

un·compromising faith

IN THE DAYS OF THE JUDGES

SERMON TITLE: Seeing the Unseen God

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SCRIPTURE: Ruth 2

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The days of the judges were not happy and hopeful. They were dark and despairing. Israel was called to be a holy people – faithful to their God and showing the nations his power and love. Sadly, rather than bless the nations, Israel became like the nations. They bowed to idols and embraced pagan lifestyles. In short, they compromised. As the last line in Judges puts it: “Everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” Thus, these stories serve as both a warning and an invitation to us. They warn us against conforming to cultural narratives and they invite us to hope in the face of despair. They ask us, “What does it mean to have an uncompromising faith in a faithful God?”

SERMON SUMMARY

Most of us live fairly ordinary lives. We work, raise families, make decisions, and deal with the problems that come into our lives never knowing what is going to happen next. We say we believe that God is in control of all things. We say we believe that God loves us and cares about us, but when tragedy strikes, it can throw our minds into a tailspin—Why is this happening to me? Why is God letting this happen to me? What did I do to deserve this? Is God really any control? Does He really care about me? Where is God in all this?—These unrelenting questions weigh us down and shake us up. The biggest question is—How do we live through our everyday lives, especially when tragedy strikes, when we can’t see what God is up to in the circumstances that come our way? How do we “see God” when He cannot be seen? Ruth chapter two will help us with that.

SERMON SCREENSHOTS & KEY POINTS

Most of the time, we cannot know God’s will for our futures.

Most often, we only know God’s will in hindsight.

Circumstances provide the context for life’s important decisions, but it’s unwise to decide God’s will based on circumstances.

The same is true for inner “peace.” Peace is not a reliable indicator to decide if something is God’s will or not.

One of the important lessons we are taught in the book of Ruth is that when you can’t see God at work, it doesn’t mean he’s not working. It just means you can’t see him working.

The Hebrew word *hesed* is a power word in the Bible and the most important word in Ruth (3X). The idea runs through the whole story and it drives all the action. In our English Bibles *sometimes hesed* is translated—“lovingkindness,” “steadfast love,” “loyal love,” “unfailing love.” *YHWH is the ultimate hesed giver*, but it’s also the kind of love we are called to live out and to put on display. Hebrew scholar Carolyn Custis James says—“*Hesed* is driven by a loyal, self-less, sacrificial love that motivates a person to do *voluntarily* what no one has a right to expect or ask them to do. [It’s a love that goes way beyond duty]. It’s actually the kind of love we find most fully expressed in Jesus.”—she says—“*hesed*” is the gospel lived out.” Ruth embraced *hesed* as God’s will for her life and she lived out *hesed* toward Naomi day-by-day as she looked into an uncertain, unpredictable, unknowable future. And here’s what’s so cool—YHWH’s *hesed* love will reach Naomi through the selfless and relentless commitment of Ruth to fight for her, and Boaz will join Ruth in this effort.

Naomi returns to faith in YHWH’s *hesed* because of Ruth’s bold actions that result in an overabundance of grain food for them, and because of the *hesed* Boaz’ shows for her and Ruth.

God is actively involved in the ordinary events of our lives, even though, most often, we don’t see him at work. He IS the God of the ordinary—the God of everyday—the God of coincidences—the God of “it-just-so-happened.”

The ordinary moments and events of your life have a “sacredness” to them that only time itself will reveal because *God orchestrates the ordinary*. The God we’ve sung about and to this morning is providentially arranging, directing, guiding all the events of our lives whether we see Him or not. Remember—*When you can’t see God at work, it doesn’t mean he’s not working. It just means you can’t see him working*, and you and I need to take that truth deep into our souls.

Do you want to know how you can see the unseen God? Do you want to know how you can "see" God at work in your life when you don't see him at work in your life?

We see God when he can't be seen by seeing him in _____. And, in your _____.

COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONS

Begin by asking someone to retell the story in chapter two as if they were telling the story to a child or grandchild.

1. KNOW IT —

- It was said that, "Most of the time, we cannot know "God's will" for our futures. Most of the time, we only know God's will in hindsight." Do you agree or disagree with that? Why or why not?
- What aspects of this story help you see that God is at work even when you can't see Him at work?

2. UNDERSTAND IT —

- How do Ruth, Boaz, and the harvesters display *hesed* toward Ruth in the barley field?
- Why was Naomi convinced that she had lost God's *hesed*, and what convinced her she was wrong?
- Describe a situation in your own life when you experienced God's *hesed* in an expected way?
- How can you hold on to the hope of God's *hesed* when you can't see it or feel it?

3. LIVE IT —

- Why do we sometimes feel that God is not working in times of crisis and tragedy?
- What did you learn from the story/message about how God typically works and leads you?
- How does that change the way you think about the everydayness of life and how to live your life as a following Jesus? How does that impact decision-making?

4. SHARE IT —

- Let's say you were talking with someone who is really struggling because they can't see God at work in their lives and they're not experiencing the closeness of God in their lives. Based on what you learn from Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, what are some things you could share with them?

5. PRAY FOR IT!