

# Surprised By Joy

*Book of Ruth*

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**Bible Text:** Ruth 1:7-18  
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Our text for this morning is verses 7 to 18. It's our third message in the book. We had an introduction to Ruth and then we had the first six verses that we looked at three weeks ago. I appreciate the two weeks off that I had from the pulpit and Stephen Gaines and Jess Arnds preaching God's word for us so well. It's good to be back with you and in the book of Ruth and so we read verses 7 to 18. The title for the message this morning is "Surprised By Joy." Surprised by joy. I borrow the title from C. S. Lewis's autobiographical account of his own salvation. As an atheist, a young man who was not looking for God, God saved him and he was surprised by joy and so I borrow that title because we're going to look at a passage this morning which really is a surprising account of salvation where Ruth, one of the most unlikely candidates, a Moabitess, comes to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ ahead of the cross, looking ahead to the salvation that would come from Yahweh. So surprised by joy, Ruth's salvation in surprising circumstances.

Let's read, we'll start in verse 6 just to give us a little of the context. You remember that Naomi, her husband and her two sons have died and now in verse 6,

6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food. 7 So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. 8 And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. 9 May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. 10 And they said to her, "No, but we will surely return with you to your people." 11 But Naomi said, "Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? 12 Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, 13 would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for

you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me." 14 And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. 15 Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law." 16 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. 17 Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me." 18 When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we come to your word this morning aware of our great need of grace. We come grateful that your promise of the Spirit, the same Spirit that inspired these words, is given to us to illuminate them in our minds and our hearts. We put all of our confidence in you and your power and your grace. Teach us what you would have us to learn. Show us more of so glorious a salvation through Jesus Christ. We pray in his name. Amen.*

So surprised by joy. We're going to have two major points this morning, but there are going to be some subpoints in each of the two points. The first point is going to have a lot of subpoints, it's going to be observing the action. That's the first thing we're going to try to do is observe the action in the story. And then secondly we're going to consider the implications and we're going to spend some time there considering the implications. So observe the action is the first major point and then we've got, let's see, seven subpoints under that and three subpoints under the next so we've got some ground to cover.

Observe the action. Now, when is this taking place? In the days of the judges. There are a couple of preliminary things before we even get into the first subpoint. We're told in the first verse, "in the days when the judges governed," or the days when the judges judged. These are spiritually dark days, difficult days socially, politically and, most of all, spiritually and morally. It's a tough day to be a follower of Yahweh.

Who is in the spotlight? We've said before that Naomi is actually the main character in the book of Ruth. Though it is named Ruth, she is the focal character. Now, Ruth we're going to see, is also coming to the spotlight and is right there as one of the main characters. They are the two main characters along with Boaz so there are three. But Naomi is first and foremost in front of us. In fact, you see this when you realize that like in verse 5 of chapter 1, we are told that, "the woman," Naomi, they are talking about Naomi here, "was bereft of her two children and her husband." And listen to the pronouns in verses 6 and 7, "Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food. So she departed from the place where she was." Do you see that the focus is on Naomi? It's what she is doing. Now, we're going to see in verse 7 that the spotlight does widen. In verse 7 when it says, "she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her," now the spotlight spreads out to include

them and it says then for the first time, the third person plural verb is used, "and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah." So it's Naomi and her two daughters-in-law.

Now, the circumstances of Naomi, we'll come to that in a moment, where they are on the way to return, verse 7, they are on the way to return to the land of Judah; they are on the journey from the land of Moab, the pagan land of Moab, across the Dead Sea on the other side of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea, from the land of promise, the land of Canaan. They had been over there for more than 10 years. She has lost her husband and her two sons and now she is coming back because she has heard there is bread in Bethlehem, there is bread in the house of bread. God has visited, the Lord has visited his people.

So she begins the journey. It's probably, depending on where exactly they are in the land of Moab, we're not sure, we're not told exactly where they are, it's probably a journey of between 30 and 60 miles. It is a difficult journey. It is a journey that is basically from a mountain down to the Dead Sea which is below sea level and then back up again to the hill country of Judah to Bethlehem. It's rocky terrain. It's a hard journey and it's probably a journey that, at that time, would take between 7 and 10 days just because of the nature. You can't cover that many miles when you're going down and up. You've got to be careful as you walk, and also for three women, particularly one elderly woman. So they have started on the journey and we pick up the action there in verse 8. The silence is finally broken by Naomi. So that's kind of the introductory setting.

Now let's consider seven subpoints as we observe the action. The first subpoint is: the gravity of their circumstances. The gravity of their circumstances. We are observing the action and this is 1A, the gravity of their circumstances. Verse 7, she, her two daughters-in-law with her, they are returning to the land of Judah. Now, Naomi, we've been told before, the picture that we had of her when we were just looking at her in the first six verses, is she was bereft, a key word we saw in verse 5, "The woman was bereft of her two children and her husband." That word "bereft," we noted the last time we were in this passage, is a word which speaks of a process of elimination, like devastation comes and that which is left is standing, bereft of everything else. A word picture or a visual image would be like a bombed out city with a building standing. That's the kind of force behind this word and it is used twice in the passage. It's used in verse 5, "bereft," it's also the word used in verse 3 when it says, "she was left with her two sons." So it's like the first bombing run happens and she loses her husband; the second bombing run happens and her husband and her sons are gone and she is standing. That's kind of the force of this word. A woman, a widow, an elderly woman alone without a man basically in an agrarian society, in a patriarchal society of that day, no man means no future. She has no future.

So we see her departing but we also now see her two daughters-in-law with her and they are in pretty much the same position. They are two women who have no husband and no sons. They are women in an agrarian society with no men and no future and so the picture of three widows making this arduous journey in hopes that they'll find food and sustenance, a difficult journey. You know, as we look at it with our modern eyes, contemporary eyes, we see three women that have gone through this kind of

circumstance, deeply distressing, this sad, awful predicament. As you watch the story unfold, you want something good to happen for them. But to the first readers of this, the Jewish readers who read as those who were in an agrarian society, when they see three widows traveling alone, this is a picture of the worst kind of suffering. I mean, this is hopelessness, helplessness, and so their hearts would go out to them. This is a hopeless predicament these three women are in. So that's the gravity of their circumstances.

Then the first thing that happens, the second subpoint, B under observing the action, 1B, is Naomi's kind act, verses 8 and 9. Naomi's kind act is that she loves her daughters-in-law enough to command them to leave and she is emphatic. There are two imperatives there in verse 8, "Go, return." This is a sense of tough love. She loves them, she needs them, she has no hope, and yet she knows that if she takes them with her, they're just coming along in a hopeless and helpless situation. Their best hope is, as she says, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house." It's actually interesting that she says "her mother's house." One of the commentators notes that normally you would have expected in contemporary literature of that day to say, "Go to your father's house," because you need a man, but the mother's house was already anticipating the fact, this is a word that is used often to describe a woman about to be married, "Go to your mother's house because that's where you're going to find your husband. She's going to find your husband for you." I guess good Moabite mothers were just like good Jewish mothers, they were going to find a man for their daughters. So she says, "Go to your mother's house."

So she gives these two commands and then she pronounces these two blessings in verse 8, "May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me." She asks the Lord in this pronouncement of blessing to show his lovingkindness. This is that wonderful rich word that is such an important word in this book and in the Bible is *chesed*, sometimes translated steadfast love, covenant faithfulness. It really takes a complex of English words to translate it properly. It really pictures mercy and grace and love and compassion all together. So, "May the LORD look at your distress," and it generally is used in context where one is in need and another in a position of strength is moved with compassion and love to help that person in need with no expectation of any return. So, "May the LORD look at you in your suffering and may his *chesed* be extended to you."

She goes on and pronounces another blessing in verse 9, "May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." She sees their great distress and she pronounces upon them this blessing of rest. Now, that word is an important word and we're going to see a little bit later that theologically this is a very significant word but in the concrete application which she means it, she is describing the distress that they have been under and are in. This idea of rest is something that we all long for, in fact, it's tied up with words of salvation in the Old Testament: the Sabbath rest of God. The Sabbath itself was a picture of salvation. We need rest. When sin came into the world, it created a condition of unrest; it created a condition of inner turmoil and conflict; it created a condition in which suffering and pain happened. You know, the kind of unrest that is described here that she is praying for the opposite of, is the sense, this word "rest" means "absence of movement; absence of spatial movement of any kind; and a sense of soothing

quiet and stillness." A picture is, you know, have you ever hurt yourself like you hit your finger with a hammer or you bang your toe? I've gotten good at that lately in the last few years. You bang your toe on a corner, what do you do? You start moving and hopping and shaking your hand. That's something physical that is a response to this pain, some way to deal with it, and so this idea of rest in Scripture comes to mean this inner busyness and this inner movement that is a response to great distress. So what she's praying and she's saying basically, "You have lost your husbands. You cared for them. You hoped maybe their illness would be turned around. You served them. You were striving in your heart, longing for them to be well. They died. Now we are frantic because we don't have food." It's also like to have to work hard to provide food. There is no easily available food and so they are not at rest. "May you find rest in the house of your husband. The great need that you have," Naomi says, "is a man so that you will have rest." So she pronounces this blessing and it's actually, as the readers, the first readers of this book would read it, they would be saying, "This is exactly what she should do." Naomi is being kind. She is being a good mother-in-law at this point.

So her kind act, that's the second subpoint. The third subpoint is: their response, verses 9 and 10. Here they respond together. It's the second half of verse 9, "Then she kissed them." After she has commanded them, "Go, return," and she has blessed them, "May God's kindness be upon you. May you find rest," she kisses them and what do they do? "They lifted up their voices and wept." Loud crying and wailing. This is a time of great sorrow. As they are being commanded to leave, the very thought of leaving her creates even more sorrow. It's sorrow upon sorrow. "And they said to her," in verse 10, "No, but we will surely return with you to your people." Here basically both ladies are speaking with one voice, Ruth and Orpah. "No, we will return with you." They love their mother-in-law. They obviously have a good relationship with their mother-in-law and they want to be with her. So that's a picture of Naomi's faithfulness and love to this point. Now that's the third point.

Now, the fourth point, move right on ahead to verse 11 into 13 is Naomi's second attempt at her kind act. Her kind act is to send them away so that they will have a future, even though it means that she is going to have to travel the rest of the way, maybe they're 10 miles along the way, maybe they're 5 miles along the way, maybe they are 15 miles along the way, she's still got a ways to go to get to Bethlehem and she is sending them home. So her second attempt in verses 11 to 13. When they say, "No, we will surely return with you," verse 11, Naomi says, "Return, my daughters," again the imperative, "Return."

Then she gives them reasons. She gives them two reasons and basically the first reason is, "I have nothing for you because what you need is a man and there is no way I can give you a man." That's what she's saying and the logic is almost humorous but you realize that it is the emotion of the moment is being reflected. She's saying, "Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?" Do you think I'm pregnant? "Return, my daughters! Go," there again, two more imperatives, "Return, go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, would you therefore

wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No." I have nothing for you. I can't give you what you need.

Then she gives the second reason you should leave, "No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me." Basically, "God is against me. It would be better for you to leave me because you're going to be caught up in the collateral damage." Naomi is kind of a mixed bag. She is a picture of faith but a picture of wavering faith. At times her bitterness is what stands out, her selfishness, but yet God works through her and this is one of the surprising things about this story is the Lord has worked through Naomi and is working through Naomi to bring Ruth to saving faith.

Now, we're up to our fourth, we have the gravity of their circumstances; Naomi's kind act; their response; fourthly, Naomi's second attempt. Now we come to the fifth point is two different responses, two distinct responses. Before, the two daughters-in-law had spoken with one voice but now there is a different response. Now, at first after she finishes in verse 13, "it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me," what is their response? Just like it was earlier in verse 9, "And they lifted up their voices and wept again." They're not just crying softly, they are wailing, and at first they are together. They are lifting up their voices and they wept again but now they have been walking along the same path but now there is a fork in the road and Orpah goes in one direction and Ruth goes the other. In fact, in the Hebrew it's even more emphatic in the word ordering, the way that the...you know, you can change the word order in Hebrew and Greek like many other languages, in the English we are a little more wooden with our word ordering. It's usually subject, verb most of the time. You know, we have to say, "Orpah kissed her mother-in-law." But in Hebrew it actually says, "kissed Orpah her mother-in-law." It's saying Orpah kissed her mother-in-law like we would say it but you can change the word order and emphasize it. So it says, "kissed Orpah her mother-in-law, Ruth clung," so that the names are right there beside "mother-in-law," emphasizing the distinction. So Orpah kissed, Ruth clung, and the author by putting it that way is helping even highlight the fact of this distinction. "Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her."

Now, to understand this the way it would have originally been read, there is nothing in the text that in any way condemns Orpah for what she has done. In fact, she has done the only reasonable thing humanly speaking. Naomi has offered the only reasonable course humanly speaking. Their best hope is to go to their mothers' houses and to be remarried and to have families so that they will have a future. And Orpah, though she loved her mother-in-law so much that initially she said no along with Ruth, now the logic of the circumstance has overtaken her and she submits to that. So it's not that Orpah does something bad, it's that Ruth does something glorious. Ruth's action for the first readers would have been absolutely stunning because as they read that for the first time, they would be expecting, "Yes, this is what must happen and, after all, these are two Moabite women. They need to stay in Moab. Yeah, it's about time, Naomi, you got back to Bethlehem to the land of promise." So Ruth's action is stunning. She clung to her. In fact, the word is interesting, it's the Hebrew word that is found in Genesis 2:24 when it says, "a

man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife." She cleaved to her; to cling to; to adhere to; to join oneself to. She is holding on to her for dear life. "No, I will not leave you."

That brings about the next point, number six: Naomi's third attempt at her kind act. She succeeded with Orpah. Orpah is now on the way home but she must try one more time with Ruth. "Then she said," in verse 15, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law." The emotion must be so thick at this moment, this woman facing a future that is completely dark and hopeless and yet trying to preserve these two young women she loves, wanting them to have a future. She pushes them away from her in her moment of need and she keeps pushing and she keeps pushing.

But then verses 16 to 17, like the words just lift up off the page in a glorious way that shows something, shows nothing less than the hand of God because this is a supernatural action that reflects a supernatural work of God. After hearing her mother-in-law again tell her to go after she had clung to her, Ruth says to her, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you." This is the seventh point: Ruth's surprising loyalty and what you see here is actually, you see *chesed* lived out right here, Ruth is expressing it; that word "*chesed*" I mentioned earlier, "lovingkindness, steadfast love." And we know that even the text tells us that because Boaz is going to tell us later when he meets Ruth and talks with her, "I heard about the kindness, the *chesed*, you showed...or this kindness that you're showing to me is better than the one you showed before." When she comes to him in the threshingfloor, he says, "This *chesed* you're showing me is even better than the *chesed* you showed Naomi." So he classifies what she did as *chesed* so the Scripture tells us that that kind of lovingkindness, she sees her mother-in-law in need, her mother-in-law's hopeless condition, and she is moved with compassion. Her heart also drawn by love for her mother-in-law and not just love for her mother-in-law but love for her mother-in-law's God, she is compelled to attach herself to her mother-in-law with this promise. And with this promise and the word "cling" before, this is why you find these words ironically often read at wedding ceremonies when what Ruth said to her mother-in-law is read as a part of the marriage ceremony. "Wherever you go, I will go. Where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people. Your God my God. Where you die, I will die and there I will be buried." And it is something like that. Her action is something like that kind of covenant loyalty. She had married her husband and now there is something about Naomi and Naomi's God that has drawn her and she pledges herself to Naomi with that kind of surrender.

"Your people," she talks about, you see the movement, first of all, "Where you go, I'm going to go. Where you lodge, I will lodge." Four verbs: go, go, lodge, lodge. And at the end, "Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried." Verbs again. In the middle are basically in Hebrew four nouns: your people, my people, your God, my God. "Your people" in Hebrew is one word. "My people" is one word. "Your God," one word. "My God, one word. And there are no verbs. It's basically, "Your people, my people. Your God," my God." It focuses in on what she is saying, "Your people are now my people and your God is my God," and this highlights the fact that this is nothing less than an

expression of faith, a testimony that she now is a follower of Yahweh. And it is lived out by the fact that she says that, these wonderful words, these wonderful promises, but then she adds to it an oath in Yahweh's name in verse 17, "Thus may the LORD," thus may Yahweh, the God of Israel, "Thus may Yahweh do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me."

What explains this? How can we understand this? This is nothing less than the saving hand of God. It's a picture of God's extravagant grace to Ruth but it's also a picture of God's extravagant grace to Naomi because she's the main character. And one of the things that is happening here is that we are seeing God loving on Naomi by saving Ruth. And the story, remember we talked about when you look at the book as a whole, what happens is Naomi is bereft, the bombing runs that the Lord sends upon her life happened: she loses her husband, she loses her sons and she is that one building standing. She goes to Bethlehem and she says, "I went out full and I have come home empty." It's a picture of emptiness. And what does the Lord do? He providentially works to give her back fullness so at the end of the book she says, "Now I am blessed in every way," and the ladies in Bethlehem say, "Your daughter-in-law Ruth is better to you than seven sons. You thought you went out full but you went out relatively speaking, empty. You went out with only three men, you came back with seven. That's what God did for you."

So really that's the overarching picture that is happening here, how the Lord brings fullness into...takes us from our emptiness and fills it with his goodness, and he does it in the most surprising ways, the most surprising ways, the most surprising circumstances and through the most surprising people. This would never have been anticipated and she hasn't, listen, she doesn't have a clue at the end of the chapter what God has done. I mean, we're going to see even here in verse 18, "When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her." What Naomi should be doing is embracing her and weeping and saying, "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! I can't believe you love me like this! I can't believe that Yahweh has moved in your heart like this!" But she's so focused on herself and her own pain at this moment that she hasn't even realized it. And you know it's even clearer when she gets to Bethlehem and she says, "I went out full and I came back empty." What about that lady with you? "I said, I came back empty. I've got nothing." You see, she doesn't realize what God is doing but Yahweh is being faithful to who he is. His chesed is on display and he does it through people. He saves this most unlikely person to bless the object of his affection, Naomi.

Now, we've observed the actions, let's consider the implications. Consider the implications, our second major point. There are three implications and essentially we're trying to ask the question: how are we to understand Ruth's conversion, her surprising conversion? How are we to understand the fact that she was surprised by joy and that Naomi is going to be surprised by joy because God has surprised Ruth with joy?

There are three things, first of all, the surprising power of an imperfect testimony. The surprising power of an imperfect testimony. Naomi's witness for the Lord is, at best, a mixed bag. I mean, think about it: she shows kindness to her daughters-in-law by telling them to go back. I mean, she's doing the exemplary thing that a woman who loves her



daughters-in-law should do, but she's so focused on her own pain that she says things like, "I've got nobody with me." And at moments she's so self-focused and so bitter that she's not seeing. She witnesses for the Lord. When she makes the statement in verse 8, "May the LORD deal kindly with you," now she's telling them, "Go back and return," where? "To Moab. And while you're there, may Yahweh bless you with his chesed." She's making a statement that a contemporary of hers would quickly understand. "Wait a minute, Moab is not the land of Yahweh, Moab is the land of Chemosh, the god of the Moabites." But Naomi is saying, "Listen, forget about Chemosh, you need Yahweh's blessing in Moab. Yahweh is the God of Moab as he is the God of Israel. He's the one true God." So she's making a wonderful statement of faith there. She's also telling that Yahweh is characterized by chesed. She's reflecting accurately who the Lord is. "May He deal kindly with you. It is His nature to look at people in misery and deal kindly with them." Even though at the same time she's sitting there, she's saying that, she's giving them a mixed bag, but she's acting like Yahweh has forgotten her, "Yahweh is not kind to me," isn't she? "I'm hopeless." But, you see, what we see is the power of an imperfect testimony because God has apparently, God always uses means to save people.

He makes this clear in Romans 9, the beautiful passage that shows us the glory of God's sovereign election, his free grace, he saves whom he wills, Romans 9. Romans 10 comes right after Romans 9. You might want to write that down. Those moments of insight just come. Romans 10, the Lord says, "how will they hear without a preacher?" He says, "How are people going to get saved unless you go and tell them?" "Wait a minute, I thought you were sovereign over?" "Yes, I am but I use means and I'm telling you to go." The Lord saves people through the testimonies of other people. He has chosen to speak to us through one another.

We would love to hear, this is how wacky and messed up we are, we would love to hear voices out of heaven all the time. Well, what God does is he puts his word in some other human being's mouth and he has that human being come to you and he's so wise in that because what it does is it humbles our pride. You have to listen to God's word through another frail human being that's a sinner just like you, a sinner just like me. We have to listen to them and we have to humble ourselves not only before God but before them because God has made them his mouthpiece.

Well, he saves people through the testimony of others, and how has he saved Ruth? He has saved Ruth through Naomi's testimony, her witness. I think not just the words that she said then but I think the life that she's lived. I mean, they suffered together. She may have been married for ten years to her husband. At least the better part of that time, she cared for her husband possibly with Naomi. They saw him die. She saw her sister-in-law care for Naomi's other son and die. And apparently watching Naomi's suffering, walking with her through long dark days, she saw what was read earlier, what Steven read earlier in 2 Corinthians 4 that when a person has been saved, we have treasure in clay pots. We have treasure in earthen vessels. It's a beautiful picture Paul is painting there in 2 Corinthians 4:7 and following. We have this treasure, that is, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. True knowledge of the living God. Through a relationship with Jesus Christ, his Spirit indwelling us, we have this treasure in earthen

vessels. Where do you see it? If you have treasure in an earthen vessel, how would you know treasure is in there? The picture that he gives in those verses after it, "we are afflicted in every way but not crushed; perplexed but but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed." What he's saying is, "The way you see what's inside a clay pot is you make holes in it, you make cracks in it, you break it not completely into pieces where it's still not a functioning clay pot, but you have cracks in it. You make holes in it and then you can see what's inside of it." And what makes cracks and holes in it is suffering.

So as Naomi suffered, Ruth saw that the faith that she had in Yahweh was something weighty and glorious in comparison to her light and weak faith in Chemosh, and she wanted what Naomi had. And God used that imperfect testimony. Isn't that encouraging? Because at our best, we just can offer imperfect testimony. Isn't it amazing how the Lord puts somebody in your life that you're sharing the Gospel with and our families are this way too, we try to disciple our families and they see our weaknesses, our flaws, but sometimes you have somebody, an unbeliever that you're really making some progress with and the next thing you know, you lose your temper or you do something stupid in front of the unbeliever that you're trying to witness to and talk to about Jesus. You think, "Oh no, it's all over. I've really blown it." Well, what you need to do is humble yourself and ask their forgiveness and let them see that you're just a clay pot just like them. And in doing that, in humbling yourself and asking their forgiveness and loving Jesus in the sense of knowing that he has forgiven you and humbling yourself before them, what they see is they see through that crack the treasure inside of you and God uses that kind of thing to save people. Even our failures he uses and narrow down to the praise of the glory of his grace because in the end, what happens is, there is no hero worship when someone is truly saved. There is no hero worship because there's only one hero and his name is Jesus and all of us, we're just clay pots. Naomi was a clay pot but God used her.

So we see the surprising power of an imperfect testimony. The second implication is the surprising reach of God's grace. One of the beautiful refrains throughout this book is the phrase, "Ruth the Moabite." Five times. It's like the author never wants us to forget that Ruth is Ruth the Moabite. Now, her name does occur 12 times: five of those 12 though, she's referred to as "Ruth the Moabite."

Look with me at chapter 1, verse 22, "So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabite." Now don't we already know that Ruth is a Moabite? We're clear on that. In fact, it had been emphatic in the first two verses we already saw, "The land of Moab. The land of Moab. The land of Moab." Where did they come from? The land of Moab. Ruth and Orpah are what? Moabites. The author does not want us to forget that. Verse 22, I just said "Ruth the Moabite," chapter 1, verse 22. Chapter 2, verse 2, "And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi." Now, "Ruth said to Naomi," wouldn't that have been enough? Are there two Ruths with Naomi? No, there is only one. "Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi," chapter 2, verse 2. Chapter 2, verse 21, "Then Ruth the Moabite said," in talking to Boaz. Ruth the Moabite again. Chapter 4, verse 5 and chapter 4, verse 10 Boaz calls her "Ruth the Moabite." "On the day you buy the field," chapter 4, verse 5, "from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabite." Chapter 4, verse

10, "Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess." Chapter 2, verse 6 when Boaz comes back from town out to his gardens, he finds his workers and he asks about the young woman and they say, "She is the young Moabite woman." The author of Ruth is amazed at the surprising reach of God's grace; that the Lord has not only reached out to a pagan, but of all pagans, he's reached out to a Moabitess to save her and to use her for his glory.

I mentioned before that, remember, Moab was the son of Lot and his own daughter. After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot's daughters get him drunk and have relations with him so that they can have children and the firstborn daughter has a son named Moab and Moab means essentially "from father." That's the name. The name itself means incest. Deuteronomy 23:3, no Ammonite or Moabite can come into the congregation of God for ten generations, indeed forever. They should not be able to come in but here what we see is that God's grace goes beyond even what should be. It's the beauty of God's grace. No Moabite should ever get into the temple room of God, should never get into the presence of God, and yet God is bringing one home right now in Ruth. You see this throughout the Old Testament, in fact. I mean, what should have happened to David when he sinned immorally and killed Uriah the Hittite and committed sexual immorality? He should have been killed but God sets aside his laws and for the purpose of his grace because he was going to punish that sin one day in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and he's going to remove the curse of Moab for all time when his Son became a curse for us on the cross.

"There is a wideness to God's mercy,  
Like the wideness of the sea.  
There's a kindness in his justice,  
Which is more than liberty."

And it's true for everyone who truly knows the Lord Jesus Christ. If you've been saved, you know that you were once dead in your trespasses and sins and you should have been beyond the reach of his mercy. But the surprising reach of God's grace.

Thirdly, there is a surprising blessedness of profound pain. This is the most counterintuitive of all of them. We've said the surprising power of an imperfect testimony, the surprising reach of God's grace, the surprising blessedness of profound pain. Just thinking of it from Ruth's vantage point, Ruth has experienced great pain, great personal family pain. Her hopes and dreams have been shattered. She has no man. She has no future. She has not only gone through that herself, she's seen it happen in her family. She came into a family where Naomi had just lost her husband. She saw her sister-in-law, who was like a sister to her, lose her own husband. And she has experienced this incredible devastation. She's also one of those buildings standing after the bombing run but the Lord used it in her life and this is one of the ways of God. His ways are not our ways. His ways are higher than our ways. We would never choose it this way but he knows best.

I mentioned earlier the word "rest." When Naomi pronounces that blessing, "May you each find rest in the house of your husband," Orpah listened to her and found rest in this life. Orpah listened to her and made the logical human decision to seek rest in this life and she went back to the house of her mother and probably she got married again, had kids, raised them and lived a reasonably happy life. But where is she today? Apart from Christ she's in hell. Ruth heard those same words but there is something about pain, profound pain, that gives an insight, a depth of insight into the reality of what is truly real. When you hurt, when you hurt in a profound way, prolonged, profound pain, it convinces you that this world is not what we are tempted to believe it is. It is not our home and it can never satisfy and God uses suffering to show us that.

This is why he subjected the world to futility. In Romans 8, it talks about the fact that the Lord as a result of sin, and we know why is there suffering in the world? Because of sin. Yes. Why is there pain in the world? Because of evil. Yes. If there was no evil, there was no sin, there would be no suffering, there would be no pain, but when God chose to judge sin with pain and suffering and death, what was in his mind? Grace and compassion because he knew that if sinful man were left without pain and without suffering and without physical death, we would never have stopped to ask what's really wrong with us. It was our physical pain, the problems in this world, though the world is still beautiful and glorious, it's marred and the marring and the disfigurement is over everything as well, and it is there to get us to ask, "What is wrong with this world? What is wrong with me?" What is wrong with me?

And so the Lord used her pain to create in her a sense of inner unrest. "I need to find a rest that's deeper than just knowing what I'm going to eat and just knowing that I have a roof over my head and that I have an earthly future. I need an eternal future. What's going to happen to me after I die?" This world is not what it's supposed to be and God uses suffering to open hearts, to till the soil of the heart, to make us start asking those questions, to make us ready for the witness of the Gospel.

So this sense of profound pain created in her a desire for true rest and I mentioned, it's one of the pictures of salvation. It's kind of a collage of words that the Lord as he's prattling with us, I mentioned that phrase before, Calvin said that, that God speaks to us in his word, it's like baby talking with us. He's speaking truth but he's an infinite being, how can we finite beings understand an infinite being? Because the infinite being stoops down and speaks to us just like you stoop down and speak to your child and you communicate truly with them. "No more Cheerios" means, I don't know why you would say that, "No more candy means no more candy." They don't have to know all the physical properties of candy and chocolate and how that's bad for you. They don't have to know all of that but they know, "No more candy means no more candy." Truly. Why? Because you, as someone who understands all of that, stoops down to their level and you may even have to come up with some baby talk word. "No MM's," rather than M&M's, I don't know. But you stoop down to speak to them. God stoops down to speak to us in the Bible.

So what he does is he starts explaining to us in the same way we raise up a child to come to understand more and more concepts. You learn calculus by first starting off with 2+2, and then you add in 4-3, and then you add in multiplication and division, etc. all the way through algebra and geometry and trigonometry and finally you get to calculus. Well, you do that by building upon things and so the Lord builds upon things and one of the ways he builds our picture of what salvation is, is through a collage of concepts in the Old Testament. And two of the key words that are used as part of this collage we're going to talk about are "peace and rest." Peace and rest. Shalom of God. Rest of God. The Shabbat. Also here the word "the nuach of God," that what man needs is to be at peace with God, the absence of conflict and to have rest in his presence. And the Lord at the very beginning showed that salvation was going to encompass rest when he rested on the seventh day after he created the world. He creates the world in six days and he stops to rest. Why does he need to rest? Is God tired? He's not tired. He doesn't get tired. He rested and reflected on his works because he was going to create the Sabbath as a time for us to rest with him and reflect on his works and so when he gives the law in Exodus 20:11, he uses the word "nuach from which we get the word "rested" here in this chapter in chapter 1 when she says, "May you find rest in the home of your husband." It's the same word. So "rest" and "peace" are pictures of salvation. When you're at peace with God, you have rest. There is no striving. There is no worry. There is no fear. There is no anxiety. There is a sense of rest, wholeness and wellness.

So Ruth has chosen the eternal rest over the earthly rest. She's done what you find in the book of Hebrews where Moses chose, for instance, to be treated as an Israelite and scorned by the Egyptians rather than enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season. Why? For he was looking for the reward. He was looking for the rest of God. He was looking for the city whose builder and maker is God. Hebrews 3 and 4 talks about the Sabbath. In fact, chapter 4, it says there in verse 9, "there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God." What is that? That is when we enter into his presence forever there will be rest. No more striving. No more straining. We'll still be working but there won't be striving and straining. We'll have jobs to do in heaven but it will be completely restful and joyful and peaceful. It's the salvation that Ruth was working for, the tribulation of her life helped to realize that what she needed was rest and rest is found through Jesus Christ.

He said, "there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God." How do you enter it? The one who enters God's rest has ceased from his own works. That's what happens when you get saved. You stop working and you trust in Jesus and you look at his finished work, you place all of your trust in what he has done, his perfect life, his atoning death, his resurrection, and you surrender to him and you come into fellowship with him and you enter into rest. That's what he has created us for. That's what we all long for. And we are so forgetful and even as Christians, don't we continually forget? We forget that we need to be resting in him every moment. Our home is in heaven.

I'm going to read one last statement from a commentary that was just helpful to me. He says, Alford's Commentary, "Ruth's devotion to Naomi caused her to cast aside all concern for her future and security and to break the bonds even of covenant community. She cast aside all of her concerns for earthly welfare." He goes on to say that in the epic,

the entire epic of Israel, only Abraham himself matched such radical commitment as Ruth. But he had a direct audible call from God, she did not. So Ruth, in a sense, stands alone. No God had audibly called her but she lives and chooses to follow Yahweh, to go with this woman no matter what is going to happen. She leaves the land of her fathers and she goes to the land the Lord is showing her and then she gives birth to a son, who gives birth to a son whose name is David. The glory of God's grace. Surprised by joy, the most surprising circumstances, God works savingly. That's the kind of God he is.

Let's go to him in prayer.

*Our Father, we praise and honor you. We marvel that you are a God who has such infinite wisdom that you know how to deal with us, you know, Lord, that we do need to not have everything go well for us like we would like. We find ourselves praying, Lord, make this go well, make this go smoothly, and there is nothing wrong with us asking those things but what we ought to be asking at the end of that is, but not my will but your will be done. You know best. Help us to rejoice in you always, to give thanks in everything. We pray for those that are here today that have not surrendered to Christ, that you would help them to surrender today their hearts in repentance and faith, turning from their sins, turning from living for themselves, and placing all of their hope in Jesus, realizing that what matters is not the cares of this world but the life to come. Help us all to be more faithful followers of Yahweh. We pray in his name. Amen.*