STUCK IN REVERSE
Ps. Anthony Njoroge – 22 Feb. 2015
Survivor: The Love Edition
Sermon Notes

RUTH 4

QOD: Please share with your neighbor the best proposal story you have heard of?

Many of us have been guests at this kind of event or even perhaps the key characters, in this kind of event, but when we look around us we see couples and families drift gradually into mara situations immediately after this spectacular events. Even people who have just entered a relationship are on cloud nine. But over time some little cracks begin to appear. The question is what if you find yourself there; Does God care? Is he concerned about where you are at? Does your circumstance matter to God? This month we have been talking about “Survivor- the love edition” ‘Do our relational circumstances matter to God?

The relationship space is so chaotic, people are left wondering how they can survive it. Some of us got married having gone through that space successfully or having muddled it. We spent time talking about how Hollywood has helped muddy the space. We established the need to have honorable men who relate with women honorably and don't take advantage of the sisters. We also talked about how people meet and we looked at Boaz and Ruth both taking certain actions. We spoke about the unrealistic expectations that people have which also confuse the dating space.

As we bring this series to a close, perhaps your situation still looks very dire.

• Many people could be thinking they are past the time for them to find someone. Or perhaps you have been prayed for already many times. As I tell you to wait on God, maybe you have moved on. Possibly you have taken matters into your own hands and you have ended up or are contemplating taking short cuts like having a child with someone who is already married. Perhaps you have concluded that there are no men/women around.

• Perhaps you feel that you have been in the Mara for so long... when will God show up for me or for my marriage?

• Some of you have resigned to consequences of your previous choices. You feel that you don't deserve God's intervention in your circumstances. You are operating under the thought that you have made your mistakes and that you now have to live with the consequences. You could have messed up when you were younger ... You could be a man and you are not settling because you have had children out of wedlock. Perhaps many Christian girls don't want your story.

• Perhaps you have struggled with sexual addictions and maybe you are thinking I don't deserve to be happy. I don't deserve this joy. I have made my mistakes so I have to live with the
consequences. Perhaps you feel "I am a scoundrel! this is what I know". I don't know how to leave my comfort zone. You don't know my story. I have done so much. I have done bad things. Perhaps you feel your situation is completely unredeemable and you are comfortable with it. I am going to play this through.

- Some have lost a spouse and you have not even resolved things to the point where you can consider moving forward with someone else.

God's word has some things to say. Turn with me to the book of Ruth Chapter 4:13-17

v. 13Boaz married Ruth. She became his wife. Boaz slept with her. By God’s gracious gift she conceived and had a son.14-15 The town women said to Naomi, “Blessed be God! He didn’t leave you without family to carry on your life. May this baby grow up to be famous in Israel! He’ll make you young again! He’ll take care of you in old age. And this daughter-in-law who has brought him into the world and loves you so much, why, she’s worth more to you than seven sons!” 16 Naomi took the baby and held him in her arms, cuddling him, cooing over him, waiting on him hand and foot. 17 The neighborhood women started calling him “Naomi’s baby boy!” But his real name was Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.

After the midnight rendezvous in chapter 3, Boaz goes to the city gate where the official business was done. The nearer kinsman comes by, and Boaz lays the situation before him. Naomi is giving up what little property she has, and the duty of the nearer kinsman is to buy it so that the inheritance stays in the family. To our dismay the kinsman says at the end of verse 4, "I will redeem it." We don't want him to redeem it. We want Boaz to do it. So again there seems to be a setback.

Just when we are about to say, "O no! Stop the story! Don’t let this other fellow take Ruth!" Boaz says to the nearer kinsman, "You know, don’t you, that Naomi has a daughter-in-law. So when you do the part of the kinsman redeemer, you must also take her as your wife and raise up offspring in the name of her husband Mahlon?" Then, to our great relief, the kinsman says in verse 6 he can’t do it. Perhaps he is married already. Whatever the reason, we are cheering in the background as Boaz gets through to the wedding feast with the beautiful young Ruth on his arm.

But there is a cloud overhead. Ruth is barren. Or at least she seems to be. In 1:4 we were told that she had been married ten years to Mahlon and there were no children. So even now the suspense is not over. Life is one curve after another. And we never know what’s coming. But the point of the story is that the best is yet to come. No matter where you are, if you love God, the best is yet to come.

We had a grubby looking fellow come in the church office a few years ago looking for help. I asked him what his name was, and he said, "Hardtimes, that's my name, Hardtimes." Well Naomi's name at the beginning of this book was Hardtimes . . . Hardtimes Naomi. That's the way the author of this book wanted us to meet her. Because the point of my message today is that The life of the godly is not a straight line to glory, but they do get there.
Ruth was written to help us see the signposts of the grace of God in our lives, and to help us trust his grace even when the clouds are so thick that we can't see the road let alone the signs on the side. Let's go back and remind ourselves that it was God who acted to turn each setback into a stepping stone to joy, and that it is God in all of our bitter providences who is plotting for our good. From this story I see 3 Signposts of a God in Action in Bitter Setbacks.

1. The Gift of Ruth: When Naomi's whole life seemed to cave in while in Moab, it was God who gave Ruth to Naomi. We know this from two verses. In 1:16 we learn that at the root of Ruth's commitment to Naomi is Ruth's commitment to Naomi's God: "Your God shall be my God." God had won Ruth's allegiance in Moab and so it was to God that Naomi owed the amazing love of her daughter-in-law. Also in 2:12 it says that when Ruth came to Judah with Naomi, she was coming to take refuge under the wings of God. Therefore it is owing to God that Ruth left her home and family to follow and serve Naomi. All along it was God turning Naomi's setback into joy—even when she was oblivious to his grace. God has given you people to support you in this journey but we never acknowledge them because we are stuck in the reverse. Your LG, Ndoa group, Accountability group.

The life of the godly is not a straight line to glory, but they do get there

2. The Preservation of Boaz: Naomi gives the impression in chapter 1 that there is no hope that Ruth could marry and raise up children to continue the family line (1:12). But all the while God is preserving a wealthy and godly man named Boaz to do just that. The reason we know that this was God's doing is that Naomi herself admits it in 2:20. She recognizes that behind the "accidental" meeting of Ruth and Boaz was the "kindness of God who has not forsaken the living or the dead." In every loss that the godly endure God is already plotting for their gain. God’s kindness has marked your life in other areas of your life. He has given you a job, a business and protected you from many accidents. The life of the godly is not a straight line to glory, but they do get there

3. The Opening of Ruth's Womb: Who was it that gave to the barren womb of Ruth the child so that the neighborhood women could say, "A son has been born to Naomi"? God gave the child. Look at 4:11. The townspeople pray for Boaz and Ruth. They know that Ruth was married for ten years without a child. And so the author makes very clear in verse 13 who caused this child to be conceived. "Boaz went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception." The story began with Naomi's loss. It ends with Naomi's gain. It began with death and ends with birth. A son—for whom? Verse 17 is the great destination of Naomi's long and twisted road. "And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, 'A son has been born to Naomi.'" Not to Ruth! But to Naomi! Why? To show that it was not true, what Naomi had said in 1:21, that the Lord had brought her back empty from Moab. And if we could just learn to wait and trust in God, all our complaints against God would prove untrue.

So again and again in this book it was God who was at work in the bitter setbacks of Naomi. When she lost her husband and sons, God gave her Ruth. When she could think of no kinsman to raise up offspring for the family name, God gave her Boaz. When barren Ruth married Boaz, God gave the child. The point of the story is made in the life of Naomi. The life of the godly is not a straight line to glory, but God sees that they get there.
What is interesting is Boaz is no longer the central figure, neither is Ruth. Suddenly Naomi comes into the foreground. The women who heard her complaint against Yahweh in Ruth 1:20-21 now return to acknowledge God as the source of her blessings. When enumerating those blessings. They speak of her daughter in law Ruth who stood quietly by when Naomi bitterly complained about her lot in life. Yet by Ruth’s faithfulness and excellent character, Naomi’s circumstances are reversed and her complaints answered.

Naomi takes into her arms the child/the boy. The narrator has taken us from the point where Naomi was bereaved of her two sons to this stage where she now holds this new child, the son of Ruth and Boaz. Naomi was finally part of a family again with a loving and fulfilling role to play. IN Ruth chapter 1, Naomi’s hands have been emptied of her sons; now she has gone almost full circle. She now holds a new baby. From a place of desperation and lacking in identity, she is now part of a family. She takes this boy and is now Obed's grandma. She has a place

What I see in this story is that God can reverse our circumstances and answer our complaints. He can move us from empty to full. The focus of this grand finale is not Boaz’s action, but the action of God. My one point of this message is: The life of the godly is not a straight line to glory, but God sees that they get there.

Our circumstances matter to God. You could have been longing for a family. God can turn anyone's story around. The series has one question: How do I deal with the mara situations; relationship situations that are bitter, empty? God is interested. The emphasis is on hope. Because Naomi and Ruth stayed true to their principles and to their faith, even though it took time, God came through for them. We are in a time when people are tired of waiting on God and it still ends up badly, maybe you hook up with this other guy. Let me get pregnant ..... I just want the baby, I don't want the husband.

2 Corinthians 4: 8-9 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

There will always be obstacles in our faith journey. We are not sent to lay down on a bed of roses, but to walk on a path of thorns. But when we do, we can be sure God will give us the good shoes of faith. In the beginning, it is blue skies. Perhaps it is a new job, a new semester, a new year, a new spouse, or a new relationship. But then setbacks, opposition, unexpected obstacles all come in like a hurricane. Such is the problem of life. David never said there would not be valleys, but that “even though I walk through the valley...you are with me” (Ps. 23: 4). Jesus never said there will be no tribulation, but “take heart I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

A preacher said this: “A setback is just a set-up for a comeback.” We are going to get stones thrown on our path, but they can either be stumbling blocks or stepping stones. We have to decide. I will not stumble over this, but use this to step a little bit closer to the Lord. A bend in the road is not the end of the road. The life of the godly is not a straight line to glory, but God sees that they get there.
Naomi did all she could, but it is the Lord who will get the final say. Many are the plans of man, but it is the Lord who guides our steps, the Scriptures say. In other words, write your plans in pencil, but give God the eraser. Notice the last scene here. Where else have you seen the words empty before? This was particularly moving to me. Remember in Ruth 1:21, Naomi said she was empty. The two worries she had as she came to Bethlehem: food and family. Look at Ruth’s hands. Food! Then look at Ruth: family! God had restored her...well, almost. Naomi, you were never empty. Your cup was just turned over. The life of the godly is not a straight line to glory, but God sees that they get there.

One of our close friends Divorced/separated / had a son / relationship broke down due to unfaithfulness and abuse / She had a conviction that she would get married again.2 years ago she met a guy who was a widower with a four year old son. God redeemed her.

Another friend of ours got her uterus removed after surgery. With Two adopted children Meets a gentleman - he had two children from different ladies .It becomes a God story. God can turn people's stories around.

Hold on, don't throw your values out of the window. You need to believe that God will make all things work together for good. Naomi finds herself as part of her family even though Boaz was not her husband and Obed was not her baby but she fulfills her purpose by mentoring Ruth and caring for Obed. we are not saying that every situation is going to end up the way Ruth's situation ended up but we want to pray for those who are trusting God. And who are those who for one of reason or another want this to be your reality. I want Ruth's story to be my story.

There are some who may have resigned themselves from the pain of having to venture into this conversation. The greater majority would want to be part of a family together with someone.

We would have forgotten about Naomi, but God turned it around so spectacularly, such that she not only gets a child, but by the end of this, History could very easily have forgotten about Naomi, Her situation turns around so that she ends up with this baby in her hands.

Prayer

• Those who have given up on God in regard to relationships and marriage.
• The people who are stuck in their past.
• The people who need Joy.