

Title: Pain, Plans and God's Purpose

Passage: Ruth 3:1-5

Theme: Man plans his way but God directs his steps

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{Read Passage}

BOR - a short 4 chapter historical story that occurs during t/time of t/Judges in Israel, a troubled time in t/history of t/nation.

BOR - a story centers around 3 characters: 2 women (Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth) and one man (Boaz).

But as we zoom out from those 3 lives we see a much larger story at work. Not just a story, but God's unfolding, eternal plan in preserving t/Royal line of David - & if we zoom out further, in preparing t/way for t/birth, life, death, resurrection of X - t/key event in history that would occur a millennium after David's rein.

Here in chapt. 3 we see t/story unfold.

Rem. Ruth is a story or drama with 4 Acts. T/story is about t/Royal line, or genealogy of King David & lurking large behind and over King David is t/King of Kings, JC.

I. Act One: The Royal Line with Hope in Ruin (1:1-22)

II. Act Two: The Royal Line with Hope Renewed (2:1-23)

III. Act Three: The Royal Line with Hope at Risk (3:1-18)

IV. Act Four: The Royal Line with Hope Restored (4:1-17)

Like a golden thread God's hidden hand of providence is weaved t/o all 4 chapters.

What is God's providence? We've been using this definition:
The continuing and often unseen activity of God in sustaining his universe, providing for the needs of every creature, and preparing for the completion of his eternal purposes. [Manser, M. H. (1999). Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies. London: Martin Manser]

Hope in the book of Ruth, and for us, is an unmoving trust in that God of providential goodness.

Or, as one anonymous writer observed ==>

There are many shadows that fall across the earth—the shadows of floating clouds, of trees swaying in the wind, of smoke ascending from chimneys, of birds on the wing, and the shadows of great rocks on mountainsides. But the deepest and longest and kindest shadow which falls over the earth is the shadow of divine providence.

We see God's invisible hand at work t/o t/BOR. Remarkable thing is that it's there in everyday circumstances - we have a story that occurs in time - one that includes people, people not unlike you and me. People who live in a real world, w/ joys, disappointments, pain and pleasure. They made decisions about their lives & it really is them that are making t/decisions & nothing seems to be at stake that is universe shattering or eternal. Yet in simple actions in simple lives lived a long, long time ago is t/hidden hand of a sovereign, loving God who works all things according to the council of his will.

Pain, Plans and God's Purpose

or God's purpose in our pain and through our plans.

Our pain, our sufferings, can be a bitter providence.

This story began w/bitter providence - famine in Bethlehem (anxiety over such a basic thing we take for granted: food);
Hope for Elimelech, his wife, Naomi, and their family as they moved across t/Jordan river to a pagan land called Moab (food there).

Moab = misery and loss. 10 years worth. Elimelech dies; their two sons die, leaving behind their 2 childless wives.

Moab stood for misery.

Back in Bethlehem was hope.

Sometimes you have to go backward to move forward & here moving forward meant returning to Beth. Famine had lifted. There was food there // friends there // God was there.

1:20-21 And she said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?”

Depressed, demoralized, despairing.

How would you feel after such bitter loss?

For those of you who have dined at t/table of suffering you know how paralyzing that can be.

"One of the terrible effects of depression is the inability to move purposefully and hopefully into the future." [Piper, 82]

I could get t/impression from chapt. 2 that N. was paralyzed by her despair.

It's Ruth who acts, it's Ruth who asks N. in 2:2 ==>

"Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor."

Fog lifts and what do we see in chapter 2? Hope is Renewed.

God's hand of providence turns bitter into sweet in chapter 2. Despair turns to hope.

Reminder that we must remain under t/protective wings of God, even during those times when they seem to cast only shadows.

I Can't Believe It (Keith Green)

There is nothing new

I could give to you

Just a life that's torn

waiting to be born

Rivers overflow

friends may come and go

But you've been by my side

with every tear I've cried

So the curtain rises on ==>

III. Act Three: The Royal Line with Hope at Risk (3:1-18)

A. Scene One: Remedy Proposed (vv. 1-5) or Naomi Proposes: A Husband for Ruth

Naomi proposes a plan to get Boaz to propose marriage.

What a difference in Naomi from t/beg. of chap 2. [^]

Cf. 2:19-20 -- What a difference a Boaz makes!

If you look past and through t/ups and downs; t/seeming coincidences; t/halting human decisions what do you see?

1. The Beauty of God's Invisible Hand (1-5)

That's t/theme we're exploring this morning in vv. 1-5.

Through t/Pain, in our Plans, stands God's Purpose.

1. The Beauty of God's Invisible Hand (1-5)

Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?

a. Beauty in the selfless actions of others (1)

Am I selfless or selfish?

Then . . .

Time indicator (a few weeks had passed)

Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?

2:2 R. was looking out for N.; here in 3:1 N. is looking out for R.

(1) There's nothing to indicate here that N's concern was about anything other than Ruth

Simply put - she wants Ruth to have security (some transl. interpret. t/word rendering it 'home').

Heb word נִזְמָן refers to a condition of security and rest.

That was so true of women t/o most of recorded history. True of Israel at this time.

In t/grand design of God, he made men to be t/protectors of women. Complementary roles of creation. "Women and children first."

Becoming more and more foreign to our godless unisex culture where w. are encouraged to do anything & everything that m. do - even engage in military hand-to-hand combat.

Christianity that liberated women w/o depriving them of all they are as those created in t/image and likeness of God.

(2) Naomi isn't scheming to find an heir for her dead husband Elimelech

Parallel to 1:9 ==>

"May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband."

"Rest" -- from t/same Heb. root that we see here in 3:1.

N. defines the purpose of her seeking "security" or "rest" for R.:
. . . that it may be well with you?

Daniel Block notes ==>

Naomi's sole motivation in proposing the following scheme is the welfare of her daughter-in-law. Not a word is said about her personal anxieties about the future. Nor is there any hint of a concern to provide an heir for her own husband Elimelech or her son Mahlon by a levirate marriage.

N. is so selfless, so concerned about R. that she is willing to see her go and live t/rest of her life alone.

Beauty of God's providential hand at work ==>

a. . . . in the selfless actions of others (1)

(3) We can be so selfish

Anthropologist Eric Michael Johnson gives an account of the pygmy tribesman, Cephu, in the Congo, who was part of a tribe for whom “hunts were collective efforts in which each hunter’s success belonged to everybody else.” The tribe would use long nets that were hung while women and children would shout and beat t/ground to scare t/animals into it.

It was a group effort to provide food for the entire tribe.

When no one was looking, Cephu slipped away to set up his own net in front of the others. Deceit; Robbery; Selfishness.

He was caught and brought before t/tribe. Cephu defended what he did. As another anthropologist observed: "He felt he deserved a better place in the line of nets, After all, was he not an important man, a chief, in fact, of his own band?" [healthland.time.com/2012/10/08/is-human-nature-fundamentally-selfish-or-altruistic]

While t/study was defending t/idea that Altruism can be a motivating factor in human culture (Cephu was threatened with banishment) I see it as illustrating an underlying truism: We are selfish.

Whenever we are unforgiving it is s. // blame others // demand our rights, to have things our way // brag about ourselves // we condition our treatment of others on how they treat us // we are not acting as

humble, broken, loving disciples of JC (in our homes, in our work, in our church).

We bemoan t/selfishness of children. Sadly, they have nothing over us adults in that regard. They are selfish about little things they don't understand. We are selfish over childish things we do.

Am I selfless or selfish?

Romans 12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself;

4 Do all things without grumbling or disputing;

Why is there so much disorder in homes, in churches, in lives?

James 3:16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

N. was loving enough to consider Ruth's welfare above her own. Beauty of God's providence was at work.

I. The Beauty of God's Invisible Hand (1-5)

b. Beauty in Orchestrated circumstances (2)

Do I see God at work?

(1) Orch. = cap. "O"

God is t/leader orchestrating all things acc. to His good pleasure.

"Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight.

It's one of those things where someone would be tempted to say, "What a coincidence!"

Ruth, you made a decision to go into the fields to find us food. You just happened to land in t/plot of land owned by B. B. just happens to be our relative.

More ==>

... Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight.

b. Beauty in Orchestrated circumstances (2)

Do I see them as coincidence or do I worship God in what is His doing?

What is this about? [^]

You text a friend to see if he's avail. later & he texts you back, "No, tonight I'm going to be winnowing some barley at t/threshing floor."

What is that about? Is "The Threshing Floor" a new dance hall and "winnowing barley" a new dance!

(2) Winnowing was an agricultural practice

Winnowing involved a large wooden rake.

When t/barley was harvested it would be mixed w/straw and chaff. Winnowing was how one separated t/grain (which you wanted) from "the stuff" (which you didn't).

The harvest would be placed on t/threshing floor nearby -- a raised area of hard-packed dirt, almost like a concrete floor.

The winnower would stick his rake into t/pile and toss it up into t/wind blowing at his back. The heavier grain would drop at his feet and the lighter stalk and chaff would be blown further away where sometimes a slow fire would be burning.

Luke 3:17 (John t/Bapt) “And His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

In Palestine, the summer winds come out of t/west and blow strong in the afternoon. In t/evening they begin to drop off. Best winnowing required t/right amt. of wind and that was usually in t/evening.

N., familiar with this practice, as well as Boaz' seasonal habits =>
. . . Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight.

Here God has so orchestrated things that we have a great opport.

10+ yrs. ago God so orchestrated t/events of our life that led to a great opport. to move from AZ to NY so that we could minister and serve here.

He opened t/doors but we still had to act. We could have said "Thanks but no thanks." God's providence encompasses our plans and our decisions.

I. The Beauty of God's Invisible Hand (1-5)

c. Beauty in Providence greater than our plans (3-4)

Do I trust God to work?

Is my God so big that His program for my life and His KD extends beyond my plans?

Noami def. has a plan. Might even call it a scheme.

She's going to play t/game "Matchmaker" ==>

"Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes . . .

(1) Ruth's Preparation (3)

Washing up; Smelling good; Looking good. Personal hygiene.

(a) Washing up (3a)

"Wash yourself therefore . . .

Keep in mind people then, true today in most places outside of the US, did not bathe or shower on a regular basis. Some of you shower ever day or even 2x. I won't say that you don't need it. But that's historically very uncommon.

If you've ever traveled abroad (or have spent time in a gift store in Niagara Falls) you know that in some cultures body odor is considered normal and acceptable.

Am I saying that Ruth didn't smell very good?

I'm saying that everyone didn't smell very good (not by R stds)

However, this wasn't becoming of a potential bride. So she was to wash.

. . . and anoint yourself

(b) Smelling good (3b)

Some of your transl. have "put on perfume"

Perfumes have been used for centuries.

According to Forbes, Imperial Majesty is the most expensive perfume in the world @ which costs \$215,000 a bottle. [ebay?]

That's not what's in mind here, of course.

Idea is perfumed oil (so HCSB). Used as a feminine perfume or a general deodorant.

In a hot climate and in a culture where bathing was only an occasional luxury since water was scarce and personal hygiene was at most in a primitive stage of development, perfumed oil was used as a cosmetic to counteract body odors. [Bush, 150]

(1) Ruth's Preparation (3)

Washing up; Smelling good;

(c) Looking good (3c)

. . . **put on your best clothes . . .**

"best clothes" is not the best transl. of this word.

Actually sing. But it's one of those weird sing. like we have in Engl.

"Pants" is that sing. or plural? Make it worse we say "pair of pants."
Scissors . . . If I ask for a pair of scissors shouldn't you bring me 2?
Is 2 pair of scissors really 4?

ESV "put on your best cloak."

This isn't Ruth taking a bubble bath, dabbing her ears with Chanel #5 and putting on her little black dress.

Ruth washing up; applying perfumed oil; and donning a nice clean cloak that would cover her entire body.

i. This is something that goes beyond fishing for a husband

Parallel to 2 Sam. 12:20. Rem. King David had a child by his illicit murderous affair with Bathsheba. V. 15 we read that God struck t/child so that he became very ill. David was grieving. Would his child live or die?

Child died.

Oddly enough to his observers, David grieved while t/child was sick. But once t/child died, David stopped grieving.

What did that look like?

12:20 So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the LORD and worshiped. . . .

He washed; anointed himself; and changed his clothes.

What do we have here?

"Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes . . .

There's a clue that what Naomi is saying is this ==>

Ruth, t/time for mourning is over. You are a widow. You have lost your husband. Time to put the past behind you // to move forward.

You're young and you have t/opportunity to marry and find security with your own home and your own husband.

1 Timothy 5:14 . . . I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach;

Not only would Ruth look and smell good. The change would also serve as a signal to Boaz as to her intentions.

ii. At this point one may wonder, why hadn't Boaz taken t/initiative?

He was considerably older (3:10).

Maybe he was hesitant because it appeared that Ruth was barren.

Maybe he was one of those guys that couldn't see much further than t/end of his own nose when it came to those things.

(1) Ruth's Preparation (3)

(2) Naomi's Plan (3-4)

Go; Wait; Act; Listen.

(a) Go (3d)

. . . and go down to the threshing floor;

(b) Wait (3f)

. . . but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.

Timing is everything. Naomi wanted Boaz to be in the best possible mood. Cf. v. 7.

(c) Act (4a)

"It shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies . . .

Lies down to sleep for the night.

Common for a landowner and his men sleep literally on t/threshing floor to protect t/harvest from robbers or wild animals.

Then, in verse 4, is the really problematic part ==>

. . . and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down . . .

He's an avail. man; I'm a young avail. woman. It's dark; I'm to wait until everyone's gone to bed and I'm to go up to him and do what!?!?

2 things. Uncover his feet and lie down.

i. Uncover his feet

So ambiguous that just about every English translation renders it this way for fear of misinterpretation.

The Message (not a translation) ignores it completely.

*** Ambiguity has led to some wild interpretations:**

Some have said that Naomi is telling her to uncover his nudity.

True that t/word Heb. word "feet" can be a euphemism for t/sexual organs. But this is not t/normal word for "foot."

This particular word for "feet" is only found elsewhere in Daniel 10:6 where it's used opposite of arms. We don't think in terms of arms and feet, but arms and what? Legs. That's how this word can be understood.

At least 1 scholar thinks that t/key is how one translates t/word "uncover." He would render it as "undress" - that is *undress yourself at his feet*.

The type of guy who comes up with this sort of thing spends too much time watching R rated movies.

That stretches credibility beyond t/scope of incredibility!

While immoral practices associated with fertility rites were practiced on pagan threshing floors, this isn't one of them. ==>

This Heb. word seems to be deliberately used to steer t/reader away from such thoughts.

One OT scholar has this to say (PG rated redacted version) ==>

Accordingly, it seems Naomi is advising Ruth to uncover Boaz's lower limbs, probably exclusive of his [privates], and then go and lie down herself. Naomi says nothing about lying next to him or even lying at his feet. She is simply to lie down and watch what happens. Although the action is suggestive, by either of these last two interpretations the choice of *margəlōt* actually draws the reader's attention away from the [privates] and diffuses it over the limbs as a whole. [Bush]

ii. Lie down nearby

No indication that she is to lie down right next to him or extremely close to him.

All of that said, there is a hint of sexual overtones. That can't be denied.

The ambiguities in the words and the circumstances chosen by Naomi are indeed provocative. What is one to think of a woman who bathes, puts on perfume, and then in the dark of night goes out to the field where the man is sleeping and uncovers his legs? Under ordinary circumstances these look like the actions of a prostitute. On the other hand, this overtly sexual interpretation of Naomi's directions seems to read far more into the text than is intended.
[Block, 685–686]

Again, we know the end of the story. But for t/reader hearing this story for t/first time, this would point toward a possible crisis.

Is this wise advice? Won't Boaz misinterpreted it? Will this tempt them beyond what they can endure? What's will happen?

Here that all we've learned about Boaz and Ruth will be put to t/test. Are they followers of YHWH who walk in t/integrity of His law?

Here's t/plan, Ruth. Get prepared (wash; anoint; dress).
Then ==> Go; Wait; Act;

Everybody, including Ruth, must respond by thinking, "And just where do you suppose that will lead?" To which Naomi gives t/puzzling answer ==>

(d) Listen (4b)

... then he will tell you what you shall do."

God's working through all of this.

1. The Beauty of God's Invisible Hand (1-5)

is last seen in the ==>

d. Beauty in simple decisions (5)

Do I trust God with the future?

She said to her, “All that you say I will do.”

Sign of respect.

Ruth treats Naomi as a mother. This is the other side of 2:2. There she asks permission. Here she listens and obeys.

While she may not understand, she trusts. She trusts Naomi. But behind that she trusts a sovereign God under whose wings she has sought protection.

Do I trust God with the future?

The mind of man plans his way, but the lord directs his steps.

Proverbs 16:9

100 years ago Hermann Gunkel, considered by some the father of modern-day Ruth studies, claimed that it was not possible to find a central teaching in the book:

To anyone who still wants to take away a “teaching” ... we might command this one: that men would do well to be on guard before beautiful and clever women who want to get their way. [H. Gunkel, ‘Ruth’, in Reden und Aufsätze (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 1913) 89.]

He's wrong, of course. While there are several sub-themes, the overarching picture is one of God's providential rule.

Pain, Plans, God's Purpose.