but who have chosen to put their hope elsewhere. And Jesus says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!"

Jesus is our redeemer. He came to take the things that are and make them as they ought to be. He is the peak of God's providence. He is God's plan working for our ultimate good in the

midst of every situation. And Jesus didn't just come to replace what we've lost; He came to make things right and new, because He's our Redeemer.

Are you willing to let Him gather you under His wings?

The redemption that Ruth is seeking in Boaz is just a shadow. Jesus is the substance. And it's under His wings that we find refuge and redemption and life. He is the only true source of hope.

The Book of Ruth is a story of loss and hope. And you're going to need to come back next week to see how that story turns out. Will Boaz accept this marriage proposal? Will he marry a stranger from a strange land? Will Ruth and Naomi be redeemed? Find out next week—same bat time, same bat channel.

Ruth teaches us this: that when loss and life brings you to a place of lament, do not lose hope. Choose to hope. Trust that God is at work. Trust His providence in your life. He has a plan for your good and for His glory. It's called redemption.

I'm the father of three little girls. My wife and I are actually expecting our fourth daughter in August. I expect a lot more gray hair next year. Please pray for us, too—that'd be great. The thing I think I've come to dread most in this entire world is seeing them get hurt. And right now it's mostly skinned knees and hurt feelings. But I know a day's coming when they're going to endure disappointment and they're going to suffer loss, and broken hearts are going to replace those broken toys and boo-boos.

And what I'm learning now and what I hope to remember then is that when my daughters experience loss and hurt, sometimes the best thing, the only thing I can do is simply to hold them. Like Derek Redmond's dad, I just need to be there with them and put my arm around them and let them cry. And I'm not going to be able to help them win every race. I can't replace what they're going to lose. I can't take away or make their hurt disappear forever. That's just part of life.

But maybe I can just help them cross the finish line. Because there are going to be times when they just need their dad to wrap my arms around them and just hold on. And after they've run out of tears, maybe I can just tuck them in and wrap a blanket over them and spread my wings over them and just be there with them and for them.

We have that hope. We have that Father. We have a hope in the God of the universe, that He knows you, that He cares about you, that He will be with you. We have a hope that no matter

what, He is still God and you are still His, because you are His child. And He's your Father. Even in the midst of pain and suffering and brokenness and loss, He is there to spread His wings over you and wrap you up in His arms.

We have a hope in a God who's not just out there. He is here. He is with us always. He is our Redeemer. He is our hope.

Let's pray to Him together.

Heavenly Father, we come before You humbled, that You would love us, You would choose us, that You would want to be with us. God, we thank You for that; that You have made a way to with us through Your Son. God, we thank You for Him. We thank You for Jesus, who came and experienced suffering and loss and death to bridge this gap, so that we could be with You, and You with us.

God, we pray that we could put our hope in You. In a world that's increasingly hopeless, God, we pray that we could hope; that we could find hope again or that we could hope in what You're going to do in our lives today and tomorrow and into the future. God, we put our hope and our trust in You, knowing that You have a plan and a purpose, and that our lives fit into that plan.

So, Father, we love You, we praise You, and we pray these things in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.