

The End of Ruth, and the Beginning of Something Else.

Genesis 25:19-34

Ezekiel 25

Psalms 103: 1-14

This morning I fully intended to focus upon the last half of the final chapter of Ruth, but upon going through it earlier this week I realized that we had touched on most of the content that is in here last week. It is apparent that the main focus of the book of Ruth is the redemption of an outsider, a redemption brought about by faith, as through the account of Ruth we see a woman who remains faithful not only to Naomi, her mother-in-law, but in God's provision and mercy through the generosity of Boaz. My intention this morning, isn't to go over and rehash what we have looked at over the past month or so, since I think that the message here has been rather clear and straight forward. Ruth was an undeserving gentile who was giving a sort of new birth being recognized as an Israelite, and her child becomes the Grandfather of David, the great promised king of Israel, and the prophesied patriarch of the family line which would result in the birth of the Messiah.

In conclusion to Ruth, I think the last thing to really be said here as we see this sort of redemption through the marriage of Boaz, is this picture and account of God's faithfulness. His redemption plan for his people included this Gentile woman, this account of Ruth was no accident, nor was it just some random happenstance, but it was God working his purpose and plan for the result that he was driving forward, paving the way for the future redemption of mankind through Jesus. This seemingly fairly uneventful, normal story of a widow gleaning in a field, results in the birth of Obed, the father of Jesse whose son was David, the great king of Israel, and the subsequent birth of the promised Messiah roughly 1000 years later. For all that to happen, there had to be a famine in Israel driving Elimilech to Moab, the death of Elimilech and his 2 sons resulting in the eventual return of Naomi and Ruth to Bethlehem. Ruth unknowingly gleaned from the field of Boaz, a close relative to Elimilech, which results in her marriage, the redemption of the family inheritance back into the family line, and an offspring to carry on that inheritance.

Each and every step of the way God was orchestrating the events and outcomes to result in the culmination of his purpose and plan not only in the life of Ruth, but in his redemptive plan for mankind. Which is something to keep in mind as we go into our next series of studies into the minor prophets, which again, shows God orchestrating events and outcomes to result in the culmination of his purpose and plan. If you think about it, that really is the core of scripture, God's revelation to his people about his purpose and plan for redemption. The entirety of the old testament points to the promised King, the Messiah who would come to save his people. The law, the traditions, the temple worship all taught about God, or about the promised one, or about our own relationship with him and our need for another. And the new testament points to the fulfillment of all the prophets, of all the law, since now in Christ we have been made alive, since now in Christ we have been made free, free from sin, and free from the law which taught us of sin, since now we have the Holy Spirit indwelling, instructing, convicting, and working in us to will and to do the things that are pleasing to God.

And though, God's redemptive plan maybe finished, by that I mean he has accomplished redemption for his people through Jesus, the culmination of the old, and the hope of the new that doesn't mean that we are in some new era where God is not involved with his people, that God is not still yet orchestrating the events and outcomes to result in the culmination of his purpose and plans. He

does so every day, in each of our own lives, driving us ever forward toward the finish line as we seek to live a life worthy of this calling.

God is just as active today as he was in the time of Ruth and Boaz, God is just as involved in the life of his people as he was throughout any moment or time in scripture. How he has chosen to interact with his people may have changed, but the outcomes and reality of His working in the lives of each and every one of us has not. Looking back on our study of Ruth, I think that thing was impressed upon me the most was God's working in everyone's life. It is encouraging to me to see stories like this, to see trials overcome, to see blessings given, to see faithful people stand firm, and to see God orchestrating all things for his good pleasure and purpose. I often reflect on such things within my own life as well, trying to retroactively draw those lines, to see how God has worked to bring about various things within my own life, reflecting upon his provision and mercy. And I am sure you all do the same, for when there is some difficulty in life, it is encouraging to reflect how God has provided before.

Last week we were talking about the year of Jubilee, and one of the things that was discussed with the rest of the land, that every 7 years they were not to work the land, nor harvest its produce, but God said, be faithful in this and I will provide on the 6th year, food for 3 years to cover your needs. That is what God doesn't isn't it? Provides against seemingly impossible odds, cares for us against seemingly impossible moments. The realization of God's activity within our own lives, the realization of his provision, and his orchestrating his purpose for us goes a long way in defeating the stress and anxiety of the future. We don't know what tomorrow holds, or next week, or month, or the coming years...but God does, and he has a purpose for all of it. I can tell you now, where I am today is nowhere even close where I thought I would be, never did I ever think I would be doing this, I had no desire to do this, and in fact I was angry because God put this task before me....and honestly it took almost dying to come to grips with it. It is not lost on me, that the struggle of my own health loss gave me a new perspective, and as I look back on that time it is actually an encouragement to me as again I reflect upon God's mercy, and provision for myself and my family, the generosity of the church, friends and family, and of people I didn't even know giving of themselves for us.

So, I read stories like Ruth, draw those lines of God's care and provision and find great encouragement, and a strengthening of my own faith as I learn to rest on God all the more. Which brings us to our next study, I had mentioned a few weeks ago that after Ruth we would start getting into the minor prophets. It would seem that the most recommended way to approach the minor prophets is to do so in chronological order, sort of a journey through Israel's history leading up to the birth of Jesus. So in that case, the first book that we will be going into is Obadiah. This period of the minor prophets spans about the course of 400 years, starting from around 845BC and going to 425BC or so. There are 12 minor prophets which can be grouped into 3 distinct eras, the Pre-Exile era, before the fall of Israel and Judah, which includes the books of Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Nahum. Then the second Era, is during the Babylonian Captivity, which is Zephaniah, and Habakkuk. And the last group is the Post Exile era, after the return from Babylonian captivity, which is Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Throughout these minor prophets, we get messages of God's justice, the consequences of sin, and the hope of ultimate redemption. So this morning we are going to do a little introduction into Obadiah, looking at the history surrounding the writing of the book to put it in its context. This book is the shortest in the old testament, it contains only 21 verses. This little book talks about the eventual downfall of Edom, the descendants of Esau. As told in the story of Jacob and Esau there was a constant

struggle between the two, even while yet in the womb, which we read about this morning in Genesis 25. This is a struggle that would continue for generations. Both the Israelite and the Edomites were closely related, Both from Issac, the twin brothers, Esau's descendants became known as the Edomites, and Jacob's descendants became known as Israel.

As was prophesied, these 2 nations were in a constant struggle despite their shared ancestry. As we get into the book of Obadiah, we will see that it centers around the Babylonian siege and destruction of Jerusalem and instead of coming to their aid, or even remaining neutral in the conflict, the Edomite banded with the Babylonian invaders in the capture and destruction of Jerusalem. Thus enters the word of the prophet Obadiah, delivering a message of God's judgment upon Edom. Not much is known about Obadiah himself, there are theories but no real known facts other than his name, which in Hebrew means, Servant of Yahweh. Some speculate that since he was a prophet that this name is a little to on the nose, and that it is actually a Pseudonym rather than his birth name, but again there is no evidences to point either way. There are actually 12 other men named Obadiah that appears throughout the Hebrew bible, and there is much debate as to whether this Obadiah is one of them. The two leading theories as to who this author was, is that he was either a Steward to King Ahab and queen Jezebel, or he was just an otherwise unknown prophet living around the same time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel during the Babylonian Exile. The traditional view is that he was a Steward of the King, this Obadiah that is mentioned in the book of Kings risked his life to hide 100 of God's prophets in a cave, and was believed to be a convert from Edom.

Modern Scholars debate this, believing that the timeline doesn't add up, that the Obadiah from the Kings Steward theory would have lived in the 9th century BC, which the fall of Edom began in the 9th Century, so it is entirely plausible that this could have been the same man, but Scholars argue since the date of the fall of Israel is 587 BC it is more likely that this book was written around that time, and that this Obadiah was around during the same time as Jeremiah and Ezekiel. So there is no real way of knowing much about this author, all we have is theories and speculation but who the author is, is not the important point of this book, what he writes has no bearing on his reputation, or fame, as he writes a message from the Lord, a message of warning, a prophesy of judgment and destruction. Which as was already mentioned, happened in the 9th Century BC. The fulfillment of this prophesy is what gives it merit, for that which this Obadiah prophesied did indeed come true.

A little more historical context before we read this book, is that Edom was built high within the mountains. They were mountain dwelling people, who carved their dwellings into the mountains. They were a proud people believing that they could never be conquered due to their natural defense and location. In this prophesy, we see God's message to them that he was tear them down, though they ascend as high as the eagle, the Lord will bring them down. There is no thwarting God, there is no place that is unreachable, and though man may believe themselves strong..God proves over and over just how weak we truly are. The unsinkable Titanic comes to mind, the Tower of Babel, the Hindenburg blimp, among many, many others all symbols of power, all symbols of man's strength, destroyed. Nothing man makes, or does is impervious to destruction or loss if God so wills. He is the God who raises up kings, and tears down kingdoms for his own purpose and will. As we talked about in Sunday school a few weeks ago how crazy Noah must have looked to his piers..building a boat, on dry land foretelling of water falling from the sky.

When God speaks, we should listen. The prophet Obadiah foretelling the falling of the impenetrable Edom, as a judgment upon them I am sure would have likewise seemed a bit silly to

some, especially the Edomites, yet nothing is impossible with God. So I think in closing this week, I want to just go ahead and read the book of Obadiah, its only 21 verses. (read Obadiah 1-21)

So, next week we will begin to dig into this book a bit, as the beginning of our study of the minor prophets.