

- We have been examining the lives of certain people from the OT in order to see how they interacted with God, how they responded to him, what they did, what they said and thought.
- In doing so, we get a window into how we ourselves can and should respond to the activity of God in the world and in us.
- As I went through Ruth this week, I felt it was applicable to our situation and I am hopeful that you might find this particularly helpful today.
- The story begins this way:

Ruth 1:1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab.

- I couldn't help but read this in light of our current situation.
- How many hundreds of conversations are contained in this verse? How many sleepless nights? How many attempts to juggle the finances? How many times where they said, "Let's wait one more week"? It's got to get better. Maybe it will rain soon.
- I wonder how bad it got before they left. How they debated the best decision. After all, they went to Moab, the land of Israel's enemies.
- In the end, however it came about, Naomi and her husband and two sons moved away.
- They settled in Moab and Naomi's sons married local Moabite women. But after living in the land 10 years, and before she could get any grandchildren, her husband died, and then both of the sons died.
- Naomi was left with two daughters-in-law and nothing else to hold her in Moab any longer. The famine was over back home and so she left. She urged her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab, get married, have kids and live their lives. There was no future for them in Israel with Naomi.
- One of the two stayed but the other, Ruth, refused to abandon her mother-in-law Naomi. *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.*
- This is a loyal daughter-in-law. Naomi went back to Bethlehem and at the end of the first chapter we get a couple of important pieces of information. *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."*
- Naomi's life and her dreams have been shattered.
- Naomi wanted a family. She wanted a marriage, for her sons to grow up and have family of their own.
- Now, she returns home with her life a wreck. She has lost her husband and both her sons.
- She has lost 10 years of relationships where she grew up.
- She faces financial hardship because widows had very little standing in society and were dependent on the generosity of others.
- Everything she wanted was gone and it's not even as if her dreams are bad ones.
- Just like Naomi did, we all have dreams. And just like her dreams, often our dreams are shattered.
- So what happens when our dreams are not being fulfilled the way we want?
- So much of the current crisis is focused around the loss of things. Loss of people. Loss of family. Loss of income. Loss of jobs. Loss of 401k's.
- What do we do with this? We are told to trust God, but what does that mean or look like?

- I wonder though if in the breaking of our dreams, God might be opening us up to something bigger? So the main idea I want to focus on through the story of Ruth and that applies to us is that **Broken dreams might actually be a prelude to a bigger dream.**
- Shattering our good dreams opens the door for a greater and better one. A dream which we do not value until the other dreams that we do value are out of the way and no longer cluttering us up. Maybe God takes away the good to create an appetite for the better.
- When we speak of HOPE for some dream, we usually mean something far different than what the Bible speaks of hope. To us, hope is wishful thinking. It is the positive thought that things will get better, that broken dreams will be restored, that God will do a miracle and make all the pain go away. We naturally and wrongly assume that we are to experience something in this life that God never promised. As far as we are concerned, we are here TO HAVE A GOOD TIME.
- But what happens if God's purpose for life is different than what we assume it is?
- What happens if God's values are different than ours?
- What happens if God's dream for our life is different than what we want?
- What happens if God is doing something behind the scenes we cannot easily see?
- It might be that our **broken dreams are a prelude to a bigger dream.**
- Let's return to the story and see how it played out. As our storyteller moves into chapter 2, we see a principle that is at work even when, and maybe even especially when, our dreams look like they are being broken.
- It is a principle we talk about a lot in our church and you have all heard it before, but it bears repeating.

I. God is at work even if it doesn't look like it.

- In the midst of the unknown, the shattered dreams for Naomi, and the problems, we notice that God must be doing something. He might be at work.
- When dreams are damaged or broken, we miss that God is at work, but if we begin to change our perspective, we might get a glimpse of God working.

A. **We get a glimpse of God working through coincidences.**

- *Coincidental timing:*

22 So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

- Naomi arrives in Bethlehem as the barley harvest is beginning. This is right time. Food will be plentiful, jobs will be available, people will be more apt to be generous - the famine is over. Because it is harvest time, Ruth will go into the fields. Because she goes into the fields, she will connect with a man. Because she connects with a particular man, God's plans will be fulfilled.
- *Coincidental relationships:*
2:1 Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz.
- Living in the same town at the time Naomi returned was a living relative of her dead husband. He was a noble man who was of high standing in the community.
- What makes this so coincidental is that Boaz is an eligible bachelor. He is what Jewish law calls a "kinsmen redeemer" or a "family guardian." He could, if he wanted to, legally take over a deceased family member's property and family.
- *Coincidental places:*

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....

- Jewish law allowed the poor to follow after grain pickers and scoop up the leftovers for themselves. In some cases gracious workers would intentionally drop grain for the poor. This is what Ruth hoped to do – find someone who'd let her walk behind them and take their leftovers.
- But Ruth is unfamiliar with the geography so she just wanders off to find a field. We're not told she prayed nor consulted anyone. Instead, these little phrases "As it turned out" and "Just then" describe a coincidences of God proportions. Who knows what made her stop in this particular field; is it just random chance OR is something big is unfolding behind the scenes.
- Coincidence = When God does a miracle and remains anonymous. Pay attention. God is working and the coincidences in your life might not be coincidences.
- It's not just in coincidences though. Sometimes:

B. We get a glimpse of God working in simple things.

8 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.

• Boaz protects her – someone who was not even an Israelite. Stay here where you are safe. *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?"

- Boaz provides for her – he is giving her privileges and providing drink and more for her.
- Boaz is generous – he instructs his workers to let her harvest some extra – she goes home with almost 30 lbs of grain.
- These are small and simple things, but remember that Ruth and Naomi are not in a good place and maybe, just maybe, God is up to something.
- When Ruth goes home, Naomi is amazing at how much grain she has. She asked her where she worked and when she found out it was a relatives field, she is stunned.

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 guardian-redeemers. "

- Naomi is beginning to see that maybe God is up to something. Maybe God is working. The coincidences and simple things point to something bigger.
- We need to watch for God in the seeming coincidences, the simple things, to see what God might be doing and follow along.
- Chapter 3 is where we get to the heart of the love story. But this is not just a simple Netflix romance. The author does something that happens often in Scripture, is painting a picture through the love story that demonstrates, or gives us a window, into how God deals with his people.

3:1 One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, "My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for. 2 Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. 3 Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in 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."

- There are cultural things in here, but the essence is that Ruth is going to go and let Boaz know that she is available for marriage and interested. It seems like God is working in this direction.
- But there are risks here. There are fears to be faced. Remember, Naomi and Ruth have both been in love before. There is the risk that Boaz will reject Ruth. Since he is older, the odds of him dying before Ruth are higher. The pain of being a widow again is a strong possibility.

II. Following along with God makes us face fears.

- The Christian who has been disappointed by life & God deep down doesn't want to feel hope and passion for God again; they're afraid of what else He might bring into their lives.
- Fear of rejection. Fear of additional broken dreams.
- Fear of more pain. Fear of exposure.
- Fear of what others will think. Fear of failure.
- Fear of not being good enough. Fear of not having enough money, of losing all we have
- But in order to follow along with God, we must identify and face what we fear.
- As you listen today, what do you fear? What keeps you awake? What do you hope never happens? What could happen that might make you question everything?
- We put tremendous energy into making this life work better so we can feel better. We devote great time and energy to improving circumstances – better homes, better families, and better jobs. We live under the assumption that we exist to have a good time. We're deluded by our simplistic religions into thinking that God's job is to assist us in that goal.
- *"We conceive of the spiritual journey as a cooperative enterprise where we pool our resources with God's to see to it that life works well enough to keep us relatively happy till we reach the world where life works perfectly and we always feel great."* – Larry Crabb, *Shattered Dreams*, p141
- As a result, we don't see pain the way God does. We don't see problems the way God does. We don't recognize bigger dreams because we have so many little ones. And we won't accept this truth:
- **Broken dreams might actually be a prelude to a bigger dream.**
- As we finish Chapter 3 and move into chapter 4, it becomes quite apparent that Boaz wants Ruth and Ruth wants Boaz. Not the non-love love of today. Their passion is deeper, richer, and more enduring than the fleeting lusts we're accustomed to. Instead, Boaz is going to do whatever it takes to have Ruth alongside him for life.
- Since Jewish law stipulated that the nearest relative had the right of first refusal to marry his relative's widow and assume responsibility for the family, Boaz knew there was someone closer related to Ruth than himself. Boaz is going to see if this other relative is going to exercise his rights or will Boaz be able to.
- Maybe, just maybe:

III. Broken dreams are necessary to experience renewal.

- As we read chapter 4, we see that Boaz meets with the closer relative. The closer relative cannot afford the risk of taking on Naomi, Ruth, and all their debt. Boaz gets some witnesses and they make a binding agreement to let Boaz takeover the deceased's family.
- 4:13 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, 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 guardian-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 in her arms and cared for him.

- The story comes full circle. From bitterness to joy. From despair to hope.
- If we are going to experience God and his dreams, we need to expand our vision.
- God is doing something far greater than making life comfortable.
- God has a greater and bigger dream than Naomi could ever imagine.
- Note that God did not restore her dream. Her husband and boys were still dead. But God had a bigger plan. One that we see at the very end of this story.

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.

- Ruth was the grandmother of David, the greatest king of Israel, and even more significantly, was in the line of the family that birthed Jesus.
- **Broken dreams might actually be a prelude to a bigger dream.**
- Broke dreams come in all shapes and sizes. From internal expectations that leave us wrestling with constant feelings of failure to wipe out financial, relational, or health crises, they are all real and relevant. Every dream that is shattered is an opportunity to discover a greater dream.
- **Broken dreams might actually be a prelude to a bigger dream.**
- Suppose you were convinced that God is not committed to making life comfortable and good. Suppose you knew that those lesser dreams cloud our souls from the greater dream. Suppose you understood that deep within each person is the innate longing, the spiritual DNA that craves to connect with its Creator above all else ... and that dream, that desire will be released only when the lesser ones aren't as powerful?
- Don't be fooled into thinking Jesus is here to fulfill YOUR dreams.
- There is a greater bigger dream He is bent on fulfilling in and through you.
- You are to be a part of it. You have to see beyond your small dreams.
- And when your small dreams get shattered, as they will at some time in life. Remember this.
- **Broken dreams might actually be a prelude to a bigger dream.**