February 21

Happy Monday, everyone!

Today we will begin a brief look at the eighth book of the Bible, the Book of Ruth.

In Jewish tradition, Ruth is considered one of the Wisdom Writings, and there is good reason for that. While it is only four chapters long, nonetheless it contains a lot of wisdom and Scriptural truth. Here’s the background of the story:

The story takes place “in the days when the judges ruled (1:1) and a woman named Naomi, along with her husband Elimelech and their two sons, flee the area of Judah because of a famine and settle in the area east of the Dead Sea called Moab. Moab and Israel were enemies, so right away you can gather that the family must have been desperate to have settled in such hostile territory.

Shortly after arriving, Naomi’s husband Elimelech dies and she is left with her two sons, who marry Moabite women. Their names are Oprah and Ruth (after whom the book is named). After about ten years, both of Naomi’s sons die, leaving their wives, along with Naomi, widows. By this time, the famine was over in Judah and Naomi prepares to return to her homeland, and her daughters-in-law prepare to go with her. However, she tells them to “Go back to your mother’s home. May the Lord show kindness to you…” (1:8). They argue back and forth, and finally, Oprah agrees to stay in Moab with her mother’s family. However, Ruth is adamant about accompanying her mother-in-law Naomi back to Judah out of love and devotion to her, and finally makes this declaration:

“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 even death separates you and me” (1:16-17).

What are we to learn from this? Ruth must have been a powerful witness in her dedication to the Lord in order for a Moabite woman, that is, a woman of pagan practices whose nation was hostile to the Jewish people, would turn her back on her old life and declare "your God will be my God."

And so it is with us today. It is a watching world. But as we see with Ruth and Naomi, through our witness, the Lord can, and does, work with those who seem removed from, and even hostile to, the Lord and His presence.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
February 22

Grace and peace to you this day.

Today we look at the Book of Ruth, chapter 2.

Naomi and Ruth have returned to Judah. A new character enters the scene: a man of “standing” named Boaz, who is related to Naomi’s deceased husband Elimelech.

Naomi and Ruth, as widows, have no means to support themselves, so Ruth goes into the nearby fields to gather the grain left over by the harvesters. (This practice was called “gleaning” and was proscribed by Jewish law. Part of the Law required that the harvesters leave something behind in the fields to be “gleaned” by the poor and the indigent.) In any case, as God’s plan would have it, Naomi finds herself in one of Boaz’ fields. This is what happens next:

Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, “Who does that young woman belong to?” The overseer replied, “She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.’ She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.” So, Boaz said to Ruth, “My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. Watch the field where the men are harvesting and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.” At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?” Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. 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” (2:5-12).

I think there are at least two lessons here. The first is this: while a life of service and care does not earn us salvation, nonetheless, as we see with Ruth, it can earn us the Lord’s blessing. Secondly, as we also see with Ruth, sometimes we are the ones who are required to get up and act if we are able. I sometimes hear people say, “I’m waiting for the Lord to move in my life.” However, as is the case with Naomi, sometimes the Lord is waiting for us to move.

Tomorrow: Naomi has a plan.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
February 23

Greetings, DGCC Family.

Chapter 3 of the Book of Ruth starts like this:

One day Ruth’s mother-in-law Naomi said to her, “My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for. Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight, he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.” “I will do whatever you say,” Ruth answered. So, she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do (3:1-6).

Wow. At first blush, this sounds like something out of Days of Our Lives or General Hospital. In effect, Naomi encourages Ruth to take a shower, put on her best dress, spritz on some perfume, and seduce the old man Boaz so that he will provide for her. And really, that’s exactly what Naomi is saying, but as we will see tomorrow, God has a bigger plan in mind.

Ruth does as Naomi advises, and Boaz, being a man of honor, does not sleep with her, as would be his right, by the way, as her “kinsman-redeemer” (v.12). Under Jewish law, a “kinsman-redeemer” was required to marry the widow of a deceased male relative in order that he could provide for her and that she may have children. Since Naomi was too old to bear children, Ruth was next in line.

However, Boaz was a man of integrity and promises to marry Ruth, except that there is another man who is more closely related to her, and thus is first entitled to marry her. See? The plot of our little soap opera thickens. Boaz meets the other kinsman-redeemer, along with ten elders, at the city gates in order to discuss and decide the matter. Long story short, the first kinsman-redeemer gives up his right, and Boaz is allowed to marry Ruth, which he does.

Ruth’s plan seems to work. But there is something much larger at work. Today we looked at Ruth’s plan. Tomorrow: God’s plan.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
February 24

Greetings to you in the name of Jesus the Messiah.

Today we will look at the fourth and final chapter of the Book of Ruth. As we saw yesterday, Boaz marries Ruth. Boaz was a man of means so no doubt there was a big wedding festival with many guests from far and near. The wine flowed, the fatted calves were slaughtered and roasted, and all lived happily ever after. Down comes the curtain, and our story comes to an end. And everyone lived happily ever after.

Well, sort of. That was Naomi’s plan. But God did not bestow Ruth with these blessings for their own purpose. As we have seen before, God never simply meets our expectations. Scripture records that “the Lord enabled [Ruth] to conceive, and she gave birth to a son” (4:13). That son’s name was Obed.

And then the book of Ruth ends with this:

This, then, is the family line of Perez:
   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 (4:18-22).

You see, Ruth and Boaz’ son Obed would be the grandfather of King David. God used King David’s great-grandmother, a widowed, indigent Moabite woman to continue the line of King David, and eventually, complete this genealogy with the birth of Jesus the Messiah. Naomi had a plan, but God had a PLAN.

Have you ever wondered how God is working through the ordinary, or even, seemingly adverse circumstances of your life? Ruth and Naomi start our story as desperate, destitute widows, one of whom was far removed from God. And yet, as we so often see, God uses people just like them for His purpose, and for His glory.

IHS,
Pastor Lou
February 25

Happy Friday, everyone!

A little country/bluegrass devotional for today. Turn up the volume and enjoy!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtolv9kM1qk

IHS,
Pastor Lou