

Lake Cities Community Church
Series: Book of Ruth. Living Above and Beyond –
Living a Life of HeseD.
Pastor Craig Schill
10-7-07

Happy Endings

Ruth 4:13-22

Do you believe in happy endings? Personally I like happy endings. If you gave me a choice between a happy ending or a tragic ending – I will pick the happy ending every time.

But isn't it funny that most of the really great books of literature are tragedies? Take the John Steinbeck novel, *Grapes of Wrath* – I read this classic about a year ago. I kept waiting for the Joad family to find work in California –to be treated fairly –to have enough food to eat – but they never found steady work – they were taken advantage of and for 619 pages were on the brink of starvation...and then the book ended –a tragedy! The word tragedy comes from the Greek and means, “Song of the Goat” – it is the hypothetical song a goat might sing as it is led to slaughter. Today, a tragedy means “A story dealing with an unhappy ending.”

Why am I talking about tragedies when our sermon is titled “Happy Endings?” Today we will see everything is going to work out this morning – the baby will be born – the widows taken care of.

But the ending of our book it raises an interesting question – “Do you believe in happy endings?” Is that a reasonable expectation for your life? You might say – it is great it worked out for them – but that was a special situation – God doesn't normally work that way. “Do you believe in happy endings?”

We will come back to that question – as we open our text today we will first examine, one last act of HeseD, second, we will look at the great legacy of Ruth and Boaz and then conclude this series with three lessons that I pray will stay with us for years to come.

Last Act of Hesed (Ruth 4:13-17a)

Look with me at verse thirteen – *one last act of hesed*. Notice the sequence of events. Verse 13 – “**the Lord allows Ruth to conceive a son**” – through the normal course of marriage. We are reminded here that Ruth was married for 10 years to his first husband without children – and here the Lord blesses her with a child. From this point – the focus turns to Naomi. Verse 14 – Naomi is blessed – “**the Lord has not left her without a redeemer.**” Who is the redeemer? Not Boaz – but the child! Look at it – verse 15 – the child will be “**restorer of life**” - the child will bring life where there was once death and extinction, and he will be a “**sustainer of life**” a provider for her in her old age. And all this is possible because, of Ruth who loves Naomi. The word here is not hesed – but the more traditional Hebrew word for love – *ahava*. This is the name of one of our Community Life groups. Ruth gets her praise – she has been better than 7 sons (7 is the number of perfection) – even if you had the perfect number of sons – this one woman – this one Moabite woman – Ruth is better.

Verse 16 – then “**Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse.**” Nurse here means she is going to be the caregiver of the child. Verse 17 - The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, “**A son has been born to Naomi.**” So they named him Obed – which means servant, mostly likely named for the role he will have providing for Naomi.

Now we need to pause here and ask – *Why did the women say a son had been born to Naomi?* Wasn't the son born to Ruth? Why, now is all the attention on Naomi? Interestingly, you could make an argument that the main character in this book is not Ruth but Naomi. It is from Naomi's perspective that the events in chapter one unfolded. It was for Naomi that hesed in chapters two and three were carried out. And now in chapter four – we read the son is born to Naomi – when clearly the son was born to Ruth.

From my study it appear that there are at least three possibilities. First, it could be just a euphemistic way of saying “Grandchild.” Like when Grandma says – “That’s my boy!” Second, it could be a literary device to highlight the fact that the problem of extinction is solved – Son means descendents – Naomi’s family has heir!

But I prefer the third view which is that Ruth’s last and perhaps greatest act of hesed was to give her firstborn son to Naomi to raise as her own. That is – this first child conceived take on the role of the deceased Mahlon and Chilion. He is now Naomi’s descendent – she may have even adopted him. You may give up your country and your culture. You may give yourself to hard work for the sake of another. You may give up your other marital options. But would you give up your child? What a breathtaking act of hesed!

Lasting Legacy (Ruth 4:17b-22)

That is I believe the last act of hesed in our story – *but there remains a tremendous legacy* – look at verses 17b through 22. We learn that “Obed is the father of Jesse, the father of David.” And verses 18-22 expand on this fact lineage – tracing the line of Perez – the mother of the tribe of Judah – to Obed, and Jesse and David.

Some People complain that our beautiful narrative story ends with such a boring list of names. But these are in some ways the most important verses in the story. Sinclair Ferguson captured it well: The final words of the book of Ruth are actually the most important in the book...they set the previous four chapters in an entirely new light! This is storytelling at its best, when the punch line is at the end and takes us completely by surprise! This is David’s family tree. Yes, *that* David...in a sense the book is not ultimately about Naomi, or Ruth, or Boaz, or even Obed. It is about the great king is Israel! - Sinclair Ferbuson, *Faithful God*, 144-45.

Without Ruth's hesed love – there would be no Boaz, and no Obed, and no Jesse and No David. The book starts with Elimelech which means My God is Kind and ends with David – the man who became King and lead us to the King of Kings.

Lessons from the book of Ruth

We have looked at Ruth's last act of hesed, and have seen the great legacy of Ruth and Boaz. As we conclude this book and this series – I have three lessons I pray we will linger with us as individuals and as a church family.

The first lesson comes from chapter one – it is **Endure through difficulty** – While the book of Ruth has a very happy ending it started with great tragedy. A key message of the book of Ruth is don't give up – endure. The book of Ruth illustrates for us the clear teaching of the NT – which is when you face hard times, suffering, affliction, persecution – you endure!

Kenneth Pike was Born in 1912. Was weak and nervous as a child, awkward in movement and often sick. His heart was to be a missionary in Mexico, to take God's word to those who had never heard. He Excelled at Gordon College, and was accepted as a candidate with China Inland Mission, but was reject for mission service. Why? His nervous disposition and his difficulty in language, in ability to grasp pronunciation.

But he endured through this set-back. He began writing to every mission board he could think of, seeking to serve God. Despite his difficulty with languages, that was, ironically, the area he felt called to serve. Only one replied, Wycliffe Bible Translators. He went to their training camp in 1935. A Wycliffe official when observing the frail young man prayed to himself: "Lord couldn't you have brought something better than this?"

But Cam Townsend, the founder of Wycliffe, saw something besides the frail exterior – a love and potential for language skills and a heart for missions. And so Townsend invested his life into young Pike.

Pike's first assignment Mexico where he made significant headway as a linguist. He returned to the states and pursued further linguistic study and received a PhD in linguistics from the University of Michigan. He now taught new missionaries with Wycliffe and was President of their Summer Institution of Language. He quickly became one of the world's foremost linguists and expert in phonetics. He was a key part of Wycliffe's success in those early years. During his ministry Wycliffe expanded into over 50 countries. He wrote 20 books, 200 articles and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize 16 times. Yet he was a modest and humble man.

Dr. Eric Hamp of the University of Chicago wrote, "It is fair to say something like one-half of all the raw data from exotic languages that has been placed at the disposal of theoretical linguists in the past quarter-century can be attributed to Kenneth Pike. In Pike's words: "I've done this (work) to serve God with both mind and heart, as Jesus told us to do."

It would have been easy for Pike to have quit – Circumstances were against him, authority figures were against him. The doors were not opening – but he did not quit – by faith he pressed on through the fog of uncertainty. Do you need to hear this message today? It is a message for you and for our new church. We have our blessings and joys – but we also have problems and challenges. Let's work through them together.

I believe in happy endings because God's people are called to endure through difficulty to arrive at blessing on the other side – At the end of it all, we will be blessed forever in the presence of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

The second lesson I desire for us to learn is: **Believe in God's Sovereignty** – and I would add - he works through the daily events of life. Did you know there are no miracles in the book of Ruth? God is there and he is sovereign, but just off stage. Just out of sight. He ends the famine, presumably through natural means – it began to rain. He provides Boaz and Ruth a child through natural means or marriage. But in every chapter, in every verse we sense that God is there, guiding this narrative - leading through the daily events of life.

Hubbard says, “In this book, Yahweh does not guide human affairs through intermittent miracles followed by long periods of apparent retreat. Rather His activity is hidden behind the actions of human agents... Yet He is presumed to be the implicit, immanent cause of events. Hence God is the cause of even the smallest “accidental” details of life. - Hubbard, *Ruth*, p.69-70

Consider this new potential facility for us – There was no miracle here – the door was first closed, and then opened. Through the hard work of many people, Lord willing, we will begin worshipping there in a few weeks. Now, we don't know how long we will be there, we don't know the impact this will have on us as a church. But I am so excited about it because I believe that the sovereign of the Universe is at work – He works through the normal events.

I believe in happy endings – because God is sovereign. He works all things to the pleasure of His will – most of the time through the rhythm of life, sometimes through miracles – but ultimately to His glory.

Finally and most importantly – I desire that you as an individual and us as a church live lives that go Above and Beyond – That we **Live a life of hesed**. I want *hesed* to be ingrained in our church's vocabulary. We don't need a lot of Hebrew and Greek, but we need some. We need the word *hesed*– that loyal love, generous love.

Do you remember the illustration I used a couple weeks ago about the blind pole-vaulter who set the bar 9 inches higher than he ever had before – That was an illustration of going above and beyond what is expected. Another illustration that comes to my mind is superheroes. Every summer we pack these movie theaters to watch them display their extra-ordinary gifts. They go above and beyond physically – they leap buildings in a single bound. They help people and save people from danger with their super strength.

I think Christians who practice *hesed* are true superheroes. We are to go above and beyond also – not with super strength, but with super love! The miracle that our world needs to see is the Christian practice of love - Love that is not explainable. Love that leaves us with our mouths open. Love that dazzles and attracts and touches hearts. Love that goes above and beyond. Faith, hope and love – the greatest my friends - is Love. That is what Christianity is all about.

I can't promise that you will have a happy ending in this life – that everything will work out the way it did for Ruth and Boaz – Though it sometimes does, the Bible does not promise that to us – but *I do believe in our ultimate happy ending – because Jesus demonstrated that love to me, and that which I have received, I freely share with the world.*

O the deep, deep love of Jesus
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free!
Rolling as a mighty ocean
In its fullness over me.
Underneath me, all around me,
Is the current of thy love;
Leading onward, leading homeward,
To my glorious rest above.