

**Scandal in the Family**  
**Ruth 4:1-22**

Friends, its wonderful when stories have happy endings isn't it? When we hear a story with a happy ending it helps us to believe that there can be happy endings in our own lives as well. That in spite of whatever challenges and hardships we might face – there will be something good that comes out of it and it will all have been worth it.

And the story of Ruth certainly delivers in this regard. Four weeks ago when we began this series the story began with Naomi and her family leaving Bethlehem to go in search of greener pastures elsewhere, and they end up losing everything. Tragedy!

So, Naomi must return to Bethlehem now a poor bitter widow with only her foreign daughter-in-law for company, a person that would be a reminder that she had walked away from the Promised Land, from her God and his people.

Don't call me Naomi, she says – it means pleasant, but Yaweh has made my life very bitter! So call me Mara.

But what a difference four chapters later into the story! Things have really turned around and Naomi's story has a happy ending after all.

They have found a guardian redeemer, and not only is he kind and generous. He is willing to buy back their land and take Ruth to be his wife. And the Lord gives Ruth and Boaz a son

Naomi came back empty but now she has been filled up once again – the Lord has done more than she could imagine in her life.

So the story ends, the music plays, the credits roll, the lights come up and we leave the theatre with a good feeling in our hearts because we've been encouraged that happy endings do exist, and if they can happen for others there is hope that God will do the same for us.

But friends, the story of Ruth is much more than a simple heart-warming tale of a Moabite princess who goes from riches to rags, and marries into a poor Israelite family and then she

and her mother-in-law find redemption by having Boaz come to their rescue - a nice happy ending.

No, this story is part of a much larger story, and God doesn't want us to miss this, so as the happy ending is celebrated there are certain names which are mentioned. People from the past are brought up and connected to the story of Ruth

And these people are connected because they are ancestors in the family tree, and because they share the common theme of "scandal" with Ruth and Naomi. These are scandalous ancestors; they are remembered for something in their life that was not quite right, something shameful. So let's take a look at who they were...

The story of Rachel and Leah

The first people mentioned are Rachel and Leah – and just by the order in which the names are presented you get a hint at what was going on. Leah was the older of the two sisters, but Jacob was in love with Rachel. And on the night of the wedding their father played a trick on Jacob and gave him Leah

as his wife. *Lest we feel too sorry for Jacob, we should remember he's simply getting his just desserts for tricking his own brother out of his inheritance and his father's blessing.*

So what to do – it's too late to undo the marriage, but Leah's not who Jacob wanted. So He ends up marrying Rachel as well. But Leah's the one who has all the kids; And Rachael eventually has only two – Joseph and Benjamin.

Two wives, not quite the way God intended for marriage to be, a recipe for fighting and conflict in the family. There is fighting between the wives and their children and it all leads to that infamous "coat of many colors" and Joseph being sold into slavery in Egypt.

Yet in spite of this colorful family history – Rachel and Leah as the story of Ruth mentions, built up the nation of Israel.

Now who is Tamar and what is she famous for?

Tamar was a Canaanite daughter-in-law of Judah, the fourth son of Leah and Jacob. Judah's son Er had died and left Tamar

without a child. So Judah told his other son, Onan to fulfill his duty as a brother-in-law and give Tamar a child. But Onan only used Tamar for pleasure and he wouldn't get her pregnant – so the bible says God put him to death!

Now Judah had another son – who was much younger. Judah promised Tamar that he would become her husband when he grew up. So Tamar waited, but Judah did not keep his promise.

So, Tamar took matters into her own hands – she disguised herself as a prostitute and seduced Judah into sleeping with her and she became pregnant, and Judah had no idea who she was.

When Tamar's pregnancy became visible, she was accused of prostitution. Judah was furious with her for this and wanted to have her put to death. But Tamar had secured some of Judah's personal effects when she seduced him so she used these to let Judah know that it was his child she was carrying, and Judah then realized that he had neglected to fulfill his promise to her and give her his son for a husband, so he let her be.

And it was Tamar's son Perez that became the prominent descendent and his was the leading family in the Tribe of Judah.

Now there's one more story to tell – but to know about this you had to be one of the townspeople who was in the know. We don't find out about it in this last chapter. We only find out about it when the gospel of Mathew begins with the details of Jesus' family tree,

<sup>1</sup> This is the genealogy<sup>[a]</sup> of Jesus the Messiah<sup>[b]</sup> the son of David, the son of Abraham:

<sup>2</sup> Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob,

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

<sup>3</sup> Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,

Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram,

<sup>4</sup> Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon,

Nahshon the father of Salmon,<sup>5</sup> Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,

Obed the father of Jesse, <sup>6</sup> and Jesse the father of King David.

Now you might notice the similarity this bears to the genealogy in the book of Ruth, but it also includes a significant detail not mentioned in Ruth. Here we discover that Boaz's mother was Rahab - the famous prostitute from Jericho, the one who hid the Israelite spies when they were scouting out the Promised Land and kept them safe. And for this act of faith her life was spared when Joshua fought the battle of Jericho and "the walls came a tumblin' down."

So, we see that the story of Ruth is connected to some other stories and that these stories aren't all that glamorous, and in some cases they are the stories that don't make it into the children's story bible!

But why is this important for us to know about?

Because friends, if you or someone you know and love is going through circumstances in your life right now where there may be doubt as to whether or not it will come to a happy ending, and maybe those circumstances are somewhat scandalous or a

bit sensational – you've lost a job, you've gone through a bad break-up, you're dealing with the consequences of bad decisions –whatever it is...

You need to be reassured that the happy ending in Ruth is not simply a "one-off" episode in the bible. No, it's part of a larger pattern that we find in the scriptures where in spite of scandalous situations - God is still present! And He is working behind the scenes to bring hope into people's lives, and He will use them to be a part of His plan to save the world! Even if there has been something scandalous – that's God's grace and mercy at work.

And friends, I don't think that we can be reminded of that too many times because our sinful nature always wants to go back to the place where we feel that we need to have things all together in order for God to love us, let alone use us!

And the devil is working overtime to convince us of this as well – Always reminding us of the "scandals" in our own lives, waving them in front of our faces, taunting us. Whispering to us that if people found out about some of the things we've done

we'd wish the ground would open up and swallow us, we'd be so ashamed to have others know about it.

And so we keep these areas locked away, we don't care to think of them or remember them, and we keep up our guard because we certainly wouldn't want others to know about them and deep down we believe that God is disappointed in us because them, that He'd be more pleased with us if we hadn't done these things. So we try very hard to never make those mistakes again, and we mostly succeed, and ironically that when we think we're being good Christians.

But friends, the story of Ruth and these other stories in the bible show us that it's precisely through our mistakes, our sins, in the times of scandal in our lives that God acts and works miracles in our lives.

If we won't open up about them, if we can't bring them to God – we won't experience His grace – all we'll experience is our own self righteousness, our own efforts, but we won't know the forgiveness, the mercy, the grace of Jesus Christ and we won't be filled with the gratitude that comes from this experience.

It's almost like the happy ending doesn't come unless it's been preceded by some tragedy or scandal, and the characters who face up to their part in it, who are honest about it they receive the grace and mercy, but those who try to hide it or cover it up prevent themselves from experiencing the happy ending.

The story of Ruth makes no attempt to hide anything scandalous, to keep any skeletons from getting out of the closet. It's a story where people are who they are and they know they are in need of God's help, his grace and mercy, and they receive it and celebrate it.

And this pattern in the story of Ruth continues – because many years later, another young woman who has been scandalized comes to Bethlehem. She is a young woman who is engaged and she becomes pregnant – but no one will believe that her fiancé is not the father – that instead she bears the Son of the Most High in her womb.

Friends many years later when Mary, engaged to a descendent of Ruth and Boaz, a descendent of King David, comes to

Bethlehem, she and Joseph find no rooms for rent and Mary gives birth to the Messiah in a stable.

Friends, the scriptures say God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 1 Corinthians 1:27

That's good news for anyone who is waiting for a happy ending, who is struggling in life because of things which they are ashamed of.

And if you think hey great news for the weak people but what about me – I'm strong, I'm wise – well my friend just take a closer look at yourself,

dig a bit further back in your closet and you'll find that you too are foolish and weak too-

but that's good news because that's precisely where you need to be, in order for God to write your happy ending. Because the story of Ruth – is our story as well. Amen