

RUTH

A STORY OF REDEMPTION

An Advent and Series Devotional



ONE
FELLOWSHIP
CHURCH

THE MEANING OF ADVENT

For more than 1400 years, Christians have been celebrating Advent. The word comes from the Latin “adventus” which means “coming”. It is a time of anticipation and celebration of Christ’s birth into this world and His coming again.

Advent is one of the main times of the year where the entire church family thinks about and celebrates the Lord's arrival on our planet. We celebrate the miracle of our Lord appearing in the flesh. He is Immanuel, "God is with us".

We know the whole story of His arrival, His ministry, His sacrifice on the cross and His ascension into glory. During the Advent season, we reflect on themes of Hope, Love, Joy and Peace that will be fully realized at His second coming.

WHY STUDY RUTH DURING ADVENT

Ruth, the great-grandmother of King David and an ancestress of our Savior, was a pivotal piece of God’s plan. Much like the story of Christmas, the book of Ruth shows us how God uses the most unlikely of people and circumstances to bring about His glory.

We will see Hope restored in a dark time. We will see radical Love and immense Joy on display. And, the events of Ruth help usher the Prince of Peace into the world.

We hope you find this devotional helpful no matter where you are in your faith. The promises of God are real for you now just as much as they were thousands of years ago. We pray that you will feel His love for you and see the lengths He will go to in order to make you His own.



INTRODUCTION – GOD’S PROVIDENCE AND RESTORATION

by Betty Laswell

The prelude for the Book of Ruth (1:1-6) is an amazing account of God’s providence and restoration for an Ephrathah widow from Bethlehem. Naomi, a Hebrew woman, finds herself alone in a pagan land, grieving the loss of her husband and both sons. Several years prior, she had left behind all that she knew and followed her husband in search of provisions during a famine. The family moved away from Bethlehem, which means “house of bread,” in search of food in the country of Moab – a traditional enemy of Israel throughout biblical history. The story centers on the three widowed women who were facing an uncertain future. Without the protection a husband, father or son could offer, Naomi and her daughters-in-law were in a very vulnerable position. Naomi, as an elderly widow, without children or grandchildren was perhaps the worst possible fate that an Israelite woman could experience. The deaths of all the men of her family were disastrous for Naomi. The losses she suffered were not necessarily the result of choices that she made. Yet God is sovereignly at work moving her back to Bethlehem, the place of eternal blessings, so He could provide for her deepest needs.

Hopelessly blinded by her grief, Naomi cannot see the move as God’s providence and restoration for her. She is fully aware that Yahweh can bless, but she perceives only disaster for herself as she goes back alone, brokenhearted and empty-handed. Yet returning to Bethlehem is the means by which God will bring blessing into Naomi’s life. It is not from providential happenstance that she will arrive there at the beginning of the barley harvest but is the evidence of the provision of God. The Sovereign Lord has initiated the means whereby Naomi will not only survive but will be delivered by a kinsman redeemer. Understanding the struggles that her daughters-in-law would face as Moabite widows in Bethlehem, she strongly encouraged them to return to their mother’s homes to begin a new life (1:8-15). The women clung to each other sobbing over yet another loss, at the suggestion of this separation. Albeit reluctant at first, Orpah kisses them goodbye and returns to her home in Moab. Realizing that Ruth could not be persuaded otherwise, Naomi and she began the long and lonely trek toward Bethlehem.

The Book began with the tragic and untimely deaths of Naomi’s husband and sons draining her of all hope. Profound bitterness caused her to discount the providential and restorative purposes God intended through Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-law for both of them. God provided for Naomi in several ways. He delivered Ruth from a pagan nation into a personal relationship with Him. He gave her an Israelite husband, a family, an aging mother-in-law she loved, adored and cared for, a nation of God’s chosen people, and an ancestral line that included King David and the promised Messiah. He also allowed Ruth to become an exemplary example for women for generations to come (Ruth 3:11). The book climaxes with Naomi’s emptiness and misery turned into joy as she held Obed in her arms while her life-long friends referred to him as Naomi’s son (Ruth 4:17). What began as a story of great sorrow was in reality an account of the goodness of God, His providential care and the restored hope He alone is able to provide.

QUESTIONS

Do you think God is involved in the details of your life? Have you seen Him at work in your past? How?

Where are you spiritually right now?

In what ways do you want to change in this coming year? What do you want to be different in your relationship with God?

Is there any area of your life where you are struggling to understand “why”? How can God, or will God, use this situation?



“We must accept finite disappointment,
but never lose infinite hope.”
~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

HOPE [LESS]

by Elise Tegegne

Let's be real: there is no hope.

For starters, just skim the headlines. Here's one: the war in my husband Dagi's home country of Ethiopia is intensifying. This conflict has left thousands dead, millions displaced and hundreds of thousands at risk of famine. Our Ethiopian friend living in the Netherlands does not know if her mother, father, brother, sister are still alive.

Zooming in a little closer, look at your own community. See the hungry image-bearers gripping cardboard signs off interstate exits. See the funeral processions for youth lost to bullets. See the division fracturing, breaking the body of Christ.

Peering closer, see the drama splintering your own family. See the friend who betrayed you. See the empty place at the table full of so much ache.

Dare, if you will, to look at yourself.

If I muster the courage, I see the sin deforming my own heart. How quickly my prayers derail into thoughts of what's for breakfast. How my manicured mask of piety is just a cover for my pride. How weak I am in bearing the burden of my daily labors. *Without Me, you can do nothing*, Christ says. Nothing. Scouring my soul, I cannot find even one shard of hope.

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Ruth knew about hopelessness. At the time, kingless Israel suffered under a period of political, social and spiritual unrest. On a more personal level, her father-in-law died. Her brother-in-law died. Her husband died. Her sister-in-law, one of the only souls in the universe who had been through the losses she had been through, left. She had to give up everything she knew – country, culture, community – to be an alien in a strange new land. She survived by searching other people's fields for leftover fallen grain.

As an impoverished widow, a misfit foreigner, a heathen (to many Jewish eyes), how could Ruth possibly dare to hope? As Christmas approaches, how can we – fractured, misguided, weak as we are – dare to hope? In a time of war, how could we celebrate? How could anything be more absurd?

But what if hopelessness was actually a door to hope? Jesus's heart is not for the sleek and self-made, the ones who have it all together. His heart is for the hopeless. The prostitutes, the disease-deformed, the beggars. Rejects. Losers. Those who could not find a shadow of hope in themselves.

Ruth was a hopeless case. In her culture, she had nothing, was nothing. Her only hope was God. And because she had nothing human to hold on to, she was able to receive God's miraculous redemption.


Through Boaz, God gave her a husband, a family, protection, social status, and provision for life. But what is perhaps most incredible is that He invited Ruth, the hopeless foreigner, to participate in the bloodline of the ultimate Redeemer. To become a part of God's grand story of redeeming all things.

Ironically, I'm at my most hopeless when I don't feel like I need divine hope. When I think I can handle disciplining a ten-month-old and holding my husband's heart and beating back my pride all by myself. But when I've finally realized my hopelessness, when I've given up on every human hope – failed governments, militaries, schools, homes, even my own splintered self – my emptied hands are finally open to receive real hope.

Empty-handed, we can hope now, in this moment. In this moment, we can bury ourselves in the gentle arms of Christ, fall exhausted into His embrace. And receive abundant and abounding grace for our limitless needs. This God who bubbles over with love delights to lavish the confused and hopeless and burnt out with tender compassion.

Empty handed, we can hope now – and for the future. We can look forward with great anticipation to the unfolding story of God's continuing redemption of the universe. This God who was birthed in a barn and drank breast milk. Who, like Ruth, chose to be a misfit and a foreigner. Who knew about family drama, flaky friends, the empty place at the table. Who obliterated death and sin and the Evil One. Who created all the glorious worlds of the cosmos. Who holds all power and authority. Who is making all things new. Who is changing His people from glory to glory so that one day He will commune with us in perfect intimacy forever. Who – at the deepest core of His core – is love. This God – what more awesome, more unimaginable, more inexpressible hope?

Here, in the dust of hopelessness, real Hope arises



"Sometimes God comforts us directly, but that's not His only strategy. Normally He comforts us through His people - so if our lives aren't open to one another, they're closed to the Father's comfort. Let's share our lives; let's fellowship in suffering so that we can fellowship in His mercy."

~ Thabiti M. Anyabwile

QUESTIONS

Advent reminds us that we are to remain hopeful and active in our faith while we await the Lord's return. How are you preparing yourself for His coming?

Advent is the anticipation of the GOOD NEWS of Jesus coming into the world. He brings glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners ... Who are the brokenhearted, the captives or prisoners in your life who do not know Him? What can you do this year to reach out to them?

Think about some of the problems that you are trying to overcome. Where do you need God to come along side you? Where do you need rescue? What is a promise from God that you need to cling to while you wait?

God wants to hear from you. We can boldly share anything and everything with Him. What do you want to say to Him?

What is God saying to you?

"For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you live, I will live;
your people will be my people, and your God will be my God."

Ruth 1:16b

"God doesn't call us to be comfortable. He calls us to trust Him so completely that we are unafraid to put ourselves in situations where we will be in trouble if He doesn't come through." "When I am consumed by my problems - stressed out about my life, my family, and my job - I actually convey the belief that I think the circumstances are more important than God's command to always rejoice." ~ Francis Chan



GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL CARE FOR WIDOWS

By Betty Laswell

The biblical narrative of Ruth includes three widows, Naomi and her two Moabite daughters-in-law Orpah and Ruth. All of them had to contend with the premature deaths of their husbands and left with uncertain futures. It is no secret that life can be hard, famines happen, and people we love die. But none of these disastrous things, or any of life's circumstances, goes unnoticed by God Almighty.

We learn by experience that God works in human history providing His counsel and tender care in the day-to-day affairs of ordinary people. How we respond to the troubles, trials and even blessings of life will affect the outcome. Those who choose to yield to God's guidance, trust in His Word and embrace godly standards have the assurance of His promises. Orpah had the option to follow Naomi or return to her homeland; given her mother-in-law's advice, it seemed logical for her to return to Moab, which she did. Ruth having been offered the same counsel and opportunity, however, did what seemed totally illogical and remained loyal to Naomi. While the outcome of Orpah's departure is unknown, it's clear she missed the blessings her sister-in-law received in Bethlehem. Because of Ruth's desire to know God, she and Naomi became the beneficiaries of His favor because Boaz was willing to undertake the levirate obligation on their behalf under the wisdom and foresight of Israel's covenant-keeping God.

I too learned of God's tender care and concern for widows when I became one after being my husband's caregiver for sixteen years. I can attest; however, God's timing is sometimes hard to understand. Yet, I trust it's not by chance that my husband passed away on December 3, 2015, on our eldest son's birthday, two weeks before our forty-ninth anniversary and three weeks before Christmas. Like Naomi, my life endured some profound changes during those caregiving years, which included major shifts in my health, plus many other sweeping adjustments shortly after Jon's death. In that season of sadness and sorrow, our family and I faced life without my husband, their father and grandfather. Yet, God's providence, protection and provision was evident. Only six months after Jon passed, like Ruth, I did something that seemed totally illogical too. I enrolled in Boyce College, found an apartment and moved alone, lock, stock and barrow to Louisville, Kentucky from everything I loved and knew. At sixty-eight

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years old, I became a 'geriatric freshman', attended college for the first time in my life, and planned to remain there until graduation. But three years later, when the 2019 fall semester ended just before Thanksgiving, and it was time to sign a new lease for my apartment, once again God's timing took center stage. He orchestrated circumstances that called for an unplanned return to Indianapolis and a transfer of colleges; all in thirty days' time. Amazingly, three months later the pandemic struck! I look back over that puzzling time and praise God for His providence, even when I didn't understand what He was doing or why. He has always been there when I needed Him the most. God's timing isn't easy to understand but it's always right!

Here we are, six years after Jon's passing, I and my family fondly remember and greatly miss him; but the Spirit of God continues to comfort us. He is the same God who says, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy to whom I will show mercy." During Advent this Christmas, I am especially thankful because of God's mercy and grace in sending His beloved Son to redeem us from our sins and for our forgiveness. Together with the body of believers, we too look back in celebration of Jesus' lowly birth in Bethlehem and look forward to Christ's imminent return for those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of Life. In this joyous season of giving and receiving gifts, praise God for the gift of Jesus Christ the Savior! The Babe born in a manger that first Christmas day was the promised Messiah from the ancestral line of Boaz and Ruth. As we celebrate His Virgin birth, let us all lift our hearts in worship and praise for truly, Immanuel, our God is with us! (Matt. 1:18-25)

LIVING A LIFE OF LOVE

By Marcus Dennis

When you type into Google “love is _____”, you get about 12 million results in just half a second. You’ll see things like “love is friendship”, “love is immortality”, “love is the trophy of life”, “love is a fire”... With all these different ideas of love, how can we know what love really is? We have to go to the one true explanation of love.

“Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for **God is love**. (1Jhn 4:7-8, bold added)

Love is what God is all about. Love is His center and truest form. Love is the concentrated sum of all His qualities and attributes. Love is the source of all His actions. Love is infinite in amount, more powerful, and farther reaching than any of us can comprehend.

If that is true, then how should we respond? Should not His followers be all about love as well?

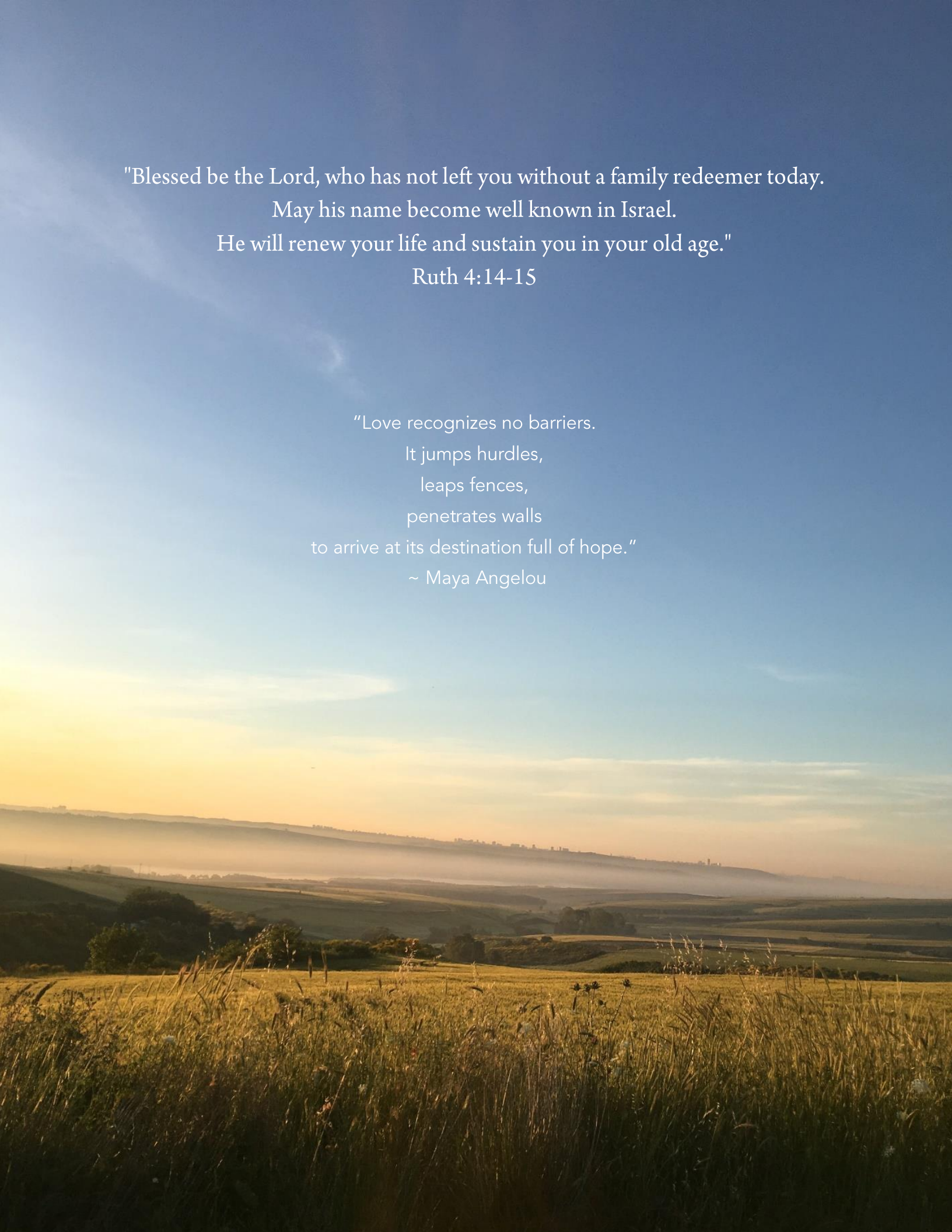
“**Imitate God**, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. **Live a life filled with love**, following the example of Christ.” (Eph 5:1-2a)

“For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will.” (Jhn 6:38)

“**All who love me will do what I say**. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them. Anyone who doesn’t love me will not obey me.” (Jhn 14:23-24a)

Instead of viewing our lives as a series of “NO” to the world, we can cling to Christ with a stronger “YES” to His Word.

One of the things I am most thankful for is how clear God’s Word is. God has given us exactly what we need to live this calling. How do we live out love; through obedience. I know that does not sound very Christmassy, but when we love Him, we trust Him. When we trust Him, we believe that what He says is only for our good. We want to be with Him and mimic Him so much that obedience is simply a natural result. Why would we not? Instead of viewing our lives as a series of “NO” to the world, we can cling to Christ with a stronger “YES” to His Word. Our obedience is what strengthens our love, drawing us closer and closer to Him. Love is what prompts Ruth to stick to Naomi even when that doesn’t look like the best choice. Ruth lives out love by seeking the welfare of others over herself. She is patient and kind. She trusts, hopes and perseveres. When we obey Jesus, we are saying to Him, “I want to walk as you walk, act as you act”. We recite the words of Ruth back to Jesus, “where you go, I will go.”



"Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you without a family redeemer today.
May his name become well known in Israel.
He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age."
Ruth 4:14-15

"Love recognizes no barriers.
It jumps hurdles,
leaps fences,
penetrates walls
to arrive at its destination full of hope."
~ Maya Angelou

UNLIKELY PLACES

By Kyle Dickerson

One of the prominent themes in the advent season is waiting. One of the most difficult things to do is wait. And yet, waiting is a prominent theme throughout scripture and the Advent season. Waiting culminates in Advent as we longingly wait for our hope to appear. We have all felt the angst of waiting especially in the Covid-19 season we are coming through. But waiting is not always longing in desperation. It can often be in hope and excitement. This anticipatory waiting is baked into this season as well! Children eagerly wait to wake parents for Christmas morning. We wait for the joy and rest of being with family. We eagerly anticipate the look on grandparent's face when they see grandchildren for the first time. Longing. Anticipating.

The reality about waiting is we have time to formulate an idea on the outcome of our waiting. We imagine how our waiting will be alleviated; how the thrill will be sprung. As we immerse ourselves in the book of Ruth, tension builds as we are drawn into this Biblical narrative. We wonder how the story will resolve and how life will pan out for Ruth and Naomi. If Ruth tells us anything, it is that the things we are waiting for will come from unlikely places.

Not only is our waiting fulfilled from unlikely places, but Ruth shows us that we can prolong our waiting with decisions we make. Elimelech found himself responsible for a family in the middle of a drought. In a very real sense, he and they were waiting. Waiting for rain, food supply, for something. In his waiting he moved his family from Bethlehem to Moab. Ironically, Elimelech moved his family where God had told them not to be because there was bread there and in doing so he left Bethlehem which means the house of bread. In an effort to save their lives and position themselves for plenty, Elimelech and his sons lost their lives, leaving their wives once again, waiting.

Often times, in our waiting we can manufacture the means in ourselves for the things we are waiting for, but it often doesn't suffice. We miss the blessing of the unlikely places, as we settle for substitutes. We manufacture paths to love, joy, hope, and peace, rather than waiting on the God of those very things. As Christians, we must become adept at patiently waiting for God. We must become astute learners and look for his hand to work in unlikely places.

We needn't look far for the story to remind us of the "unlikely places" principle. When the story is at its lowest point, we see God provide companionship for Naomi in the

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midst of her immense grief in her foreign daughter-in-law who had no social or covenant obligation to her. We see Ruth as the first beacon of hope, faithfulness to God, exemplifying neighborly love and being steadfast in the midst of a chaotic story. The idea that these traits would be found not in the women or men from Israel first in this story is unlikely. Even further, we see the unlikely redemption of Ruth by Boaz as he marries her. He wipes all their debts and takes both Ruth and Naomi from poverty to stability overnight even though it wasn't his responsibility first.

Take some time now and read the story again and mark all the unlikely places hope, provision, belonging, joy, love and redemption are found. What's even more astounding is the story of Ruth is but a link in a longer unlikely story. God uses Ruth and Boaz in the family line of King David and through that line they are in the family tree of another long-awaited king, Jesus! Similar to Ruth, Jesus comes to us from an unlikely place. Ironically, the unlikely place he comes from on earth is the same place Elimelech took his family from all those years before.

In this advent season as we reflect on the birth of Jesus and the theme of waiting, maybe we too should and can look in the most unlikely places. God does this all the time. Who would've planned to have the King of the Universe born in a poor inn with nothing to call his own? Are you searching for him in the unlikely places?

If you are like me, seasons of waiting can create patterns of discontent and nervous business. Even as we wait patiently for Jesus to come again, or as we wait for God to show intervene in our particular present place, or maybe we are longing and waiting for some of the other themes present in this season: love, joy, hope, peace. Are you looking in the unlikely places? Is there a love in your life that needs to be restored or reconciled? Maybe joy is right around the corner in the form of a simple act of kindness to someone else. In a season of loss, maybe hope is to be with the people you love rather than grieving alone. Could peace be found not in accomplishing the to-do list for the season, but by minimizing it to priorities and being ok with that?

Maybe as you think of unlikely places, you find yourself to be an unlikely place. Here is the hope of the story of Ruth, the Christmas season and the Bible, God shows up in unlikely ways and in unlikely places for unlikely people! If you feel like an unlikely place for God to show up, you are in good company, ask Zacchaeus!

In this advent season, may we wait well and live for the wonder and surprise of God working things out and providing all he has promised. As we continue to be in our own season of waiting for the Lord Jesus, my prayer is the story of Ruth will remind and encourage us that in seasons of waiting, God will show up in the most unlikely places.

Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly,
Thou hast brought me to the valley of vision,
where I live in the depths but see thee in the heights;
hemmed in by mountains of sin I behold thy glory.

Let me learn by paradox
that the way down is the way up,
that to be low is to be high,
that the broken heart is the healed heart,
that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit,
that the repenting soul is the victorious soul,
that to have nothing is to possess all,
that to bear the cross is to wear the crown,
that to give is to receive,
that the valley is the place of vision.

Lord, in the daytime stars can be seen from deepest wells,
and the deeper the wells the brighter thy stars shine;

Let me find thy light in my darkness,
thy life in my death,
thy joy in my sorrow,
thy grace in my sin,
thy riches in my poverty,
thy glory in my valley.

The Valley of Vision:
A Collection of Puritan Prayers
& Devotions,
edited by Arthur Bennett

QUESTIONS

Think about who you were before Jesus redeemed you. What has Jesus saved you from?

What gives you joy during this Advent season?

W. E. B. Du Bois said, "Now is the accepted time, not tomorrow, not some more convenient season. It is today that our best work can be done and not some future day or future year." What is God calling you to do today?

What are your thoughts on these quotes from Mother Teresa and Pastor Eric Mason?

I see Jesus in every human being. I say to myself, this is hungry Jesus, I must feed him. This is sick Jesus. This one has leprosy or gangrene; I must wash him and tend to him. I serve because I love Jesus. ~ Mother Teresa

"The gospel is supposed to bring people together who wouldn't naturally be together. We are called to advocate for the poor as an outworking of being a wise covenant community. This is the legacy of the church. Defending the cause of the needy and oppressed is a huge role that we are to be known for as the people of God." ~ Pastor Eric Mason

DECEMBER 05

Sunday Morning Prayer, 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Sunday Service, 10:00 AM - 11:15 AM

Student Ministry, 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM

DECEMBER 12

Sunday Service, 10:00 AM - 11:15 AM

Congregational Meeting, 5:00 PM - 6:30 PM

Solid Word Church

DECEMBER 19

Sunday Morning Prayer, 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Sunday Service, 10:00 AM - 11:15 AM

Student Ministry, 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM

DECEMBER 26

Sunday Service, 10:00 AM - 11:15 AM

Sunday Evening Prayer, 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM



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