

An [Extra]Ordinary Love Story, Ruth 4:13-22 “What Child is This?”

About a month before the 2020 Presidential Election VP candidates Kamala Harris and Mike Pence sat down to debate each other over dozens of important political and cultural issues. But my guess is that if you remember anything from that debate you only remember one thing...the fly on Mike Pence’s head. [Play Video \[No Sound\]](#)

Title Slide We are such easily distracted people are we not? I see how easily distracted people are every Sunday when I stand up and preach. A phone will go off and half the room turns to look or someone’s watch is getting hit by the skylights and shining a beam that people are chasing across the ceiling. Most research suggests that a speech can hold the attention of the average adult for 15-20 minutes¹ which means I will lose most of you between point one and point two. But you aren’t average!

But this isn’t really the kind of distraction I want to talk about today. There is another kind, a deeper kind of distraction one a spiritual level that can steal our joy, our hope, our purpose and our sense of the presence of God. Our temptation is use things like entertainment, jobs, relationships, politics, hobbies, sports, substances to numb distract ourselves from going to the deeper places in life and in doing so we miss out on what God really wants to do in our lives and we don’t see his fingerprints, we dull the Spirit’s leading. Christmas is a great example of this, to the point where it is almost a cliché. The temptation year after year is to get so caught up in the trappings of Christmas, the presents, the lights, the parties, the travel that we forget the reason for the season, what all of it points to- The incarnation of the Savior of the World, Jesus Christ. This is not just your challenge. Advent can be so busy for pastors and church staff that are so busy with services and events that we can be focused on the wrong things.

For many of us spiritual distraction is coming from a source of pain. A health problem, a financial stress, our fears, insecurities, anxieties, relational wounds. We can be so focused on the pain, sitting in it, exhausted by it, denying it, numbing it, blaming God for it...that we miss the goodness, the presence and purposes of God. Many of us are [looking at our lives through a microscope](#). We get so caught up in our goals, our plans, or pain, problems...we get miopic. We Naval gaze. [But God wants to give us a telescope](#). He wants us to take our goals and plan and pain and problems and look through them to what is beyond them, to what God is doing and teaching....This was the case for Naomi in the first part of our story.

[Title Slide] Naomi was so distracted by the tragic circumstances of her life that she couldn’t see the good and sovereign hand of God at work. She was looking at her life through the microscope and all she could see was pain and tragedy. In the span of a few short years she lost her husband and two sons, and has to go tail between her legs back home empty-handed to Bethlehem after 10 years living in Moab. Naomi (which means sweet) changes her name to Mara (bitter). And just like some of us right now, Naomi is so distracted by her pain to see that

¹ <https://www.thehindu.com/education/does-the-decrease-of-average-human-attention-span-have-an-impact-on-education/article34116513.ece>

God's good and sovereign hand is at work behind the scenes, even in the tragic circumstances, orchestrating something beyond her through her daughter-in-law Ruth. He causes Ruth to be gleaning in the field of Boaz who we come to find out is a man of integrity and a family member of Naomi. Boaz embodies love to Ruth just as Ruth has embodied love to Naomi. Suddenly, Naomi begins to see God's goodness at work. And as we saw last week, not only does Boaz help to secure the survival of Naomi and Ruth as the guardian-redeemer but becomes Ruth's husband.

Yes, we are easily distracted from experiencing God's goodness in our lives like Naomi was, but the hopefully news is we don't have to be today. Our goal today with the Spirit's help is to identify and set aside those things that are causing us to be distracted and ask the Spirit to draw our mind's attention and heart's affection beyond the things that so easily distract us spiritually, beyond your pain to see through the telescope the good and sovereign hand of God at work in and through our lives. Because as we are going to see in the conclusion to our story in Ruth 4, God is not done with his good and sovereign work in their lives, He's only just getting started. His work goes far beyond them. Pray.

Today in Ruth 4 we are going to see **God's Sovereignty is at work for our present, future and eternal good.**

God's Sovereignty at work for our Present Good.

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." [By the way, what a statement these women make! In a patriarchal society. Seven is the number of perfection, as perfectly blessed as it would seem to have 7 sons, Ruth is still better.]

¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. ¹⁷ The women living there said, "Naomi has a son!" And they named him Obed.

From widowed to wedding to womb in one verse! Clearly there is some fast-forwarding by the author who wastes no time to show us the fulfillment of the prophetic blessing of the women at the gate in the previous verse, who prayed for a son for Ruth and a grandson for Naomi. Naomi who starts off as emptyhanded and hungry with tears of grief, is now filled with a barley harvest and a baby in her arms and tears of joy. Who is it behind the scenes who restores her with food and family? Who enables the birth of this child? Of course it is God, all life is precious and comes from God certainly. But remember, Ruth is a woman who struggled with infertility for 10 years in Moab. The writer peels back the curtain in verse 13 to make it crystal clear it was the Lord's hand through the long season of mud and muck...when life was Mara...It wasn't how

Ruth and Naomi would have wanted it, it wasn't easy, it wasn't with the first husband or the first effort, but God did this good thing.

God's Sovereignty is at work for our present good. God is not malevolent; he's not taking joy in her displeasure of tragedy. Satan does, sometimes we do. We live in a fallen world that is not the way God made it nor intended, mankind's rebellion in 1000s of ways has brought about all kinds of fractures, pain, disappointments and tragedies. But the story of the Bible is a good and sovereign God working through fallen creation to restore and redeem His good. While not always easy, God's ways are always good. God's sovereign plans are not a straight line, they are jagged with many ups and downs, hills and valleys and swamps but it is God who sees it through for our good. God is working- through the mountain tops of weddings and babies and promotions and love and successes and laughter...and through the swamps of divorce, tragedy, infertility, losing your job, failures and tears. If in the highs, you take credit or forget God or in the lows you blame God...you will be looking through the microscope, and miss seeing God at work in your present for your good. When you get that promotion, it's not the time for pride to say, "I deserve this for my hard work, time to buy lots of new toys." It is the time to say, "This is God's hand. How can I use my position and power to accomplish your purposes?" And when you face the dark days of pain and confusion, not to say, "What did I do to deserve this? I'm going to wallow and get bitter." But to say, "God what are you teaching me? What do you want me do with my pain? Lord, help me stay faithful and trust you are still working it for my good." Yale Professor Nicholas Wolterstorff after losing his son in a mountain climbing accident **"The world has a hole in it now. I shall look at the world through tears. Perhaps I shall see things that dried I could not see."**² This is the telescope perspective God wants for us, especially in our pain. But remember, God is not done his good work in Naomi's present, it goes beyond her.

God's Sovereignty is at work for our Future Good.

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.*

The mention of David alerts us to the fact that Obed was not the end of the story. It was about Obed, but beyond Obed. Obed will become the grandfather of King David, the greatest King in Israel's history. The one who slays Goliath, writes the song book of Israel, Establishes Jerusalem and builds the temple. The line through whom the prophecies of the Messiah would come. Can you imagine in the middle of Naomi's deepest pain if you would have told her she would because the great grandmother of the greatest King of Israel? She would have never believed it in a million years. **Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.**

God's Sovereignty is at work for our future good.

Just like Naomi, your present is a part of God's sovereign plan for good but not the end of it. When we look at our present, maybe at the mundane everyday life as a student in school, the

² Quoted from Carolyn Custis James, *God in the Margins*

day-to-day grind of work or in the challenges of aging it is easy to get distracted. It's hard to see God's sovereignty at work to do something beyond ourselves in the future in daily life. When Naomi was nanny for Obed growing up, change his diapers, playing with blocks, trying to get him to go down for a nap, cleaning up after him- she probably wasn't thinking what God was going to do through Him. Same for you, Waking up, packing your kids lunches, saying a little prayer, hurrying them off to school, cleaning the house, getting groceries, maybe squeezing in a nap, prepping dinner, doing homework, playing together, doing family devos, getting them ready for bed, saying a night prayer. Don't discount your faithfulness at home and how God might use that to raise children in a loving, consistent, secure environment and the faith that is on display in your lives trusting God and being present. You don't know how that may explode into a legacy of beauty and impact in kids, grandkids, neighbors... I've told the story of my grandmother. She got pregnant from an affair and in her fear and shame, she attempted abortion. But after an unsuccessful attempt she began to see maybe she was supposed to keep this baby. In those early days of pain, shame, fear, poverty, the hardship of raising a baby and making ends meet as a disgraced single woman it, it would have been hard see God's sovereign hand at work in her future. But God was doing something through her keeping and helping raise that baby, and he was doing something beyond her. Her only daughter, Linda would come to a saving faith in Jesus as a young adult, and my grandmom would become a Christian as well, she would marry a man named Ken who would become a pastor and they would raise three boys who are all serving the Lord today, whom God is using to reach others. My grandmother broke the chains of her family heritage, was restored and became the matriarch of a new family tree- that no one would have seen when the cake was half-baked in the streets of Philly. When we put our ordinary lives in the hands of God he can do something extraordinary. Don't get distracted. Look up with that telescope, look over the horizon, don't go off his path, and trust he is at work in a 1000 ways you can't see for your future good. And that might be enough, but Ruth's story isn't over.

God's Sovereignty is at work for our eternal good.

At the end of Ruth 4:18-22, the writer gives us a genealogy with 10 names from Perez, the son of Judah, to King David. But the genealogy doesn't end here, this very genealogy shows up in **Matthew 1 [Text]** leading right to the birth of Jesus Christ. This is profoundly significant in God's sovereign plan of salvation, because it brings the book of Ruth with its distinctive theme of God's sovereign love and good purposes into explicit connection with his eternal plan of salvation through Jesus. If it ends with King David, the story of Ruth, Boaz and Naomi is ultimately tragic and not that good. Because despite a happy ending, they all still die in their sins with no hope for eternity. It is the hope of a messiah, a Savior who will conclusively forgive, redeem and restore humanity to a relationship with God that makes their story extraordinarily good.

God's sovereignty was a work through the story of Ruth not just to bless them with a son of Bethlehem but bless the world with The Son of Bethlehem.

Excerpt from Poem by Brandywine Member, James Stockwell

Your mother Ruth
 became a child
 of the God of Abraham,
 th' God of truth.
 Thus Ruth the mild
 entered th' line of the lamb.

You are her son;
 Your son will be
 Jesse, David's father.
 And David's son
 Will set us free,
 The Son of God the Father.

Rejoice with me,
 My son, Obed.
 The kinsman redeemer
 You may call me.
 When He has bled,
 You will call Him Savior.

God's Sovereignty is at work for your Eternal Good

Experiencing tragedy, serving a widowed mother-in-law, gleaning in a field, falling in love, having a baby, growing old- all these ordinary things are part of God's eternal and extraordinary love story. The book of Ruth wants to teach us that God's purpose for the life of his people, even in the pain, is never wasted. God wants us to know that when we follow Christ, we can live for something far greater than ourselves- our houses, money, jobs, hobbies and pleasures. We can find hope even in the tragedy and the pain. Everything we do in obedience to God, no matter how small, is eternally significant. The deepest satisfaction you will experience in life is when you see the eternal connection, when you get out of the distracted life and step into life with Jesus. "The future is in our power. Let us, then, each morning, resolve to send the day into eternity in such a garb as we shall wish it to wear forever." - Adoniram Judson

Are you looking at your life through a microscope when God wants to give you a telescope? What is it that is causing the distraction? Maybe what is distracting you is that you don't have a relationship with God in Jesus. Friends, God wants you experience His good but it's ultimately only found in one relationship- Jesus, who came that first Christmas.

[Microscope/Telescope Slide] Maybe it is doubt that God is in control and it's just hard to trust Him with something unknown in your life. As we can see from Ruth- it's OK, God's got this. Maybe it is doubt that God intends good for you because of the pain in your life right now. Our good is not always God's good, because he not only has our present best interest in mind, but our future and eternity. Invite Hayes and Bethany...Reflection.