

Defining Moments:
That Moment Could Come at any Time
The Book of Ruth

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Text Introduction: We are in a series of messages that we are calling “Defining Moments.” Our lives are sprinkled with defining moments—moments that shape the rest of our lives, moments that are so important that the rest of our lives hang in the balance of these moments.

We have talked about such topics as our births—both our physical births and spiritual births, baptism, and marriage. We even talked about how historical moments are defining moments (wars, hurricanes, etc.) On Easter Sunday we talked about “The Most Defining Moment of all of History”—the resurrection of Jesus. We have since been trying to isolate other defining moments. We have talked about such things as failure, crisis, and last time parenting.

As we begin to wind this series down, I want to share with you this morning that one of life’s most defining moments could come at any time. There are many examples in the Bible. Moses wasn’t looking for a defining moment when God appeared to him in the burning bush. None of the disciples were looking to be part of a history-changing band of disciples when Jesus called to them, “Come follow me.” The Apostle Paul certainly wasn’t looking for a defining moment when Jesus met him on the Road to Damascus. In the midst of all of these examples, we turn to the Book of Ruth this morning.

The book of Judges and 1 Samuel is separated by Ruth, which gives an account of a “bright spot” for Israel in the days of the judges. Ruth points to the theological truth that God is still sovereign and in control, even in the darkest days of rebellion and sin.

The Story

A Tragedy

The Bible tells us that at some point in this time of the judges, there was a famine in the land of Promise. (Ruth 1:1). Living in Bethlehem (a town that means by the way, the house of bread), there was a man and his wife by the name of Elimelech and Naomi. They had two sons—Mahlon and Chilion. This family went to the land of Moab, outside of the land of Promise, back across the Jordan River and on the other side of the Dead Sea. Not long after being there, Elimelech died. The sons married women from the land of Moab—one named Orpah and one named Ruth. Not long after that and before any children were born, Mahlon and Chilion died.

Naomi decided that it would be best to leave the land of Moab. She had heard that the famine had ended, so she prepared to go back to Bethlehem. After starting on the journey, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Look, you go back home. You don’t have to come with me. I don’t have any more sons to offer you.” Orpah did return, but Ruth responded with a beautiful rebuttal to her mother-in-law’s kind offer:

¹⁶ But Ruth replied:

Do not persuade me to leave you
or go back and not follow you.
For wherever you go, I will go,
and wherever you live, I will live;
your people will be my people,
and your God will be my God.
¹⁷ Where you die, I will die,
and there I will be buried.
May Yahweh punish me,
and do so severely,
if anything but death separates you and me.

And, that's how Naomi and Ruth arrived back in Bethlehem.

Provision

We also learn in the text that Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem right at the time of the barley harvest. Needing to provide for the two of them, Ruth goes off to a field to gather grain. Her plan is to go behind the hired harvesters and pick up what they leave behind. It so happens that she chooses the field of a man named Boaz, who just so happens to be a relative on her deceased father-in-law's side. Having already heard of Ruth's loyalty to her mother-in-law, Boaz sees to it that no one bothers her and that she picks up plenty of grain.

A Kinsman-Redeemer

When Ruth returns home that night, Naomi is amazed at the amount of food she has been able to collect. She wants to know how this happened. Ruth tells her about Boaz. Naomi says, "Boaz! He is a close relative. In fact, he is one of our family's kinsman-redeemers." Now, we don't know what that term means, but in this ancient setting, a kinsman-redeemer was of great importance. According to the law that Moses had received from God, a kinsman-redeemer could be called on to do any or all of three things.

1. To redeem property and/or relatives—In Israel, all property was a family possession. If property had to be sold, the kinsman-redeemer was called on to buy back the property for the family.
2. To provide an heir through marriage—If a man died without an heir, it was the brother's duty to marry the widow for the purposes of providing an heir.
3. To avenge the unlawful death of a family member.¹

This is where the love story evolves. Boaz fulfills this role as the kinsman-redeemer both out of obligation, but also out of desire. The story of Ruth ends with the announcement of their marriage and the announcement of the birth of their son—Obed.

The Sermon: God is always at work!

¹ Adam. T. Barr, *Exploring the Story: A Reference Companion*, Zondervan Press, 56.

God is working behind the scenes of our lives to bring about His purposes. Ruth's story gives evidence that God is at work in all areas of our lives. That which defines us can come at most any time.

- **God is at work in the problems He allows into our lives.**

I guess we have already seen this truth in the message on crisis, but here it is again. Ruth is a story of tragedy—famine (1:1) and death of all of the husbands (1:2, 5). But even in this tragedy God is bringing triumph. Without the death of the men (1) Naomi would have never known of Ruth's great devotion, (2) the women might not have returned to Bethlehem {and notice that they return at the beginning of the barley harvest (1:22)}, and (3) the stage could not have been set for the Davidic line.

- So, we must resist the temptation to become bitter. Consider verse 20. Everyone is excited, but Naomi. She believes that the hand of God has gone against her. (1:3)
- So, we must trust that God is always working.
God's sovereignty is sometimes subtle—probably more often subtle. God doesn't always appear in a burning bush as He did to Moses. God does not always speak with a loud voice. God is actually at work when we do not even realize He is at work.

- **God is at work in the provisions He brings into our lives.**

God worked through the ordinary event of going to glean in the field. (2:2) {It just so happens} that she chooses the field of Boaz, who is a relative and can serve as her kinsman-redeemer. God is at work!

- **God is at work in the people He brings into our lives.**

Ruth's story is a story of God weaving the lives of people together that did not otherwise know one another. Without the particular set of circumstances that ensued, none of the major characters in this story would have ever known each other, let alone be defined by these relationships.

Did you ever stop to think about the people that God has allowed into your life? If that is true in the past, know that is true in the future. Pay attention to the people that God brings into your life.

So What?

God uses the problems, provisions, and even people He brings into our lives to accomplish His Divine purposes.

- Both in us and others
- Our salvation and our sanctification

Everything God is doing, He is doing to bring us to salvation. All of these events in the story of Ruth point directly to Jesus, as the line of David is established in the genealogical record at the end of the book.

This whole story about Ruth is to get to Ruth 4:18. We worry about so much. God is interested in two things really—our salvation and our sanctification—our continued growth in Him.

God, in His sovereignty, works through the mundane as well as the miraculous, just according to what we need.

We better pay attention to all that God is doing. Everything I do is important and should include God. God uses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary purposes. Everybody God brings into my life can be used by God for His purposes.

Just make sure you don't miss what God is doing in your life!