

When Benjamin Franklin was the Ambassador to France, he occasionally attended the Infidels Club -- a group that spent most of its time searching for and reading literary masterpieces. On one occasion Franklin read the book of Ruth to the club, but changed the names in it so it would not be recognized as a book of the Bible. When he finished, the listeners were unanimous in their praise. They said it was one of the most beautiful short stories that they had ever heard, and demanded that he tell them where he had run across such a remarkable work of art. He loved telling them that it came from the Bible!

And, because this love story is in the Bible, it's more than just a romance novel. Romans 15:4 says, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." Paul is referring here to the Old Testament, including the book of Ruth. That means we'll be taught, we'll be more able to endure tough times, and we'll be encouraged as we learn together. In the process, we'll grow in hope. What lesson will we learn today? God's Faithful love is Seen Through Faithful People."

One of these faithful people is a woman named Naomi. Naomi, was a godly woman, a wife, and the mother of two sons. She and her family leave Palestine and move to the foreign land of Moab, because of a famine. Moab was a land of rich soil and adequate rainfall so this would be a good place to raise crops which wouldn't fail. After being in Moab for a time, Naomi loses her husband in death. Fortunately, she had two boys to help provide for the family. These boys married Moabite girls. But oneday, both boys died, leaving behind 3 widows. Because they had neither food nor money and no certainty of what the future might hold, Naomi chose to return to Bethlehem, her homeland.

On the way, Naomi suddenly stopped to tell Ruth and Orpah that they should return to their homes in Moab because there they would have the chance to marry again. Both Ruth and Orpah protested, but Naomi was insistent. Finally, Orpah gave in and returned home, but Ruth would not leave Naomi, her mother-in-law and friend. Ruth speaks those familiar words:, *'Do not urge me to leave you or to return 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. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.'* With these words, Ruth is determined and declares that the God of the Hebrews will be her God. She will bow to Him, worship Him and serve Him. He will guide her every step and movement. She will live under His banner of love, protection and provision.

Do you see God's faithful love in this story toward these two women? Ruth, was at one point, an unbeliever from Moab. She had worshiped Chemosh, a pagan God. But by the witness of her mother-in-law or the 10 years she spent with her Christian husband, she was brought to faith in the True God, with a promise of a Savior, who would be born in Bethlehem. When she and Naomi get back to Bethlehem, Ruth goes out in the fields to get the leftovers there, after the harvesters go through. The Lord makes sure that she finds the necessary food so she and her mother-in-law can survive. They will make it. Try to put yourself into this situation. Your house has been foreclosed. You have been evicted. You have no money in the bank. Forced to survive on the streets, you are literally living from hand to mouth. Moving from one friend's house to the other. Finally, your friends don't want you living with them, so you are out on the streets, truly homeless. You cry a lot. You alternate between feelings of bitterness and hopelessness. And although you are a believer, you are angry with God for letting this happen. Never before have you felt so helpless, so alone. You look forward to nothing. Then something shocking transpires. A relative learns of your sad condition, takes matters into his own hands,

and undoes everything. Your future, your fortunes, and your outlook are restored as suddenly as they disappeared. Best of all, the emotional pain is gone. You once again have hope. What happened to bring about this dramatic change? This relative, you see, is more than just a kind person. He is your “kinsman-redeemer.”

In Ruth and Naomi’s case, that man was Boaz. To “redeem” means to pay the price for somebody or something in order to free it from slavery or captivity, difficulty or danger. In His great love for His Old Testament people, God had made specific provisions regarding redemption. If an individual or family ran into hard times and had to forfeit land that was theirs, it became the responsibility of a kinsman to help his relatives out by purchasing the land and restoring it to them. To qualify as such a kinsman-redeemer, three things had to take place. First, you had to be related by blood to those he redeemed. Secondly, he had to be able to pay the price. Finally, he had to be willing to redeem. Boaz qualified on all three counts. And he took things even a step farther. Not only did he redeem Naomi and Ruth, he also became Ruth’s husband. God’s faithful love could be seen in faithful Boaz. They had a son, whom they named Obed. Obed had a son named Jesse, and Jesse had a son named David, who would later become King David. And great King David’s greater ancestor would be Jesus Christ. And that of course is the greater lesson that lurks beneath the surface of the Book of Ruth. In Jesus Christ we have a greater friend than Ruth was to Naomi and a greater Redeemer than Boaz was to the two women.

Don’t for a moment think that this story is simply a story that took place so long ago in a foreign land. NO! NO! NO! This story is being played out day in and day out in your lives and mine. For you see in reality you and I are the foreigners, we are the outcast of society, we are the misfits of the world, we are the Samaritans and the Moabites. We are the ones who have been brought from the desert dreary life to eat at the Eternal banquet that God provides for us. Do you realize that there is nothing that you have, or offer to God that will appease Him from destroying you? There is nothing that you can do to take away His wrath from you. Instead, we see ourselves crawling and coming home from Moab with nothing but the promise that a kinsman redeemer is coming to our rescue. A redeemer who will supply all that we need.

We saw in the story before us and in the Gospel lesson today, how God intervenes and provides what is needed. The 10 lepers are cleansed from sin and commanded by the gracious Lord, the Bread of heaven—Jesus to show themselves to the priest so that the leprosy of sin will be removed. And they are cleansed and healed. Naomi and Ruth, too, are provided for by the gracious hands of God Himself. And so are you and me. Yes, He provides for you what you can’t provide for yourself. We stand before the High Priest Jesus whose crimson blood washes away all of our leprosy and sends us on our way redeemed and forgiven. Remember our story today? It began in Bethlehem (the house of bread) with no bread. Elimelech which means God is my King, but there was no king. There was famine and drought. But how does it end? With a story that you should know and share with others—it is your story and mine. In Bethlehem, the God of heaven in a lowly manger provides the gift of heaven—manna—His Son, Jesus Christ. Now there is bread. Now there is a King: Jesus Christ. Now there is a family. Now there are provisions flowing from His pierced side and hands. Now there is forgiveness and peace. Now there is joy in the house because the famine and drought have been replaced with faith and delicacies.

Today, you the Redeemed from Moab, the Samaritans, the outcasts, will dine on the true manna from heaven—Jesus Himself as He serves you the eternal bread and the joyful cup for the salvation of your soul and the blessings that comes from the God who goes where you go.

Most precious beloved of our Savior, know this—this is not simply the story of Ruth—but yours and mine and we should know it and tell it to all people.

One of the overriding themes of the Book of Ruth is the providential sovereignty of God. He is seen everywhere, weaving His purposes through events and circumstances. He uses a famine to bring a Jewish man and his family to Moab, where one of his sons marries a Moabite woman. Through the unexpected widowhood of both Naomi and Ruth, they end up in the Promised Land because they hear that the famine has ended. Naomi teaches Ruth about the things of God and Ruth make a life-changing commitment. Then, in Ruth 2:3, we read that Ruth “just happened” to find herself in a field that belonged to Boaz. This was no coincidence! God orchestrated the events in order to accomplish His purposes. God’s invisible hand steered her to that particular field on that particular day. Ruth had gone through some terrible things, but every difficulty, question, uncertainty, and broken heart became God’s way of doing something better than could have happened otherwise. We find the beginning of God’s grace when we come to the end of ourselves. Friend, even when you are completely unaware of what is happening, or even why something is happening, God is guiding your decisions and actions. He is working everything together for your good and His ultimate glory. Our responsibility is to surrender to His sovereignty. . It’s been said, “Tough times never last, tough people do.” The Bible says, “Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.” (Ps 30:5) Tragedy strikes when we least expect it. Some trip over suffering while others triumph over tragedy. They become better, not bitter; they live triumphant and not troubled lives; and they recover faster than others, while many do not at all. My friends. God is still in control, even if you have trouble seeing it right now.

The only survivor of a shipwreck washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He cried out to God to save him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but he only got depressed. He eventually was able to build a small hut and put his only possessions in it. But one day, after hunting for some food, he came back to his hut to find that it had gone up in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. He was devastated. Early the next day a ship drew near the island and rescued him. He couldn’t believe it. When he came on board he said to the crew, “How did you know I was here?” To which they replied, “We saw your smoke signal.”

Perhaps some you still remember the Television miniseries Roots? It was the story of a slave from Africa by the name of Kunta Kinte who was kidnapped and brought to the shores of the USA. His American captors wanted to give him the name Toby, but he refused to accept it and kept telling his family about his home, how he was kidnapped and brought here. All along he reminded them of the freedom he had in the old country and his name was Kunta Kinte.

We too, have a name and a story—it is the story of our salvation. Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life freed us from the slavery of leprosy, death and the devil; and gave us freedom. Therefore, today, we, like Kunta Kinte relive our story and share it with others—the story of our Redemption and salvation. The story of God’s love for you by sending His greatest gift—His ONLY begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Only one life will soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last." Amen.