

This morning, we are continuing in our sermon series “The Power of One Life,” looking at the life of Ruth, as recorded in the book of Ruth. Ruth’s life takes place in the time of the judges. Judges is a historical book which takes place from roughly 1200-1000 BC. It begins with Israel’s entry into the land of Canaan and the death of Joshua, and goes up to the time that God gives them a king. During this time, there was no formal centralized administration. Instead, God would raise up at various times specially gifted men and women who would provide leadership to the nation. They were called judges because they carried out God’s judgment, either by driving out enemies or by settling disputes among the Israelites. It was a time of great social and religious chaos.

With that background in mind, we are going to read this morning through the entirety of the book of Ruth, one section at a time, and see what we learn about love. A word that shows up a lot in this book is the word “hesed,” which is a very important word in Hebrew. What is hesed? Covenantal love. Steadfast, loyal love, marrying both intimacy and unswerving commitment. It’s the covenantal love that God has for His people, and tells us a lot about the kind of love we are to have for each other. Let’s begin in ch. 1:

***Ruth 1:1-5** - In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. ² The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there. ³ Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, ⁵ both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.*

1) God’s “hesed” is a disciplining love

The first thing we see about God’s hesed is that it is a disciplining love. Verse 1 tells us that there was a famine in the land. According to the old covenant that God made with his people at Mt. Sinai, we see in Deuteronomy 28 that famine was a sign of God’s judgment, a consequence that God would bring against His people if they were straying away from faithfulness. When His people were falling into idolatry, or failing to care for the poor, or violating their covenant in some other way, God would bring his discipline into their lives to wake them up, to alert them of their need to repent, to turn back to Him. **But instead of seeing the famine as a warning and choosing to repent, Elimelech interprets the famine as a sign of God’s lack of love and provision, and so he decides to leave for a foreign land to seek for food.** The bottom line is that this is a people who do not trust in God’s hesed. And in that land, they intermarry with non-Israelite women, which is another no-no in God’s covenant. And by verse 5, Elimelech and his two sons have died, leaving three widows, a mother, Naomi, and two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah.

Let me pause to reflect on what we learn about God's hesed and our suffering. One reason we experience suffering in this life is the **disciplining love of the Lord**. A loving parent brings discipline into their child's life in order to help them to make wise decisions. For example, if they get in a fight, they may be confined to their room. If they lie, they may lose their phone. If they stay out past curfew, they may not be allowed out for a week. **Is the suffering because the parents hate their child? No – on the contrary, it's because they love their child and want the best for them, and they know that it would be unloving to allow them to continue down a road that will lead to destruction.**

***Hebrews 12:5-12** And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." ⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! ¹⁰ Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. ¹² Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.*

In the same way as a good parent disciplines his or her children, God disciplines us. Maybe you're experiencing pain and anguish and consequences in a relationship. Maybe you're experiencing joblessness or financial struggles not because God is mean but because of poor decisions you made. Could it be that some of your suffering is due to your sin?

Again, this is one reason for suffering. I have to walk a tightrope when talking about this. **On the one hand**, I don't want to commit the fallacy of saying that you are good and don't deserve it and how dare God allow you to suffer. Plenty of people are wondering why God might allow something to happen, because they think that they are good people, that life should be fair and that they should not experience anything that violates their dreams and desires. **On the other hand**, I am not saying that your cancer is because of your rebellion against the Lord. Sometimes suffering happens because of the sins of others, as in the case of abuse. Sometimes it is because we live in a fallen, broken world, as in the case of disease or natural disaster. **But I am saying that when you sin, there are natural consequences that bring pain into your life in order to wake you up to the effects of sin and rebellion and how much better it is to walk with the Lord. And when you suffer, it is worth asking whether it is due to some sin that the Lord is disciplining you about.**

As C.S. Lewis put it, “*God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.*”

In ch. 1, we see the disciplining love of God, but we also see that **his people misinterpret it as a lack of love and care, so they go looking to have their needs met elsewhere**. And that only leads to greater suffering and increased bitterness. Let’s continue reading:

Ruth 1:6-22 - *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. ⁷ With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. ⁸ Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. ⁹ May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." Then she kissed them and they wept aloud ¹⁰ and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people." ¹¹ But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? ¹² Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me-- even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons-- ¹³ would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has gone out against me!" ¹⁴ At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her. ¹⁵ "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her." ¹⁶ But Ruth replied, "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. ¹⁷ 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." ¹⁸ When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. ¹⁹ So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?" ²⁰ "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. ²¹ I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me." ²² So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.*

Naomi has lost her husband and two sons, and she has grown bitter – **she tells them to call her “Mara” (bitter) instead of “Naomi” (sweet)**. There is no food, there are no men to work for them, and there is no possibility of an heir. A family of three widows was a dangerous predicament, as women did not typically earn their own living in those days. They are in the worst possible place economically and socially. So when Naomi hears there is food again in Judah, they start to head home, and she tells her daughters-in-law to go home to

their families. Orpah decides to leave. **But Ruth shows extraordinary devotion, converting to Ruth's God and promising to care for her. She is willing to forego her homeland, the possibility of a husband, family, safety, etc. to care for her mother-in-law. This is the first of many instances we will see of extraordinary love that goes beyond what would be culturally expected.** And God will honor and work through that extraordinary love to eventually provide the very things that are lacking – food, a man, and an heir.

2) God's "hesed" works secretly

The second thing we learn about God's hesed is that **it often works secretly**. After losing her husband and sons, **Naomi becomes bitter, and as a result she is unable to see the good that God is doing in the midst of the suffering.** She is sure God is against her and has rejected her, saying "*The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.*" But in reality, God is very much at work for her good. **Because of her bitterness, she misses the grace she is being shown by God through the person of Ruth,** who clings to her and will not leave her, for it is through Ruth that God will bring her everything she thought she had lost forever. But God is always working for good. **Did he cause the men to die?** It doesn't say. He did allow it. But he has not left them alone, and he will bring good out of it.

It is hard to trust in God in the midst of suffering. When we think we are a good person who does not deserve suffering, we can easily become bitter and reject God. As the writer of Hebrews warns:

Hebrews 12:15 - See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

But when we recognize that we are a sinner to whom any good shown is grace, then we can find gratitude and trust that replaces the bitterness and despair. We can trust that God is working for good:

Romans 8:28 - And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28 is a rock to which we cling. Often when people reject God due to evil it is because they can not imagine that God would have any good reason for allowing that to happen. **But isn't it possible that God could have reasons that you can't fathom?**

"God is God. Because he is God, He is worthy of my trust and obedience. I will find rest nowhere but in His holy will that is unspeakably beyond my largest notions of what he is up to."

Elisabeth Elliot

One of my favorite quotes is from Donald Miller in his book, *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*:

“Somehow we realize that great stories are told in conflict, but we are unwilling to embrace the potential greatness of the story we are actually in. We think God is unjust, rather than a master storyteller.”

The best stories always seem like all hope is lost at some point, before things turn around. Patriots-Seahawks, Patriots-Falcons. Giants-Patriots. Trust that God is always working for good.

Let's continue in ch.2:

Ruth 2:1-23 - *Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz. ² And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter." ³ So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. ⁴ Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, "The LORD be with you!" "The LORD bless you!" they called back. ⁵ Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, "Whose young woman is that?" ⁶ The foreman replied, "She is the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi. ⁷ She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter." ⁸ 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 my servant girls. ⁹ Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled." ¹⁰ At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me-- a foreigner?" ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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." ¹³ "May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord," she said. "You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant-- though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls." ¹⁴ At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar." When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She*

ate all she wanted and had some left over. ¹⁵ As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, "Even if she gathers among the sheaves, don't embarrass her. ¹⁶ Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don't rebuke her." ¹⁷ So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. ¹⁸ She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough. ¹⁹ Her mother-in-law asked her, "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!" Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. "The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz," she said. ²⁰ "The LORD bless him!" Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. "He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead." She added, "That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers." ²¹ Then Ruth the Moabitess said, "He even said to me, 'Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.'" ²² Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with his girls, because in someone else's field you might be harmed." ²³ So Ruth stayed close to the servant girls of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

After returning to Jerusalem, Ruth begins gleaning to support the family. Gleaning was a way of caring for the poor while requiring them to work for their food.

Leviticus 19:9-10 - "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**. ¹⁰ Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.

This is another kind of disciplining love for the poor. And as she gleans, Ruth is noticed by Boaz, who is of the clan of Elimelech. A clan was a group of families descended from a common ancestor. Boaz is a wealthy landowner, a relative of Elimelech. Boaz notices her and makes sure she is protected. And he shows her hesed, generosity, giving her an ephah of barley, half a month's worth of food. **It turns out Boaz is a kinsman-redeemer.** We learn about that in Leviticus 25:

Leviticus 25:47-49 - 'If an alien or a temporary resident among you becomes rich and one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells himself to the alien living among you or to a member of the alien's clan, ⁴⁸ he retains the right of redemption after he has sold himself. One of his relatives may redeem him: ⁴⁹ An uncle or a cousin or any blood relative in his clan may redeem him. Or if he prospers, he may redeem himself.

A kinsman-redeemer was a close relative with certain duties toward the clan. He could repurchase property once owned by clan members but sold from economic necessity, in order to keep the clan's inheritance intact. He could redeem relatives whose poverty had

forced them to sell themselves into slavery. He would also if necessary provide them with offspring to inherit as well. And so Naomi hatches a plan:

Ruth 3:1-18 - One day Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for?" ² Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. ³ Wash and perfume yourself, and put on 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. ⁴ 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." ⁵ "I will do whatever you say," Ruth answered. ⁶ So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do. ⁷ When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. ⁸ In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet. ⁹ "Who are you?" he asked. "I am your servant Ruth," she said. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer." ¹⁰ "The LORD bless you, my daughter," he replied. "This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. ¹¹ And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character. ¹² Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I. ¹³ Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning." ¹⁴ So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, "Don't let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor." ¹⁵ He also said, "Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out." When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and put it on her. Then he went back to town. ¹⁶ When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, "How did it go, my daughter?" Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her ¹⁷ and added, "He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" ¹⁸ Then Naomi said, "Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today."

3) "Hesed" is beautiful and attractive

The third thing we see is the beauty and attractiveness of "hesed," of extraordinary love. Word has gotten around about Ruth's devotion and care for her mother-in-law, and Boaz is impressed by it and makes sure that they are taken care of. **Those who look out for self-interest may get ahead in life at times, but those who are of noble character and integrity will be recognized by the right people. And most importantly, they will know they are right with God.** In ch. 3, Naomi tells her to make herself alluring and to go to the threshing floor, where Boaz would be sleeping to protect the grain, and uncover his feet so the cool breeze would wake him up, and then to essentially propose marriage to Boaz. She appeals

to his sense of duty, asking him to cover her with a robe, like an engagement ring, to marry her and provide for their family. This is risky – she is a foreign woman proposing marriage to a wealthy landowner. But he sees that she has chosen family loyalty over love or money, and he is moved. V. 1 - they know she is a woman of noble character – *eschet chayil*. And he shows her extraordinary love. Remember **Proverbs 31:30** *Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.*

Our hearts long for that kind of extraordinary love. Verbal encouragement – you are a woman of noble character. Service – I will take care of your needs. Extraordinary love in the friendship between Ruth and Naomi. Naomi tells her to go back. Ruth sticks by Naomi. It's a love that loves extraordinary, and even loves enemies.

Luke 6:32-35 - *"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.*

Look at how God honors hesed, extraordinary love and devotion. This is God's greatest commandment – love God, love others. **Oh that our church would be known for this kind of love!** Directory, looking for those who are not here, prioritizing the newcomer, Sunday School & nursery.

Boaz is willing to redeem Ruth and her family. But there is a redeemer who is a closer relative, and so he has to go to the town gate first to meet with that man.

Ruth 4:1-22 - *Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there. When the kinsman-redeemer he had mentioned came along, Boaz said, "Come over here, my friend, and sit down." So he went over and sat down. ² Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, "Sit here," and they did so. ³ Then he said to the kinsman-redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. ⁴ I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line." "I will redeem it," he said. ⁵ Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property." ⁶ At this, the kinsman-redeemer said, "Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it." ⁷ (Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and*

gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.)⁸ So the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself." And he removed his sandal.⁹ Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon."¹⁰ I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records. Today you are witnesses!"¹¹ Then the elders and all those at the gate said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem."¹² Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."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.¹⁸ This, then, is the family line of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron,¹⁹ Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab,²⁰ Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon,²¹ Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed,²² Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.

Ironically, the man who is concerned about his name and reputation fades away anonymously into history, while Boaz and Ruth become part of the grand story of redemption. And Ruth gives the child to Naomi, who becomes like a foster-mom to Obed.

4) God's "hesed" is a redeeming love

Ultimately this is a story of redemption that points us to **the redeeming quality of God's love**. This family that had no money, no man, and no heir, is provided all of them graciously by God through Ruth's extraordinary hesed for Naomi, followed by Boaz's hesed towards Ruth and Naomi. In the same way, God takes what seems lost and brings life out of it. He purchases us back from slavery, from despair. He covers us with his blood and brings us into His family.

1 Peter 1:18-19 - For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Galatians 4:3-7 - So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.⁴ But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a

woman, born under law, ⁵ to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. ⁶ Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

Jesus laid down his life for hard-hearted, bitter unbelievers like Naomi. He left his father's country, heaven, to come and suffer for us. With his love, He covered us, redeemed us, and made us His.

Ezekiel 16:8 - "*Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine.*

Romans 4:7-8 - "*Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.* ⁸ *Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.*"

Because of His redeeming Heseed, we can trust Him to care for us and to always work for our good:

Romans 8:31-32 *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

Boaz was willing to risk his reputation to redeem Ruth and Naomi from poverty, and Jesus risked and gave his life to redeem us from sin and death. See the extraordinary, sacrificial love of Christ for you, and let that love transform you so that you might trust Him, even when you are suffering, and go and love others as He has loved you.