

The book cover features a dark, textured background with a vertical strip on the left showing a white bird perched on a branch with yellow leaves. The title 'Holy Week' is written in a large, elegant, light-colored script font. Below it, the word 'DEVOTIONAL' is written in a smaller, spaced-out, light-colored sans-serif font. At the bottom, the word 'EASTER' is written in a large, bold, light-colored sans-serif font, followed by 'AT THE CHURCH AT WEST FRANKLIN' in a smaller, spaced-out, light-colored sans-serif font.

Holy Week

D E V O T I O N A L

EASTER

AT THE CHURCH AT WEST FRANKLIN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	3
<i>Holy Week</i>	5
EVENTS & SCRIPTURES	
<i>Palm Sunday</i>	8
WHO WILL FIGHT FOR US?	
<i>Holy Monday</i>	10
WOMEN, A TENT PEG, MILK & HONEY	
<i>Holy Tuesday</i>	12
GIDEON'S BELIEVE IT OR NOT	
<i>Spy Wednesday</i>	14
TAKE THE LEAD OR FINISH THE JOB?	
<i>Maundy Thursday</i>	16
LIKE SAMSON, LIKE JESUS?	
<i>Good Friday</i>	18
WE NEED A HERO	
<i>Holy Saturday</i>	20
SO WHAT?	
<i>Resurrection Sunday</i>	22
WHY SO MANY WOMEN?	

As your pastor, I understand my primary responsibility is to point you to God. Help you understand who He is. Help you hear from Him. Help you talk to Him. Help you grow in a life that is consumed by and enamored with God. In short, my job as your pastor is to call us all to worship God.


There are numerous ways to do this, of course. Every week, I get to open the Scriptures with you and try to explain what the text means and how it impacts your life with God and one another. I have the honor of praying for you: your soul, your health, your relationships, your struggles, your joys. On occasion, we have individual conversations where, hopefully, I can help you understand your way with God in the world a little better. There are moments in the hospital, at weddings, and at funerals. My responsibility for these things is to help us all remember to worship and obey God.

There's also writing. During the pandemic, I wrote to you weekly. Weekly letters that usually went out on Saturday morning. I am not sure if my sole intent was to point you to God or if I just needed a connection. I enjoyed working on those letters. I have missed writing to you in that way. I believe writing can be yet another way of calling us to remember and worship God.

Christians around the world are practicing Lent. Lent is a 40-day journey of sorts where many Christians give something up for the forty or so days leading up to Easter. The word "Lent" comes from an old English word that means "lengthen." It is a lengthy time. If my research is correct, it stems from Jesus's 40-day season of wilderness fasting between His baptism and earthly ministry. He was tempted by and resisted the devil. Lent is a season of surrender. Surrender something in order to get something else. Surrender one thing in order to hear from, connect with, worship, and obey God. I like that. I don't like to surrender. But I do like the thought of intimacy with God.

As a congregation, we are reading the Bible through chronologically. That said, the week we set aside to remember and celebrate Christ's Passion, we are reading through Judges, Ruth, and the beginning of 1st Samuel. With that in mind, this small 8-day devotional seeks to accomplish three things. First, to help us reflect on the events surrounding Jesus's last week on earth leading up to His death, burial, and resurrection. I have included the events and Scriptures for your reference. Second, I want to encourage you to continue reading the Bible through this year. Each day, I have tried to write thoughts based on the readings. I hope this compels you to continue on the journey. Third, I have sought to mesh the two together. In other words, I wanted to take what we are reading chronologically and make a connection with events that transpired with Jesus the week between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday.





I'll let you be the judge as to whether or not I was successful.

Though I didn't set out for there to be a unifying theme to these devotions, one emerged. Humanity is longing for a hero. Ever since the tragedy in the Garden, we have ached for someone to rescue us. We've wondered if there is hope. We've questioned if we could be loved. We've ached to get back to a rich, intimate, loving relationship with God. Jesus is God's emphatic "YES!" to all of these curiosities and aches. Many parts of the Bible hint at Him. But He, and only He, is God's means of our salvation and the fulfillment of our hearts.

Come, let us worship and bow down.

I offer this to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Looking to God with You,

Pastor Matt

SUNDAY (MARCH 29, AD 33)

- ***Jesus Enters Jerusalem***
MATTHEW 21: 1-11; MARK 11:1-10; LUKE 19:29-44; JOHN 12:12-19
- ***Jesus Predicts His Death***
JOHN 12:20-36
- ***Jesus Visits the Temple***
MATTHEW 21:14-17; MARK 11:11

MONDAY (MARCH 30, AD 33)

- ***Jesus Curses a Fig Tree***
MATTHEW 21:18-19; MARK 11:12-14
- ***Jesus Cleanses the Temple***
MATTHEW 21:12-13; MARK 11:15-18; LUKE 19:45-48

TUESDAY (MARCH 31, AD 33)

- ***Jesus Teaches His Followers a Lesson about the Fig Tree***
MATTHEW 21: 20-22; MARK 11:20-26
- ***Jesus Teaches and Engages in Controversies in the Temple***
MATTHEW 21:23-33; MARK 11:27-12:44; LUKE 20:1-21:4
- ***Jesus Predicts the Future***
MATTHEW 24-25; MARK 13:1-37; LUKE 21:5-36

WEDNESDAY (APRIL 1, AD 33)

- ***The Plot Against Jesus***
MATTHEW 26:3-5; MARK 14:1-2; LUKE 22:1-2

THURSDAY (APRIL 2, AD 33)

- ***Preparations for Passover***
MATTHEW 26:17-19; MARK 14:12-16; LUKE 22:7-13
- ***The Final Passover***
MATTHEW 26:20-29; MARK 14:17-23; LUKE 22:14-30; JOHN 13-14
- ***The Farewell Discourse***
JOHN 13-17
- ***Jesus Predicts Peter's Denials***
MATTHEW 26:31-35; MARK 14:27-31; LUKE 22:31-34
- ***Jesus Issues Final Practical Commands***
LUKE 22:35-38
- ***Garden of Gethsemane***
MATTHEW 26:36-46; MARK 14:32-42; LUKE 22:40-46

Holy Week

EVENTS & SCRIPTURES

FRIDAY (APRIL 3, AD 33)

- ***The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus***
MATTHEW 26:47-56; MARK 14:43-52; LUKE 22:47-53; JOHN 18:2-12
- ***The Jewish Trial of Jesus (Phase 1): Informal***
JOHN 18:13-14; 19-24
- ***The Jewish Trial of Jesus (Phase 2): More Formal***
MATTHEW 26:57, 59-68; MARK 14:53, 55-65; LUKE 22:63-71
- ***Peter Denies Jesus***
MATTHEW 26:58, 69-75; MARK 14:54, 66-72; LUKE 22:54B-62; JOHN 18:15-18, 25-27
- ***The Jewish Trial of Jesus (Phase 3): The Final Verdict***
MATTHEW 27:1-2; MARK 15:1
- ***Judas Hangs Himself***
MATTHEW 27:3-10
- ***The Roman Trial of Jesus (Phase 1): Pilate***
MATTHEW 27:11-14; MARK 15:2-5; LUKE 23:1-7; JOHN 18:28-38
- ***The Roman Trial of Jesus (Phase 2): Herod Antipas***
LUKE 23:8-12
- ***The Roman Trial of Jesus (Phase 3): The Final Verdict***
MATTHEW 27:15-26; MARK 15:6-15; LUKE 23:13-25; JOHN 18:38B-19:16
- ***The Road to Golgotha***
MATTHEW 27:27-34; MARK 15:16-23; LUKE 23:26-31; JOHN 19:16B-17
- ***The Crucifixion***
MATTHEW 27:35-44; MARK 15:24-32; LUKE 23:33-43; JOHN 19:18-27
- ***The Death of Jesus***
MATTHEW 27:45-56; MARK 15:33-41; LUKE 23:44-49; JOHN 19:38-37
- ***The Burial of Jesus***
MATTHEW 27:57-61; MARK 15:42-47; LUKE 23:50-56; JOHN 19:38-42

SATURDAY (APRIL 4, AD 33)

- ***The Jewish Leaders Post Guard***
MATTHEW 26:62-66

SUNDAY (APRIL 5, AD 33)

- ***Women Discover the Empty Tomb***
MATTHEW 28:1-7; MARK 16:1-7; LUKE 24:1-7; JOHN 20:1
- ***The Women Tell the Disciples***
MATTHEW 28:8-10; MARK 16:8; LUKE 24:8-11; JOHN 20:2

- ***Peter and John Rush to the Tomb***

LUKE 24:12; JOHN 20:3-10

- ***Mary Returns to the Tomb and Encounters Jesus***

JOHN 20:11-18

- ***Encounter on Emmaus Road***

LUKE 24:13-35

- ***Jesus Appears to the Ten Without Thomas***

LUKE 24:36-43; JOHN 20:19-23

THESE REFERENCES AND TITLES WERE TAKEN FROM ANDREAS KOSTENBERGER'S AND JUSTIN TAYLOR'S BOOK *The Final Days of Jesus: The Most Important Person Who Ever Lived*. CROSSWAY, 2014.

"After the death of Joshua, the Israelites inquired of the LORD, 'Who will be the first to fight for us against the Canaanites?'" Judges 1:1

"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to them." Judges 21:25

ADAM – DEAD

NOAH – DEAD

ABRAHAM – DEAD

ISAAC – DEAD

JACOB – DEAD

JOSEPH – DEAD

MOSES – DEAD

JOSHUA – DEAD

So much promise. So much hope. So much anticipation. God told the serpent in the Garden that one would come from Eve who would crush his head (Genesis 3:15). From that time on, God's people asked, "Who is it?" "Who will be the one who makes everything right again?" "Who will be the one who will finally crush our enemy?" From Adam to Joshua.

"Is it him?" No. "What about him?" No. "Him?" No.

With their beloved leader Joshua dead, the cry continued: "Who will be the first to fight for us?" (Judges 1:1) In other words, "Who will help us?" "Who will deliver us?" "Who is going to get us out of this mess?"

Spoiler Alert: We don't get the answer in the book of Judges either. The last verse? "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to them" (Judges 21:25). Fun. Times.

Fast forward several hundred years. God's people were still looking. One, finally(!), held great promise. More than most. This could be Him. So much hope. So much anticipation. After three years of extraordinary ministry, He caused a tremendous stir by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. The crowds shouted, "Hosanna!" "Hosanna!" Echoes of Judges 1: "Save us now!" "Fight for us, now!"

The ironic twist this time was that the man on the donkey was indeed Him. Jesus of Nazareth! The Messiah of God! The problem? They missed Him. They were looking for something different. This potential king with such promise from the crowd on Palm Sunday

was crucified by this same crowd five days later. The one they were looking for came. But they wanted a different kind of king. They had hoped for centuries. He came. They saw Him. Then they killed Him.

Our hearts are hardwired to long for more. For Someone to save. For Someone to Redeem, Restore, and Rescue. We've been doing it since the horrific events in the Garden. We don't have to look anymore. We don't have to wonder anymore. We don't have to question who it is. Our hearts are made to be filled by Jesus. But here's the thing: don't let what you most need and long for pass you by. Don't overlook or dismiss Him because He's not what you thought. Lean in. Pay attention. Listen. Learn. Surrender. It's Jesus you're after.

He's the king who fights on our behalf.

"Barak said to her, 'If you will go with me, I will go. But if you will not go with me, I will not go.' 'I will go with you,' she said, 'but you will receive no honor on the road you are about to take because the LORD will sell Sisera into a woman's hand.' So Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh."

Judges 4:8-9

Stop me if you've heard this before:

God doesn't do things the way we expect or anticipate.

We see it over and over and over again in Scripture. Chief among the reasons? Because we are so ignorant and need the reminder over and over and over again.

On Holy Monday – the day after Jesus rides into town on a donkey, adored by the crowds – Jesus curses a fig tree and gets testy with merchants in the temple. Clearly, Jesus is not trying to win a popularity contest. He doesn't do things the way we expect or anticipate.

We should know this. He's been doing this for centuries. Take Judges 4 as an example. Nine verses into the chapter and we know God's people are in rebellion against God (v. 1); they are sold as slaves to the Canaanites (v. 2); they are surrounded by an army with the greatest and best technology (v. 3); a woman (Deborah) is sent by God to call a reluctant man (Barak) to lead a rebellion (vs. 4-7); and, due to the reluctance, Deborah tells him a woman would get the credit for the victory (vs. 8-9). Exciting times, to be sure. In a male-dominated world and society, we read of two women called by God to get the job done.

Barak, to his credit, follows Deborah's lead and – thanks to God throwing the commander (Sisera) and his army into mass confusion – defeats the massive Canaanite regime (think David vs. Goliath). Barak, miraculously, leads an Israelite victory (vs. 14-16).

Sisera, however, escaped and found himself hiding in a woman's tent. The woman's name was Jael. Jael, knowing who he was and represented, convinced him to stay a while and rest. Her hospitality was both generous and calculated. She provided him with milk to drink instead of water. Not long after Sisera conked out from exhaustion (and a tall glass of milk), Jael took a tent peg and nailed it into his temple. Sisera died immediately. The commander of the greatest army in the known world was killed by a woman.

God's people delivered. God's people – while acting in evil rebellion – were set free. God sent a woman to a reluctant leader. The reluctant leader and the female judge led a charge. Enemies were sent into complete chaos by God. The leader of the opposition was killed. God's people were released. What did Israel do to earn freedom? Nothing. How did they get free? By someone else. Grace. Ultimately, by a hammer and a nail (hint, hint). No. *God doesn't do things the way we expect or anticipate.*

Oh, and one more thing. Deborah's name means "bee" (as in "bumble bee"). Jael's name means "mountain goat." What do bees produce? Honey.

What do mountain goats produce? Milk.

When we follow God's ways and believe what He has done for us (even when they aren't what we expect or anticipate), where will He lead us?

A land flowing with. . . well, you know.

"The Angel of the LORD came, and He sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash, the Abiezrite. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in the wine vat in order to hide from Midianites. Then the Angel of the LORD appeared to him and said, 'The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.'"

Judges 6:11-12

On the Tuesday prior to Jesus's crucifixion, He spent time teaching about the future. He predicted the future. He laid out for His listeners the way things were going to be in the days ahead. Believe it or not, the things He said did and will come about.

Did you catch what the Angel of the LORD did to Gideon? Predicted the future. The biblical author makes sure we know where Gideon was when the Angel appeared to him: hiding from the Midianites. Scared. Fearful. Anxious. Frantic. Afraid. Gideon is hiding when the Angel says, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior." Predicting the future. Believe it or not, Gideon, you are a mighty warrior.

I am guessing you know the story. Scared, Gideon conquered the Midianites as a mighty warrior. The nation of Israel ultimately begged Gideon to rule over them due to his conquests and reputation (8:22). It is a Beautiful and fascinating account of God choosing the weak to shame the strong.

But do me a favor. Actually, do yourself a favor. Read through the story of Gideon and write down the things Gideon does to prove his worth before God. Go through the story and see where you find God waiting until Gideon has his stuff in order so he can use him. Find all the times Gideon demonstrates a maturity that earns him the right to lead and be used by God. Go ahead. I'll wait.

That's right. You won't find it anywhere. You don't see it. The Bible doesn't record any instances demonstrating Gideon has his life in order and is a mature leader prior to being used by God or told he is a "mighty warrior." As a matter of fact, reading through the story, here is what you will find about Gideon:

- HE'S HIDING.**
- HE'S SCARED.**
- HE'S A NOBODY.**
- HE'S MAD AT GOD.**
- HE DOESN'T PAY ATTENTION TO THE WORD.**
- HE WANTS GOD TO USE SOMEONE ELSE.**
- HE'S A MESS.**

What does God do?

- **GOD PURSUES HIM.**
- **GOD GOES AFTER HIM.**
- **GOD CALLS HIM.**
- **GOD MAKES HIM.**

Don't miss this.

Don't pass over the character and greatness of our God.

If you are prone to think God will accept you when you get everything in order, you don't yet understand. He knows the future. He knows you won't ever get everything in order. If you are prone to think God only uses those who haven't sinned much or don't have a past, then you don't yet understand. If you are prone to think that if you're running from God, or hiding, or living a life of sin, that He doesn't want anything to do with you – you don't yet understand. He doesn't wait for you to get it right. He knows the future. He takes, rescues, transforms, and acts. He predicts the future and calls you into what He is making you into. It's not up to you. It's up to Him. What is He making you and wanting to do in you and through you?

Believe it or not, it's true.

"You will become pregnant and have a son whose head is never to be touched by a razor because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb. He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines." Judges 13:5 (Emphasis mine)

Sarah. Rachel. Hannah. Elizabeth. Women who, at first, were unable to give birth. Women who, when God opened their womb, placed a spectacular calling on their son's lives. Isaac. Joseph. Samuel. John. And here, in Judges 13. A woman whose name we do not know. God reveals His plan to her, not her husband Manoah. She is going to give birth to a son. Samson.

This mother-to-be was told her son would not actually deliver Israel from the Philistines. . . rather, he would merely *take the lead* in doing so.

It's interesting who God picks to take the lead in deliverance and who He picks to finish the job.

Samson's mother didn't originally perceive the messenger to be the Lord himself (13:6-7). Samson's dad, Manoah, pretty much dismissed it the entire time (13:6-23). His mom, not his dad, names the child Samson. It's a pagan label. A name for "sun" after the Canaanite sun god. Sure, the mom abstains from alcohol and unclean food during the pregnancy. But her devotion to the God who opened her womb was dicey at best.

Their son, Samson, takes after Mom and Dad. A chip off the ole block. He is used and chosen by God – but takes several godless liberties while "taking the lead" to deliver Israel. He pursued a foreign woman (14:1-2); he intentionally contacted (read: touched) dead/unclean animals (14:8-9, 15:15); he is seduced by a woman who wasn't his wife (16:4-7); and ultimately surrendered his God-given secret (16:17).

Samson "took the lead" in delivering the Israelites in various circumstances and situations. But he never finished the job. Interesting how God chose Samson – and his parents – to be used for such purposes.

Today is Wednesday of Holy Week. It's been called "Spy Wednesday" because this is the day Judas agreed to give up Jesus for silver. It's the day Judas-as-spy went into action. Judas, you could argue, "took the lead" in the crucifixion of Jesus.

It's interesting who God picks to take the lead in deliverance and who He picks to finish the job.

Samson was chosen by God to lead Israel's deliverance from Philistine enemies. He took the lead, yes. But his actions were anything but holy. Judas, chosen by God to hand Jesus over to authorities (John 17:12). And, without a doubt, took the lead in the most evil and ungodly of ways.

As we reflect on Samson's birth announcement and Judas' betrayal today, let's rejoice that the One who finished the job did so for all of us fallen humans who, at best, can take the lead. We aren't able to bring ultimate deliverance. No, no. We are the ones who so desperately need it.

It's interesting who God picks to take the lead in deliverance and so beautiful Who He picks to finish the job.

"Samson said, 'Let me die with the Philistines.' He pushed with all of his might, and the temple fell on the leaders and all the people in it. And the dead he killed at his death were more than those he had killed in his life." Judges 16:30

"Maundy." It's Latin for "command." Today, we call it "Maundy Thursday" because Jesus gave the command to His disciples to love one another. After washing the feet of His disciples and predicting Judas' betrayal, Jesus said: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so must love one another" (John 13:34).

Jesus lived for the lives of others.

Jesus died for the lives of others.

Jesus calls His followers to do the same. As He loved us, so we love one another.

Speaking of which. . . Samson. Yeah, *that* Samson. Not the same – but similar. Like. Like Jesus, like Samson.

Think about it:

- **SAMSON'S LIFE STARTED WITH AN ANGEL PROMISING A SON TO A MOM YET TO BEAR CHILDREN (JUDGES 13).**
- **HIS LIFE WAS FILLED WITH SUPERNATURAL STRENGTH DOING SUPERNATURAL WORKS (SEE JUDGES 14-16).**
- **HIS LIFE ENDED BY BEING ARRESTED, CAPTURED FOR PIECES OF SILVER, BLINDED, MOCKED, HUMILIATED, AND TREATED SHAMEFULLY (JUDGES 16:25-28)**
- **SAMSON, THE ONE WHOM GOD RAISED UP, VOLUNTARILY DIED IN ORDER TO KILL GOD'S ENEMIES. HE ENDED UP DOING MORE IN HIS DEATH THAN HE DID IN HIS LIFE (JUDGES 16:28-30).**

Does this remind you of anyone?

To be sure, Samson was not the Christ. Not even close. But there were pointers. There were clues. There were ways his life (and death) were used by God to show us how God works. God raises up in order to save lives. God, even in death, spares people.

No. Samson was not the Christ. But we now know God used the death of Christ to deliver humanity from rebellion against Him. Why? Because He loves us. And what does He command ("maundy") us to do? Love one another.

The Father brings life through death. He loves others through death. What needs to die in you today in order for someone in your life to be loved? What part of you needs

to die so that another can have life? As He has loved us, so let us love one another.

"After the death of Joshua, the Israelites inquired of the LORD, 'Who will be the first to fight for us against the Canaanites?'" Judges 1:1

"In those days, when there was no king in Israel . . ." Judges 19:1

"In those day there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him." Judges 21:25

"They twisted together a crown of thorns, put it on his head, and placed a staff in his right hand. And they knelt down before him and mocked him: 'Hail, king of the Jews!' Then they spat on him, took the staff, and kept hitting him on the head. After they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him." Matthew 27:29-31

The human race is desperate for a hero. We can't fix ourselves. We need someone outside of ourselves. And when God sends that "someone" to fix us – we don't want him. God's love for us anyway is beyond comprehension.

The end of Judges is anything but a, "and they lived happily ever after" ending. The book starts with Israel looking for a deliverer. The book ends with a melancholy tone of "no king" and "everyone doing whatever seems right to them." When humans do whatever they want, with no direction, the outcome isn't pretty – to put it mildly.

The book of Judges ends with a father refusing to let his daughter and her family launch (Judges 19:1-9); Benjaminites doing unspeakable things (Judges 19:10-28); a woman cut into 12 parts and sent throughout the land of Gibeah (Judges 19:29-30); the tribes of Benjamin and Israel slaughtering one another relentlessly (Judges 20); and major deception so the Benjaminites can marry and have wives.

Yessir. I'd say when it's left to us – with no king and doing whatever we desire – the outcome is dark - to put it mildly.

Not to mention what we do when God does send the King. When God acts and sends the Deliverer and Rescuer and Redeemer we so desperately need, we don't want Him. We want someone who looks different, acts differently, talks differently, and behaves differently. We don't want a King who is pitiful looking, poor, from a redneck town, and who is mutilated on a cross. The twenty-four hours we set aside called "Good Friday" is evidence of this fact.

When left to our own selves, we don't fare well.

When God's means of salvation is given, we don't want Him.

What does God do? Sends Him anyway. God Has Him crucified anyway. Forgives us for "we know not what we do." Even in our rebellion and rejection and ignorance and arrogance – God continues to send, to love, to act, to rescue, to carry out His plan.

On this Good Friday, I hope you take some time to contemplate the cross. Sit in it. Give space for the excruciating details of what happened to our King 2,000 years ago. Don't rush to Sunday. It's okay. Let yourself "go there."

But also know that God doesn't wait for you to get it together before He acts on your behalf. God doesn't wait for you to "get your ducks in a row" to love you. God is not waiting for you to stop sinning so He can finally do something with you. Read Judges. Read the events of Good Friday. He loves you now. He loves the rebel. He loves the unbelief. He loves the one who does what is right in her own eyes. He loves the one who shirks off any allegiance to a king. What was God doing while they spit on His Son? What was God doing while they annihilated Him?

Saving them. Saving you. Saving me.
Even while we were still sinners, Christ died (Romans 5:8).

"The neighbor women said, 'A son has been born to Naomi,' and they named him Obed. He was the Father of Jesse, the Father of David.

Now, these are the family records of Perez:

Perez fathered Hezron, Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, Amminadab fathered Nashon, Nashon fathered Salmon, Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David."

Ruth 4:17-22

At first glance, Ruth seems like a random short story amidst the sixty-six books we call the Bible. It's a beautiful story. It's a welcome story following the book of Judges. It's, well, nice. It's a great story, but perhaps you're asking yourself, "So what?" Sure. We're glad it happened. But why is the story of Ruth and Naomi here?

Before we answer this question, let's put ourselves in the shoes (or sandals) of the disciples on the Saturday following Jesus's crucifixion. I wonder if they had similar thoughts. Were they thinking, "Well, that was nice. Great story. Wonderful man. Beautiful three years."? I wonder if they pondered, "So what? What was it all for? We thought He was the guy. Now what?" The guy they followed was dead. The One they hoped in was gone. Their assumed Messiah was locked away lifeless in a tomb. They had to have wondered, "What was the point of that?"

When it comes to the biblical record, we NEVER-EVER have to wonder if there is a point. A purpose. There is ALWAYS something going on. ALWAYS, a reason God ensured the words we read are included in the canon. There is MUCH to glean from the book of Ruth. Many reasons God did what He did and kept the four-chapter book as one of the sixty-six. The main reason? To reveal God's ways and means as to the who and how of the genealogy of Jesus.

FAMINE.

FOREIGN WOMEN.

WIDOWS.

FOREIGN LAND.

DISTANT KIN.

BUDDING ROMANCE.

KINSMAN REDEEMER.

BITTER MOTHER-IN-LAW.

LOYAL DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.

A GENTILE WIDOW MARRIES A NOBLE JEW.

MOTHER-IN-LAW GETS GRANDBABY.

OBED BORN.

So what? Beautiful story. But what's the point?

Did you notice the biblical author mentioned twice – TWICE – in a span of five verses in chapter four that Obed was David's granddaddy?

Verse 17: ". . . and they named him Obed. He was the Father of Jesse, the Father of David."

Verse 22: ". . . Boaz fathered Obed, Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David."

The author wants us to know something. The greatest King in Israel's history (David) was the result of the Famine-Naomi-Ruth-Widow-Gentile-Boaz-Obed saga. And the greatest King-God-Messiah-Savior-Lord came from the same line.

How does God work? Read Ruth.

Who does God use? Read Ruth.

What are the ways and means of God? Read Ruth.

What kind of people does God save? Read Ruth.

Who's in our Savior's family tree? Read Ruth.

Yes. Ruth is a beautiful story. A welcome relief after reading the twenty-one grueling chapters of Judges. But it's not just there because it's a nice story. It's a true story. A true story that teaches us about God. How He does what He does. Who He chooses to use for His glorious purposes.

And, yes, the life and death of Jesus is a beautiful story. His teaching and miracles and ways and words are life-giving. But the point of it all is yet to come. Tomorrow, we will see why He did what He did.

DEBORAH.

Jael (JUDGES 4-5).

SAMSON'S MOM (JUDGES 13).

JUDAH'S MISTRESS (JUDGES 19).

NAOMI.

RUTH.

HANNAH (1 SAMUEL 1-2).

MARY MAGDALENE.

JOANNA.

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JAMES.

"AND THE OTHER WOMEN." (LUKE 24:10)

We've read about a lot of different women this week. In fact, to state the obvious, women are remarkably prevalent throughout the Bible. Women were the last to leave the cross on Good Friday and the first to the tomb on Resurrection Sunday. The role of women is critical to the story of God in the Scriptures.

Why?

There are numerous reasons, to be sure. Let me mention two here. First, to give credibility to the resurrection story. Like it or not, a woman's testimony in the first-century world did not carry much weight; they were not allowed to give witness in a court of law. To the governing bodies of that day, a woman's testimony was not valid or valuable. Thus, if the Gospel writers were making up the story of Jesus' resurrection – they would NOT have had women as the first to testify! If the resurrection were a fairy tale – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John would have inserted a "male of good repute" to spread the word of what happened. Not women. Doubling down (as Luke seems to do) on the fact that women were the first to spread the word only adds credibility to the story.

A second reason I believe women are an essential piece to the biblical story is simply to show us – again and again – the way of God. God doesn't do things in "normal" ways. He doesn't act in ways society sees as customary. In cultures and communities where women are seen as "less than," God reveals their true value. In other words, the fact that women are found so frequently in Scripture is a pointer that God's ways and the world's ways are not the same.

God chooses, as Paul reminds us, the "weak" in the world (as society views them) to shame the strong (1 Corinthians 1:25-28). He chooses the poor. He chooses the outcast. He chooses the sinful. He chooses the dirty. He chooses the nobody. He chooses those the world labels weak, insignificant, and pointless – to reveal the real and powerful and actual ways of God and reality. Women are scattered throughout Scripture as

God's means to pull back the curtain of our imagination. To get us out of our dominating "worldly ways" of thinking in an effort to help us see reality "as it is in heaven."

Today, we celebrate the Resurrection. Yet another unexpected way of God. Perhaps THE unexpected way of God. A poor man from Nazareth who claimed to be God. A misunderstood man, both loved and hated. The self-proclaimed Son of God who was slaughtered as a heinous criminal. *That* man – of all men – walked out of a tomb three days after breathing his last.

Aren't you glad God doesn't do things the way we expect?

O come let us worship and bow down.



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