

RUTH 4:13-22

(Reading: Matthew 1:1-17; Psalms 127, 128)

When You Must Look Back!

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

There is a common expression people use to help themselves and others going through a difficult time.

It goes like this: 'Don't look back.'

This same idea even entered into the speeches of the Prime Minister during the election campaign.

"We're moving forward," she said, and quite a number of times too!

It's as though you have to put the past behind you.

All those bad times are what you don't want to have hanging around your neck as you continue on in life.

Whether that's your own personal difficulties or what a previous government or prime minister has done.

Now, there are certainly times when you need to put the past in perspective.

It's not healthy – physically, mentally, or spiritually – to wallow in resentment and frustrations and all those other negative things.

But there are times when you should look back.

We must learn the lessons of the past.

And we should also be thankful for the many blessings of the past.

Our society today doesn't have this sense of the past.

More than ever before we are locked into the present.

And if all we've got to look upon is what we are now we are poor people indeed.

One commentator called our generation the most selfish of any throughout human history.

You see, it's history which puts us in our place.

And it's history which gives us spiritually the very best place of all – a place as those in God's covenant community, members of Christ's Body, the Church.

This is the major focus as we come to the end of this wonderful story about Ruth in our Bibles.

It's also what our first aspect draws out the benefits of.

For in the verses 13 till 17 we see **THE BLESSING IN GOD'S FAMILY.**

Here we have verse 13 wrapping up what we've heard about in chapter 3 and the first twelve verses of chapter 4.

Boaz and Ruth are joined together in holy matrimony.

The clear biblical phrase for when a man and woman became married is used: "Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife."

This tells us of the promise of committed love between husband and wife.

And the second purpose for a Christian marriage also now becomes valid.

For the invocation from the elders and all those at the town gate in verses 11 and 12 will come true.

They are now an important building block within the covenant community.

They have dedicated themselves to worshipping and serving God through their marriage.

And then the third purpose is realised quickly also.

For that love they have together and which they intimately enjoy through their sexual union bears fruit in the birth of a son.

Congregation, this is where sex belongs.

Within a committed heterosexual and publicly acknowledged relationship there is God's blessing.

That doesn't mean there won't be trials and struggles, and husband and wife will often have to forgive each other, yet it's through this relationship that Christ's union with His church is mirrored.

This is the relationship God ordained before man's fall into sin.

This is the way it's meant to be!

And what a marvellous picture of marriage's fruit!

Ruth is able to conceive and she gives birth to a son.

It was something which hadn't happened before in her marriage to Mahlon.

Then the Lord had chosen to keep closed her womb.

But now she is able to conceive and to deliver a child.

The covenant brings life.

And in the covenant relationship we respect life and care for it and nurture it.

The use of the word 'conceive' tells us that right from the beginning of life it is important to us.

This is why believers oppose abortion.

It destroys what is meant to be protected.

It terribly disfigures the image bearer of God that mankind is meant to be.

The covenant brings life.

And the covenant brings joy.

Which is what verses 14 and 15 turn our attention to.

For look at who is mentioned now.
It's Naomi who's back in the picture.

Now the women mentioned here would have also come to Ruth too.
There would lots of clucking over that baby.
"How much doesn't he look like his father!"
"Oh, he's got your eyes alright Ruth!"
"What strong little arms and legs he's got!"

But here Naomi is written in because that's who it began with back in chapter 1.
This is a completely different outcome for her.
And it couldn't be a better one!

Now, we might be a bit perplexed by this baby boy being called a 'kinsman-redeemer'.
Hadn't Boaz already done that?
Yet it's quite accurate, for this is the boy who would continue on the inheritance.

But there's also someone here more important than Naomi, isn't there?
Because what do the community women do but exalt that other one!
Speaking to Naomi, they cry out, "Praise be the LORD, who has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer."

They come and rejoice with her.
But right throughout this who the LORD is and what He does is interwoven.
While the author doesn't go out of his way to emphasise what God is doing there's no doubt that God is over all things, and through all things, fulfilling His plan for His people.

Congregation, this is the recognition of the same blessing Psalms 127 and 128 sing of.
There it's clear that sons are a heritage from the LORD.
There we hear of how blessing and prosperity come to the Lord's own.

For the faithful believer in Old Testament Israel this was as good as it got.
To have those around you praying for God's richest blessing upon you and your family is affirming that the Lord is with you.
And to have a daughter-in-law described as better than seven sons is the highest possible accolade.

Who today would know of this kind of relationship with the in-laws?
But when you do don't you know you've got something very, very special!

Just think, congregation, she who had lost her children and could never have another one again herself, now has a child!

We think quite rightly that Sarah having Isaac is a miracle but how much isn't this also divine intervention?

Most definitely the Lord is in this!

She who once said the Lord had brought her back empty has been filled again – and in the most unique way!

Congregation, how much doesn't this show in the brief description in verse 16?

There Naomi takes the child, lays him on her lap, and cares for him.

It might seem an everyday domestic scene.

A grandmother enjoys her grandchild, and so helps out with child-minding.

But this for that time and that circumstance means so much more than that!

From a future which seemed so bleak with her husband and sons all having passed away, she now belonged to a family again.

She has a place, and within the covenant community it's the most precious position she could have.

The words of verse 16 show ownership.

And in a distinct way this baby **is** hers!

No wonder the women around living there said that, "Naomi has a son."

But now something also very unique takes place.

Because the naming of a child was a very special privilege.

The one doing this looked to a name which would describe how that child would be as an adult.

Invariably it was the father who did this.

We know that from Zechariah in Luke's first chapter.

But here the women of the community give the child his name.

This shows us how much this struck the interest of those around this family.

This was the news item of the moment.

And as everyone there had close family and tribal and spiritual links, it was something they felt they could contribute to.

Certainly Boaz and Ruth took it that way.

They indeed called their son the name those women suggested.

And it's a name that's a little different, too.

Because Obed means 'servant'.

Why this name?

Well, the suggestion has been made that he would be a servant of the Lord.

But Obed doesn't have the name 'Lord' in it, only the 'servant' connection is found there.

This name means ‘the serving one’.

So perhaps those townswomen were reflecting on how this child would be the one who looked after Naomi.

Seeing the Lord’s looking after Naomi in this way they searched for a name which showed how he would be a great help to her and the family name.

But, tell me, how much doesn’t this point to the One who would be the suffering servant of Isaiah 52 and 53?

In this name don’t we have a pointing to the One who would help us most of all?

Congregation, we have seen THE BLESSING IN GOD’S FAMILY in the verses 13 till 17.

Now we turn to consider, in the verses 18 till 22, THE FULFILMENT OF GOD’S FAMILY.

It’s the verses 18 till 22 that may seem somewhat superfluous.

I mean, we know Obed would be the father of Jesse, the father of David, from verse 17.

And we also know that he’s from the family line of Perez from verse 12 earlier in chapter 4.

So why this list now?

Is this another of those particular pedantic Hebrew things – yet another of those lists of names they somehow felt they had to regurgitate from time to time?

Wasn’t this what we heard earlier in our reading from Matthew’s first chapter?

Of course, that is far from true.

As you’ve probably guessed by now, if you didn’t already know, these genealogies serve a most important role in the Bible.

In fact, this is the major purpose for this very book!

How can we know this?

Well, the phrase in the NIV, “This, then, is the family line of…” appears a number of times elsewhere in Scripture.

The word for “family line” or “generations”, as other versions translate it, is found in Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, and 1st Chronicles.

There is history in this phrase.

And history is, after all **His Story**.

This shows how the covenant God worked through the past generations so that we today are part of His people also.

You think about it.

Your birth was because God gave the gift of conception.

A gift that came to a certain father and mother.

So each of us is the result of various genes and biological descent.

We are the products of history.

If you don't know that now you'll certainly find out when you got to your doctor with a medical complaint!

This means our history matters.

Whether it is physically or spiritually.

Think of it this way.

The verses 18 till 22 may seem like a boring set of names.

But what if they were the names of your immediate ancestors?

Then you would be most interested!

This is where you're from.

It's who you are.

Do you see it now?

You can see the spirituality in David's family already there before he was born.

I think of what an Aunt of mine found out in her searching through our family history.

Apparently I have a great, great grandfather who went to theological college.

Because of poverty in the family, though, he had to go back to work on the family farm.

However, his brother did become a minister.

A minister who sided with those who removed themselves from the liberal Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, because of their unfaithfulness to God's Word.

He was part of the tremendous revival – the Doleantie - the Lord worked amongst His people in that country in the 19th century.

May the Lord bless my ministry so that I follow in his footsteps.

And it does help me to see why I have been so blessed to be where I am today.

So it is not David who is important here.

This is about what led up to David.

But it does give us an idea of how the life of the nation was tied up with their king.

Especially with the king who was the man after God's own heart.

There is another thing we must note in these last five verses.

Because there are some names missed out.

This is not an exhaustive genealogy.

As we find in Luke 3 and Matthew 1 there are certain names recorded while others are not.

And it's certainly not that the names not recorded are the one we'd rather not record.

In fact, some of the most infamous names are deliberately kept in, especially the names of Tamar and Bathsheba.

Yet it's interesting those not included, which includes Elimelech.

Because you would think that since this is about preserving his family line that that that would naturally be included.

But it's Boaz who gets mentioned in those lists.

Then, again, Obed is the actual son of Boaz.

So in an official genealogy this is what is stated.

What does this all mean?

Congregation, this means this is all about you!

For this is nothing less than being about all those who are truly part of God's covenant community.

All of them are ordinary people.

Whether it was the great King David or Christ the Saviour Himself, they were born into families of conventional, everyday people.

But because they were linked to God by faith and readily obeyed His Word they were used in the most extraordinary way!

The Lord's grace touched them in such a way that it's clear – then and now – that they were used for God's providential plan.

Dear believer, your faith, your ordinary life, your decisions too, are part of this God's providential and gracious care.

You are just as much part of the covenant family whose first father was Abraham as much as any of the list of saints Hebrews 11 declares!

You equally share in the continuous family line which has come down from them through Jesus Christ to us today.

The God who called Ruth is the God who calls you in Christ.

And so the call comes to each one of us to promise and willing and loving obedience in response to His gracious invitation.

Come, dear brother, dear sister, dear mother, dear father, dear daughter, dear son, to your place under the refuge of His wings!

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O Heavenly Father, Creator and Sustainer of Your world, You hold all that You have made within Your gracious providence.

So we thank You for all we have been given.

O Lord, we pray that You will help us to see everything as coming from Your hand.
Then we will live as those whose lives are entrusted to Your sovereign care.
As Ruth from Moab became one of Your people, so you call us by name
and invite us home.
How much aren't we glad to find shelter under the refuge of Your
wings!

Dear Jesus, You are our ultimate kinsman-redeemer.
You have lived among us and paid the price for our being right with God.
You set us free to share in the life of Your family.
O Saviour, forgive us our sins, and teach us how to forgive.
Enable us to live like Naomi who, even when walking through dark places, never
lost sight of You, the God of the covenant.

O Lord, through the Holy Spirit, keep us in the way of Your truth.
And as we live in that Word help us to show the Living Word, as Boaz did in his
self-sacrificing love.

O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, You, the One True and eternal God, are the God of
history.

It is indeed Your Story.
And so enable us to live out our part in fulfilling that story in this time and
place.

Please rule over us through Christ our Lord.
In His saving and reigning Name, we pray, Amen.