

The Clouds You So Much Dread Are Big With Mercy, Part 2 (Ruth 4:11-22)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on Sunday, February 28, 2010
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A preacher named Art Azurdia introduced his series on Ruth with this story that took place 63 years ago to this very month:

‘The sound was deafening [that day, Feb. 1947]. Although no one was near enough to hear it, it ultimately echoed around the world. None of the passengers in the DC-4 ever knew what happened. They died instantly ... The Avianca airline flight bound for Quito, Ecuador crashed clumsily into [a] 14,000 foot high peak ... then dropped a flaming mass of metal into a ravine far below.

A young New Yorker Glen Chambers was one of the victims. He had planned to begin a ministry with the Voice of the Andes, a lifelong dream that suddenly aborted into a nightmare. Earlier that day before leaving the Miami airport, Chambers hurriedly dashed off a note to his mother on a piece of paper he found on the floor of the terminal. On the other side of that scrap of paper was what had once been a printed piece of advertisement with the single word “WHY?” scrawled across the center.

Of course between the mailing of that note and its delivery, Chambers was killed. When it did arrive, his mother removed it from its envelope and tearfully read each handwritten word. Then as she turned it over, there staring up at her was that haunting question in big bold letters ... WHY?

In a world that is still so violently marred by the consequences of the fall, this may be the single most difficult question we’re faced with in this life. It’s the question that forces itself upon each of us when a package of tragedy or disaster is dropped on our doorstep. WHY?

It’s the question asked by a mother who gives birth to a baby with [a severe disability]. It’s the question asked by parents when they get that dreaded phone call late at night [you can fill in the blanks]. It’s the question asked when you get word from the doctor that the [disease] is inoperable. It’s the question asked by a sister when told her brother has [died tragically] ... It’s the question asked by a military wife when an official vehicle drives up to her curb, two men dressed in full uniform get out, and she hears them begin with these words “we regret to inform you ...” It’s the question that’s often aroused when mention is made of those recognizable words that need no adjectives, those words which when standing alone need no explanation. Words like: stroke ... miscarriage ... [you could add others to the list]

When the doors are closed and the curtains are drawn, and the lights are dimmed, even the most vehement atheist looks up to heaven on such occasions and asks ... “WHY?” ...’¹

That very question that some use to try and disprove God and the Bible is actually itself one of the proofs of God and the Bible which says that every man knows deep down inside not only that there is a God but that He is a God of all power (He’s sovereign).

Romans 1:19 ... *that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.* ²⁰ *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature [including common grace, goodness, as well as wrath], have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made ... they knew God, [but] they did not honor Him as God ...*

God doesn't believe in atheists. Men know there's a God instinctively though not relationally without special grace and special revelation. Men even know of God's nature and His power over all of nature and all of life – and one of the evidences that this is true is this universal human heart question *to this God ... WHY?*

Unbelievers may pose this question to try to justify why they don't want to believe in the God of the Bible during death and suffering ... but true believers also ask this question in the midst of death and suffering because they want to trust God, but it's hard at times.

In Ruth 1:3-5 Naomi is in one of these types of times:

³ *Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ They took for themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years.*

As a single mom far away from her women friends in Bethlehem, Naomi in her years in Moab must have wondered many times why God had tragically taken her husband from her, but she never gets an answer. She can't be very happy that her sons married Moabite women instead of Israelite women, but at least she has her 2 sons.

And soon she should have a grandson? Maybe as she had the girls over, she had her way as a mother-in-law of dropping hints about how things are going ... any news? But the days and months and years go by ... neither daughter-in-law can get pregnant. 10 years. Remember, this is a world where sons were everything. But then...

⁵ *Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.*

In 3 short verses we have 3 funerals. In cold print is the cold reality that everything she holds dear is taken from her. But why ... why?

Last week we saw in the first couple verses of Ruth how the very dark clouds that were so much dreaded by Naomi were actually big with mercy all along, as seen so clearly in the end of the book. The clouds included a time of spiritual darkness, a time of physical and financial difficulty (in the famine), but in v. 3-5 we see the darkest cloud of all: a time of emotional devastation and desperation. But this darkest most dreaded cloud of all also had God's biggest mercy of all.

God is not asleep in or absent from life's storms or the waves on the sea of life that toss us to and fro, as William Cowper knew from experience. God is in the midst of them, as his hymn says:

"God plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm"

God's mercy wasn't manifested by answering the WHY question in this story (or any story I can think of in the Bible). But He gives mercy to people like Naomi who don't know why, and who even can't see His mercy through eyes blinded by self-pity. Naomi has nothing left, she feels, and decides to go back to Bethlehem, and her daughters accompany her part of the way. In v. 9 she tells them:

"May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept

Look at the end of v. 13: ... *my daughters ... it is harder for me than for you, for **the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me.*** [she feels she's "behind a frowning providence" and God is against her] ¹⁴ *And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her ...* ¹⁹ *So they both went [Naomi with Ruth] until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?"* ²⁰ *She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi [sweet / pleasant]; call me Mara, for **the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.***

Play on words, same root in Hebrew twice: "call me *Mara*, for the Almighty has *marred* me..."
Mara=bitter: "call me bitter, God has given me a bitter cup in life"

²¹ *"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?"*

I can't pretend to fathom the hurt, hopelessness and helplessness that Naomi felt under this dark cloud in her life. I am moved by it, and I can honestly say I've been moved to tears contemplating this story. But if Naomi only wants sympathy and not Scriptural truth, she'll stay at the end of Ruth 1 emotionally in depression. I don't know if she meets the technical definition of depression, but in the beginning of chapter 2, Naomi seems immobilized by what her emotions are telling her. Ruth goes out to work, while Naomi stays home, not working w/ the widows (not just down, down and out?). Perhaps she keeps replaying in her mind and thru her mouth the hurts and the pains and her complaints. It's a bitter endless cycle.

And without being hard on her or harsh with her, if you really love people and have a desire to truly help people, your heart goes out to Naomi and you want her to have true help from God's heart, by instilling hope and help from God's Word, speaking God's truth in love, turning her to His comforting character. She may or may not have been ready to hear on this occasion, but your prayer and hope is that by letter or by your lips at an appropriate time you want to bring God's truth to bear in her thinking, because so much of life's difficulties have more to do with internal responses than outward circumstances, as we've been seeing in James over and over. It has to do with our desires and expectations and thinking and feeling patterns that go unchecked by God's Word if they're un-submitted to God's sovereign plan for the future (key message of James 4).

You don't have to know experientially fully what someone's going through, because there is a Redeemer, Jesus God's own Son, who does. He is a Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, and He can sympathize with our temptations experientially fully. And the Good Shepherd not only has future mercy for Naomi in chapter 4, he has mercy for her (and for us) *in the present darkness*

What would you say to Naomi if you were one of those women? At the moment, the text doesn't record they said anything. Maybe they didn't know what to say or do other than hug her and tell her they loved her and would be praying for her and were available to pray with her and talk with her and help her in any way they could. We *will hear* these same women speak truth to Naomi in chapter 4. What Naomi said in 1:21 actually had some truth in it. But there is other truth that *is not in it*, like God's goodness and mercy that would follow her all the days of her life, in Moab, even that very day.

God *is* sovereign. His hand of providence *was in her affliction* and the hymn-writer William Cowper could sympathize but could and would also say:

Take fresh courage, Naomi; These clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break In blessings on your head.

Not just in chapter 4, the mercy was already raining in chapter 1, even at the very moment Naomi was complaining, that's how amazing the grace of God is! That's how magnificent His mercy is. It takes the eyes of faith *to see that* behind a frowning Providence, to actually believe there is a good God smiling above, but that's a choice you can make by God's grace that makes a big difference if you have this big view of God with big mercy even in big trials. But don't take my Word for it, take God's. Trust His future grace.

God is writing a story with all of our lives when we suffer, a story for others to see. What he's doing is not mainly for us or about us (and as long as *us* is our focus we'll miss out on it). God intends to write something on our lives *for others* to see, to give them the same comfort and mercy we've received (2 Cor. 1), and ultimately above any person, to glorify our big God and His very big mercy.

The WHY question cannot be answered superficially or entirely (and when people try to, like Job's friends, it may make it worse). I'm not so sure Scripture encourages us to try to answer WHY, nor am I sure the question has a *single answer*. God may be doing an uncountable number of things in any one thing, most of which we know nothing about, but I want us to look at some of things He was doing in Ruth 4. *God is His own interpreter and He will make it plain...* though it may not be till eternity. But in Naomi's case we do get some sneak peeks in this life, and some glimpses she didn't get after her life. Her very dark clouds were very big with mercy.

Ruth 4 (NIV) ⁹ *Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought [i.e., bought back or redeemed] from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰ I have also acquired [or redeemed] Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records. Today you are witnesses!"* [before Naomi felt God witnessed **against** her]

¹¹ *Then the elders and all those at the gate said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. ¹² Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."*

¹³ *So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴ **The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! ¹⁵ He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."** ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. ¹⁷ **The women living there said, "Naomi has a son."** And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.*

Evidences of Mercy from Beginning to End:

1. God's Redeeming Mercy bought back all that was lost (Ruth 1:3-5; 4:9)

To understand a little more of what it meant to buy back or redeem in Israel, you'll want to listen or read online the 2/14 PM message. If this week or last week's message interests or encourages you, or if you are going through difficulty or know someone who is, I would encourage you to listen to or read the earlier messages:

- Sin, Suffering Single Ladies, and Sovereign Kindness (11/8/09)
- Behind a Frowning Providence God Hides a Smiling Face
- A Bitter Perspective Overcome by a Sweet Providence
- God's Graciousness in Human Bitterness or Emptiness
- God's Grace and Providence in Little Things and Little Towns

The reason I often encourage you to hear God's Word each Sunday Day evening or as much as you can (Sunday School, bible studies, etc.): *your life can be changed by God's Word! There is potential life-change every time you expose yourself to it, providentially-intended life-change in any text of Scripture God inspired!* I not only believe that, I have experienced the benefit of it, changing my life and I want God to encourage you and change your life, too.

God's Redeeming Mercy through the human redeemer Boaz in the estate of Naomi's family which was on the brink of extinction, was a big mercy. Boaz redeemed/bought it all back, but there was more ...

2. God's Kinsman Mercy would replace lost husbands with a greater blessing (1:3; 4:14)

¹⁴ *The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel!"*

The Lord had been a husband to Naomi in the absence of a human husband, as the OT promised. She never remarried, but any who think joy is dependent on a spouse haven't meditated on this story or many other true stories in God's Word. God didn't give her a husband but even if He had, since she's too old to have children as she said in chapter 1, their family name would still die out. God gives her something far better ... Himself (v. 14a "*praise be to the LORD*") and as an added bonus God also gave her a family of faith and an heir who not only kept the family name alive in Bethlehem, but whose family name became famous in all the land of Israel!

3. God's Life-giving Mercy replaced barrenness with fruitfulness (1:4, 4:13b)

The marriage of Ruth and Boaz is not the climax or conclusion to this story. This story goes deeper than human romantic love. This has more to do with Naomi, but more than anything it has to do with God and His love for the barren, broken, even bitter people.

Remember, 1:4 says Naomi's 2 daughter-in-laws Ruth and Orpah were barren for 10 years in Moab ... but God's people in v. 12 are believing God can give life to Ruth's womb this time. Notice v. 12: *Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman ...*

They knew God had done it before for Sarah (10 barren years after the promise) and Rachel (v. 11), and they are invoking again the blessing of God's life-giving mercy, God's womb-opening mercy, God's fruitful-and-multiplying mercy ... the blessing of children.

Psalm 127:2-3: ... *He gives to His beloved even in ...sleep. Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward.*

Ruth 4:13 suggests that they got married the same day as v. 1-12 took place: ¹³ *So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her [i.e., intimately], and the LORD enabled her to conceive*

What didn't happen for 10 years happens in one night, seemingly their very first night as a couple. God has a wedding gift for them on their wedding night! Ruth of course didn't know it right away but God had an extra big smile, His clouds extra big with mercy.

It may have been only 24 hours earlier Ruth was single, risking it all to honor Naomi the night before, and now Ruth is married! The prior evening Boaz wished her God's blessing on the harvesting barley floor and the next night God blesses w/ a honeymoon baby! At the beginning of ch. 2, Ruth was just looking for grain, but God had a groom for her in that field! She was just hoping for bread in chapter 2, but by chapter 4, she's got a bun in the oven (not bread, a baby!)

God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform ...

4. God's Sustaining Mercy would uphold Naomi and care for her the rest of her life (Ruth 1:4, 4:15a)

¹⁵ *He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age ...*

This baby would breathe new life into Grandma Naomi. More than even the usual blessings of a grandparent-grandchild relationship, this would be a very special and sustaining mercy for Naomi, not just on the day he was born (end of v. 15), but this kid would be a kinsman who would protect, provide and care for Naomi in her old age, and they know that because they know his mom Ruth (v. 15b).

The first phrase in v. 15 can be translated "he'll restore your soul," the same phrase this boy's grandson would write in Psalm 23:3-4 "*He restoreth my soul ... even though I walk through the valley ...*" God's the ultimate restorer and sustainer, but He uses human agents. The same grandson David wrote these words in Psalm 103:

² *Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: ³ Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, ⁴ Who redeems your life from [the pit] destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, ⁵ Who satisfies your mouth [or "desire"] with good things, **So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's** [as Naomi was] ... ⁸ *The LORD is **merciful** and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy...**

... ¹¹ *For as the heavens are high above the earth, **So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him** ...*

... ¹⁷ ... ***the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting On those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children ...*** ²² *Bless the LORD, all His works, In all places of His dominion. **Bless the LORD, O my soul!** (NKJV)*

5. God's Restoring Mercy was greater than her loss (1:5, 4:15b)

Naomi had lost 2 sons, but even before ch. 4, look at what she had gained, the women say in **4:15b**: ... *your daughter-in-law, who loves you ... **is better to you than seven sons** ...*

This is key: The big mercy was not just at the end of the story, it was there in chapter 1, it was right there in the midst of her darkest cloud, it was right beside her all along in the person of Ruth, even though Naomi couldn't see it in her focus on self. The Bethlehem women could see it before Naomi could, but God could see it all along. Naomi actually tried repeatedly in chapter 1 to get rid of Ruth, to convince her to stay in Moab, and she doesn't even seem to appreciate the significance of Ruth's loyal love in 1:16-17.

Open your eyes, beloved, to what God is doing around you! Ask Him to turn your focus from self to His sovereign mercy and love He has shown you and is showing you right now, that naturally blind eyes are sure to miss and scan His work in vain, Cowper said

Eph 1:18–19 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe

In Naomi's inward focus, she may not have wanted Ruth around in chapter 1 because of the continual painful reminder of her past, and a reminder of her son's choices to marry non-Israelite wives and that she has no male left in her family, only a Moabite tag-along ...

One poet wrote: I stood a child of God, before His royal throne,
And begged Him for one priceless gift for me to call my own
I took the gift from out His hand, and as I would depart
I cried, "But Father, this is a thorn, and it has pierced my heart.
"This is a strange and hurtful gift which Thou hast given me!"
He said, "I love to give good gifts, I gave my best to thee."
I took the gift, and tho at first, the cruel thorn hurt me sore,
As long years passed, I grew at last to love it more and more.
You see God never gives a thorn, without this added grace,
He takes the thorn, to pin aside the veil which hides His face.

Behind a frowning providence, God's smiling face has given her a greater grace than what she lost and the women's eyes of faith see it: "*better than seven sons*"! "Seven" signifies completeness or perfection, and there's only one OT character that actually had the perfect number of sons: Job 42, the most righteous man on earth. Do you hear what these Jewish women are saying to Naomi: *you have something better than that in Ruth!* There is no higher praise or compliment ever given to a Jew about any child, male or female, and Ruth isn't even her blood-relative, she's a Gentile *in-law!* In v. 11 the people elevate her to the same level as the mothers of Israel! "*Ruth the Moabitess*" (7x before) is now in 4:13 "*Ruth...his wife*"

When v. 15b says Ruth loves Naomi, Daniel Block says she is ‘one of the most dramatic demonstrations of the meaning of the Hebrew word for “love,”... an expression of covenant commitment, the kind of devotion to which Ruth had given ... expressed in acts of *hesed*, placing the welfare of the other ahead of oneself. In fact, more than anyone else in the history of Israel, Ruth embodies the fundamental principle of the nation’s ethic [Dt. 6:5; Lev. 19:18] ... In Lev 19:34 Moses instructs the Israelites to love the stranger as they love themselves. Ironically, it is this stranger from Moab who shows the Israelites what this means.’²

6. God’s Pursuing Mercy brought His prodigal back (1:6a)

We won’t spend as much time on this point, you can get the 1st 2 messages on Ruth to study this further. Just know God’s mercy doesn’t end when His sheep wander off or His children go through a rebellious time...the Good Shepherd pursues His sheep, Luke 15 says. There is great joy in heaven when one lost sheep is saved. As Jesus taught in that same chapter about the Prodigal Son, not only does the Father accept any prodigal who truly repents, the Father runs to meet him or her with open arms and a heavenly party!

7. God’s Providential Mercy replenished Israel’s land (1:6b)

We also developed this in earlier studies, but just be reminded that even while the dark clouds are there, God’s merciful nature is at work *in nature*, restoring even Israel’s physical land. Providence is not only in charge of rain and drought, fruitfulness or famine, but God also makes sure Naomi hears this news in the fields of Moab because He wants to lead her and a Gentile gal to Bethlehem to be a part of his plan for Ruth’s son to be born, ancestor of David ...

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
 ... Yet **in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light**;
 The hopes and **fears of all the years** are met in thee tonight.
 ... Where children pure and happy pray to the blessed Child,
 Where **misery cries out to Thee**, Son of the mother mild ...
 The **dark night wakes, the glory breaks** [when Jesus is born there]

8. God’s Compassionate Mercy through 2 Moabite women (1:8)

⁸ *Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me.*

Again this is just review of points we studied earlier in the series. But just notice that God’s common grace extends to unbelievers like Orpah and He can extend His kindness *through* unbelievers. Even Naomi can see compassionate mercy in eyes blurred by pain.

9. God’s Matchmaking Mercy brought Ruth and Boaz together (1:11-13, chapter 2, 4:13a)

This was the focus of our Christmas message a couple months ago, and its culmination and consummation is in chapter 4, v. 13. But even long before that day, God used Boaz to show Naomi that even in her dark times, the Lord was still showing kindness to her:

2:20 *“The LORD bless him!” Naomi said ... “He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead ... That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.”*

10. God’s Transforming Mercy saved a pagan Moabitess (1:15-17)

In a time when in Israel most every man was doing whatever was right in his own eyes, God transforms a former idol-worshipping Gentile woman from Moab and brings her to Israel as a trophy of grace; a testimony to His saving mercy for all to see, that no matter your past, God’s mercy is for any who repent and turn to trust Him

11. God’s Sweet Mercy overcame human bitterness (1:19-20, 4:14a)

This is another point we earlier devoted a whole sermon to, but it’s good to review and recount and count blessings, name them 1 by 1. The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet is the flower.

By Ruth 4:14, bitterness has been overcome by blessedness, pain has been replaced with praise. The very same women Naomi was *grumbling to about God* in chapter 1 are *glorifying God to her* in chapter 4. Her earlier pity party has been turned into a praise party:

¹⁴ *The women said to Naomi: “Praise be to the LORD...this day...”*

12. God’s Providing Mercy filled empty hands (1:21a, 3:15-17, 4:15b-17a)

This is another mercy that was at work long before chapter 4. She tells the women’s ministry welcoming committee in chapter 1 *“the Lord has brought me back empty.”* But she was not empty – Ruth was standing right next to her if she only has eyes to see it. And the ladies from chapter 1 aren’t the only ones who want her to know she’s not empty. Look at chapter 3, v. 15, what Boaz says to Ruth:

Ruth 3 (NIV) ¹⁵*He also said, “Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.” When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and put it on her. Then he went back to town.*
¹⁶*When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, “How did it go, my daughter?” Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her ¹⁷and added, “He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, ‘Don’t go back to your mother-in-law **empty-handed**.’ [same word]*

4:14 *The women said to Naomi: “Praise be to the LORD, who this day **has not left you without** ... ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. [NASB “became his nurse”; NET “caregiver”] ¹⁷ The women living there said, “Naomi has a son...”*

In chapter 1, it used a very unusual Hebrew word for her grown sons that had died (“lads,” or “babies”) and 4:16 uses same word.

13. God’s Heart-Changing Mercy replaced self-pity with selfless service (1:21b, 4:16)

What a change in Naomi we see in v. 16! Before, her countenance was so different and down, the townspeople asked *‘is this Naomi?’*

Now, her face may have looked so different they ask *is this Naomi, the same lady who came into town last barley harvest?* She looks so different, joyful, physically renewed ... I want to ask the reason for the hope that is within her, one might say. Naomi had a great testimony. Grace brought her safe so far; grace will lead her home.

14. God's Future Mercy extended beyond them to an entire nation (4:17)

We can't end with the mercy to Naomi and Ruth, because bigger mercy and bigger plans than these characters were at work in the providence of God in their situations, as well as in ours today.

Sinclair Ferguson speaks to our self-absorbed thinking: We must never limit the purposes of God, as though He were only doing one thing at a time, in only one person and one place at a time, here and now, *in me*. Sometimes we can be deeply puzzled by the circumstances of our life. What is God doing? Too frequently we focus attention on ourselves as if the answer lay within our individual lives, as if we were the central key to interpreting the plan of God in the universe ... But [God's] providential purposes, which include me, do not center on me as though what He is doing in me could be isolated from everything else that He is doing.³

This birth did not just bring joy to the immediate family, it brought joy to the entire community. Notice in v. 17 who named him Obed. It was the neighbor women, "*they named him*" – I believe this is the only time in the OT those outside parents and family name a child. This was an extraordinary community event, and it would even have an impact eventually far beyond their community. Obed means "servant" and in OT prophecy that became a title for Israel and a title for the Messiah of Israel, who we'll celebrate tonight with Jewish brethren who are beneficiaries of this Messiah's mercy

Did you know there's a parallel to this in the NT? First page of the gospel of Luke has barren Elizabeth miraculously enabled by the Lord to conceive a child who would be forerunner of the Messiah.

Luke 1:57 (NASB) *...and she gave birth to a son.*⁵⁸ *Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her.*⁵⁹ *And ... they were going to [name] him ...*

⁶⁶ *All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, "What then will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.*⁶⁷ *And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:*⁶⁸ *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us [same word as Ruth 1:6] and accomplished redemption for His people,*⁶⁹ *And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant ...*⁷² *... show[ing] mercy toward our fathers ...*⁷⁸ *Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us [again as in Ruth's day],*⁷⁹ *TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH ...*

In the darkness of the time of the judges, under the shadow of death in families like Naomi's, the biggest mercy of all was still to come through a descendant of the names at the end of Ruth 4.

15. God's Saving Mercy would come to all nations (Matthew 1:1-22, 28:19-20)

The names Obed, Jesse, and David from Ruth 4:17 became famous far beyond Israel. The “he” at the end of v. 14 was the newborn boy as the end of v. 15 makes clear ... *given birth to him*. Boaz would someday die, but now there's another ‘kinsman’ born to the family.

This is the only time in the OT this word *kinsman/redeemer* is applied to a baby, but we who have the NT can certainly think of:

- another baby born in the same town of Bethlehem
- in the same family line of Ruth and Boaz (4:18-22)
- who fulfilled their words in v. 14 by far greater blessing
- a Redeemer through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3) as God promised Abraham
- a Kinsman who was born to become a relative of humanity so he could redeem humanity as Hebrews 2:17 says *he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a **merciful** and faithful high priest...and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.* (NIV)
- Jesus also came to redeem a bride for Himself (Eph. 5:25b, 32) that He chose from those who were even more helpless and hopeless spiritually (Eph. 2:1-13), and there's going to be this far greater wedding celebration at the end of time!
- He paid the price to buy us back from sin and eternal death
- a fame and name above every other name: Jesus the Lord

As we read v. 14 we who have committed our life to this Redeemer should be able to say ‘Praise be to the Lord who has not left *us* without a kinsman-Redeemer Jesus! May His fame spread abroad!’

Redeemed, Redeemed, Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb
Redeemed through His **infinite Mercy** His child forever I am!

¹ www.spiritempoweredpreaching.com

² Daniel Block, *Judges, Ruth*. The New American Commentary (1999). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, Vol. 6, p. 728.

³ www.sermonaudio.com (sermon on Ruth 4)