

“A Place of Restoration”

Gen. 35; Ruth 4; 1 Sam. 16

Last week we introduced you to the first three events recorded in the Scripture that happened in Bethlehem. We focused on the aspect that Bethlehem had an association of sorrow to it. Which, we saw is very fitting as a place for Jesus to be born, as He suffered for us on the cross. We need a Saviour who sympathizes and understands our own sorrow.

But as I also mentioned last week, we didn't finish the Jacob or Ruth story. Because God doesn't leave us in our sorrow. God enjoys bringing restoration from our suffering and difficulties. Sorrow and suffering are not the final word for the believer. If you are in that place now, hang in there. God is not finished working. Let's go back to Gen. 35.

As we mentioned last week, in Gen. 35 Jacob is back in the land of promise (still Canaan, but it will be there's one day). He has been walking faithfully with God. God appeared to Him when he returned to the land, in particular at Bethel where God appeared to him as he left the land as a young man when he fled from Esau. There at Bethel God appeared to him and reassured him of the promises He made to his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham. Now, God appears again, reassuring him that these promises are always true. We always need to hear the same promises again because when difficulties happen we need to cling to what's always true even if what we experience in the moment hurts.

When Rachel gave birth to her first son she named him, 'May God add' and she said in Gen. 30:24 that Joseph was an answered to prayer that God would add more sons. God would add more sons through Leah and Bilhah and Zilpah, Rachel's servant, but not for Rachel – until now. For here we read in Gen. 35:16,

¹⁶ Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. ¹⁷ And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, “Don't be afraid, for you have another son.” ¹⁸ As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin.

¹⁹ So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). ²⁰ Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel's tomb.

Because Jacob – who is now called Israel by God – is walking with God, he refuses to let Bethlehem and Benjamin's birth always be marked with sorrow. And that's not always an easy thing to do. It's too easy for us to revisit our sorrow and always mark that day or that place as a day of pain without seeing how God worked since that hard event. Jacob refuses to let this painful event define him. And that's a good challenge for us:

Don't Let Your Suffering Define You **(Gen. 35:16-20)**

Rachel's midwife tried to encourage Rachel with the good news that she did indeed have another son. But Rachel refused to be comforted and as she died she named the boy 'Ben-oni', which means 'son of my trouble'. And I don't think she only meant the trouble she had in giving birth, I think

she meant her whole life was marked with trouble. Her father took her away from her husband on her wedding night. He manipulated her husband Jacob for cheap labour. When they fled from their dad he was more concerned about losing his silly idols than he was about his daughters and grandchildren. And then she couldn't get pregnant and had to watch her sister enjoy having six sons and one daughter with her husband, as well as their two servants each having two sons before Rachel finally gave birth to Joseph. So we are not surprised that Rachel's final words reflect the bitterness of her life. Bitter people often get better, they just get more bitter.

And Jacob's life has been easy? Of course not. He could have been bitter himself but in his spiritual wisdom he got better and refused to let God's blessing of a son be marked as a sad event. Instead he saw ...

Where God was working (v.18)

The father has the privilege of naming his children and he renamed him 'Benjamin, son of my right hand.' The right hand is the place of power and blessing. Even though it hurt to lose his wife, it doesn't mean God wasn't in it and didn't have a plan.

And that is a very difficult thing to keep in mind in the middle of your pain. That is why we have to repeat precious promises from God about His presence and purpose. They are not trite sayings; they are anchors to cling to in our suffering. Yes Bethlehem was marked as a place of suffering by Jacob where Rachel was buried, but Benjamin lived. And Benjamin was an answer to Rachel's prayer after Joseph was born. God was still at work because He is always working in and through the good and bad times in our life. Jesus said of His Father and Himself

John 5:17, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working."

This is another anchor we have to cling to. As is His promise that even in suffering He can glory to Himself (John 9). When you read the rest of Gen. 35 we see that Jacob's suffering wasn't done yet. His oldest son Reuben would sleep with his concubine Bilhah and his father Isaac would die at the end of the chapter. And of course later he would lose his son Joseph for years and even Benjamin for a short time. And we know from that story God can bring restoration out of turmoil.

Let's return to the book of Ruth. The book began with Naomi's husband Elimelech, taking Naomi and their two sons away from Bethlehem because of a famine; during the time of the Judges, a sign of judgment. While in Moab his two sons marry non-Jewish women; a clear disobedience of the Law. Gradually all 3 men die. Elimelech's sons produce no offspring and with Elimelech dying, no one will carry on his name. But Ruth, who was told by Naomi to go back home to her gods, says 'No, I worship Yahweh now. I'm going with you back to Bethlehem.' Why? Because the famine was over. God doesn't stay angry forever. He's full of compassion. Israel was supposed to treat the foreigners well and treat them like themselves if they choose to follow God.

God arranges for Ruth to meet Boaz. Boaz, from Bethlehem, and he becomes her kinsman redeemer. They marry. Ruth conceives! Oh, now conceives, yet before she could not? God closed her womb when her husband wasn't walking with God. But now she has a godly husband and God opens her womb and she gives birth to a son and names him Obed, which means 'servant of God'. God had a reason why He closed her womb because He was going to bring restoration from hers and Naomi's suffering. Once Naomi made the decision to return to Bethlehem then God was in a place to bless her. That's why it's so important for us to be walking in obedience to God. When we are – and even then sorrow can still happen – we always need to

Trust God as We Walk With Him **(Ruth 4:13-20)**

If Jesus and His Father are always working and His promises are true, we have to wait and trust. As Naomi learned. Let's read the end of Ruth:

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and **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 kinsman-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."

¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. ¹⁷ The women living there said, "**Naomi** has a son." And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Remember, the book of Ruth is about Naomi and it is through the salvation of Ruth and the obedience of Naomi to return to Bethlehem and the faithful godliness of Boaz, who endured through his own unnamed pain of being wifeless and childless until this time (or a barren and now deceased wife), that God restored Elimelech's line. The big deal about the kinsman redeemer was by buying all the land of Naomi and marrying Ruth, Boaz sacrificially forfeits his own inheritance and it all stays in Elimelech's line which eventually becomes David's line which eventually and ultimately comes to Jesus. And all those who trust Jesus get His inheritance (read Rom. 8:16-17).

Trust God as you walk with Him because He will restore and bring encouragement even in our sorrow and suffering. Like Naomi, believe God restores you through

The sacrificial work of your redeemer (4:13-15)

Just as God had not left Naomi without a physical kinsman redeemer, neither has he left you and I without a Redeemer (Jesus) who will renew our life and sustain us even as we get old. He has promised never to leave us nor forsake us. In those two sad incidents this week of the deaths of two young boys of Christian families' that we heard about their trust in God even in their pain. As we saw last week we need a Saviour who identifies with us and can sympathize with us in our pain and difficulties. He invites us to give Him our burdens. And Jesus reminded us many times not be anxious about our needs and not to let our hearts be troubled but to trust Him who is securing our future as we speak.

Ruth becomes part of the line of David, through which Jesus would come to be born in the town of Boaz and Ruth and eventually Jesse and David. Ruth was blessed in many ways but the greatest blessing is found in Matt. 1 where she is named in the genealogy of the family line of Jesus, traced through Joseph's blood line. Luke traces Mary's blood line in Luke 3 and we find both her and Joseph are blood descendants of Jesus.

But let's not forget the blessing Boaz received when he chose to preserve Elimelech's line over his own. In our suffering we sometimes get upset at God claiming we don't deserve what we've received because we've been so faithful to Him. It's a dangerous path to cross. Boaz had his own suffering he bore. He had no children, possibly because he never married prior to Ruth. He was obviously an older man, lived long enough to have land and fields and servants. Late 30's definitely if not in his 40's. But here's the irony. What's the name of the man who was the closer kinsman redeemer to Naomi than Boaz? We are never told. The one who wanted to preserve his name, his

name was never revealed. But Boaz, who was willing to lose his name, is rewarded for all of eternity because his name is recorded in Scripture. He was a humble man.

And when we need to trust God and wait for our own restoration, let's not forget our own need to remember that

In humility God will lift us up (Matt. 1:5)

Why did God delay His blessing of Boaz with a family before this time? He obviously followed God and God had blessed him with productive land and servants – during the time of the Judges even! Perhaps we can understand when we turn to Matthew's genealogy of Jesus in Ch. 1.

1 A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham: ²Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³ Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴ Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵ Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of King David.

Traditionally, women's names are left out of genealogies. But God ensures that we understand that Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba are all part of the story that brought Jesus into the world, and of course Mary as well. But Boaz was the son of Rahab, a known harlot whose faith and bravery saved the two Israelite spies, ensuring a successful raid on Jericho. God rewarded her faith by sparing her life. Then she had a son, whose life was made hard because 1) she was a harlot and 2) she was a Gentile. His father was most likely Jewish. So Boaz was from a mixed family whose mother was a harlot. So he would have been shunned by the Jewish community (similar to how Jephthah was shunned by his, see Judges 11:1-3) and mothers would have told their daughters to avoid him. But God blessed him because God saw how He could restore a life even through hardship and suffering. Boaz didn't know these verses but he knew how to live them out in his own time and way.

Matt. 16:24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.

1 Pet. 5:5 All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Boaz – a man from Bethlehem, whose name means 'strength is with him') - had his own suffering he endured for years but he trusted God. He humbled himself and sacrificially gave up his own inheritance for the love of Ruth and Naomi. It was Ruth's faith that drew her toward him. And God restored both of their lives together, giving them a place in history and in eternity, giving them a better inheritance as well as a place in the line of David and ultimately Jesus.

So our pain doesn't have to define us. Don't let the tragedies in your life be how people identify you. Don't let self-pity and remorse be how you identify yourself. You are a child of God if you have chosen to give your life to Jesus. God sees you as forgiven, chosen, elected, justified and sees your future – glorified. *"He is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit"* (Ps. 34:18). And that word 'saved' in the Old Testament context means deliverance/restoration.

I don't know how you perceive yourself this morning. If you have always defined yourself by past tragedies and suffering, see who you are in Jesus. If you have let people label you or define you by your past mistakes, see who you are in Jesus. Loved, forgiven, justified, whole and free.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net