God’s “Handfuls of Purpose”
A Study in Ruth

A Collection of Sermons
on the book of Ruth by
Dr. Cecil A. Fayard, Jr.

Presented by:
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Elliott, Mississippi
Forward

This book is being presented by the Elliott Baptist Church in honor of our Pastor Dr. Cecil A. Fayard, Jr. The sermon “From Rags to Riches” is the sermon that brought “Preacher Boy” Cecil Fayard into the acquaintance of Bro. Norris I. Corley, the late pastor of Elliott Baptist Church for 40 years. So we felt this would be the appropriate book for us to have printed and given to our Pastor for the 2006 Pastor’s Appreciation.
# God’s “Handfuls of Purpose”

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INTRODUCTION: The book of Ruth is a book about redemption. The book of Ruth has often been called the romance of redemption. The main message of the book of Ruth is the message of redemption, redemption for Ruth the Moabitish Gentile by her kinsman redeemer, Boaz. By law, Ruth, a Gentile, was barred from the covenant nation of Israel (Deuteronomy 7:2, 3). Ruth was legally excluded and in addition to this she was a Moabite and forbidden to enter into the congregation (Deuteronomy 23:3). If it had not been for her meeting Boaz, her kinsman redeemer, Ruth would have been forever excluded by the law. Friends, if it had not been for the grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, our greater Boaz, then we would be forever aliens and strangers to God, doomed to eternal death and destruction (Romans 8:3-4, Ephesians 2:11-16).

The book of Ruth is a book about Grace. The law shut Ruth out, but grace let her in. Grace is unmerited favor. I am glad that God's plan of grace includes Gentiles. God wants Gentiles to find grace (Ruth 2:2). The grace of God is so great, so amazing, so unfathomable, so wonderful, so enduring that the believer must ask with Ruth: "Why have I found grace in thine
eyes?" (Ruth 2: 10).

The book of Ruth is also a book of Rest. God wants Gentiles to find rest in Him. Naomi was so interested in Ruth that she wanted her to find rest (Ruth 1:9; 3:1). There is only one place to find rest for our souls and that is at the feet of Jesus our greater Boaz. Ruth found rest at the feet of Boaz; we find rest at the feet of Jesus. Friend, if you will come humbly to the nail pierced feet of Jesus, He will place a robe of righteousness over you and receive you: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out' (John 6:37b).

The first five verses of Ruth chapter one tell us about a godly family leaving Bethlehem.

I. VERSE 1, FAMINE IN BETHLEHEM
   A. The Period. "When the judges ruled." The book of Ruth is the connecting link between Judges and I Samuel, and introduces us to David in Ruth 4:17.
      1. Judges 21:25 says: "in those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes."
         a. Each man was a law unto himself.
         b. Men declared: "We are our own bosses, and we will do our own thing."

         c. When the laws of God are laid aside,
we get in bad trouble.

d. We live in a time today when people justify their sin and do not fear God.
e. This was a time of corruption, scandal, and compromise. Think of the scandal of Samson, one of Israel's judges.

2. During this period of compromise and corruption, we have the story of Ruth, a story of love. This story is:
   a. Light in the midst of darkness.
   b. Salvation on the black backdrop of sin.

B. The Peril: famine - a physical famine. They had no rain, so there was physical famine; no spiritual rain means spiritual famine.

C. The Place: Bethlehem-Judah.
   1. Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven, would not have been born in Bethlehem if the events of this book of Ruth had not taken place. When we sing "O Little Town of Bethlehem," we need to remember that the Christmas story started way back in the book of Ruth.
   2. Bethlehem means "house of bread," and Judah means "praise".
      a. This was a wonderful place to live- the house of bread and praise.
      b. God has a house of bread and praise today. It is the church (Ephesians
3:21).
D. The other place: Moab is the place a little family from Bethlehem-Judah moved to.

1. A certain man, Elimelech, moves his family from the house of bread and praise down to Moab.
   a. In Psalm 108:9, God says: "Moab is my washpot" or we could say: "Moab is my garbage dump."
   b. Moab was a country of outcasts. They had a sordid, sinful beginning.

2. Here we have a family, a man, wife, and two sons leaving the house of bread and praise and moving over to the land of Moab to eat out of the garbage can.
   a. This is the story of the prodigal family.
   b. This is the story of a family that left the place of fellowship, praise, and feasting on the things of God for the world. Don't leave God's place for the world.
   c. They went to sojourn there. They didn't mean to stay very long, but they did (Verse 2).
   d. Before you move for greener pastures, there are some things you need to consider:
      1- Is there a scriptural church to attend?
      2- What kind of school is there for my
children?

3- What type of social changes will I be required to make?

3. Elimelech didn't believe God could take care of him and his family in the house of bread, so he moved off to Moab. Remember, "My God shall supply all your needs..."

II. VERSE 2, THE PRODIGAL FAMILY

A. In this verse, we get acquainted with the prodigal family.
   1. Elimelech, this is the dad and his name means, "my God is king."
      a. Here is a man with a very meaningful name.
      b. Elimelech's name was a testimony. Every Hebrew knew that Elimelech meant: "My God is king."
      c. Elimelech didn't live up to his name. Instead of trusting God, he ran off to Moab. Some of you are tempted to run; don't do it.
   2. Naomi, that's mom's name. Naomi means, "The pleasant one."
      a. This indicates she had a happy outlook on life.
      b. She had a cheery personality. When she left Bethlehem-Judah, she was happy- but later shall be bitter
(1:19-21).

3. Mahlon and Chilion were the two sons.
   a. Mahlon means sick, unhealthy.
   b. Chilion means pining, or puny.
   c. This is a picture of the spiritual condition of the family.

4. Notice with me the last part of verse two. "And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there."
   a. They not only went to Moab: they made their home there. Some have left church for Moab and are still there.
   b. Although the prodigal son got into the pigpen, he finally came to himself and said: "I will arise and go to my father" (Luke 15:18).
   c. The family of Elimelech stayed in the pigpen too long, and God did to them what He does to all of His children who run off to a far country. He whipped them, and yes, He'll whip you. The Father of the prodigal received him with open arms (I John 1:9). The prodigal got his whipping in the far country, and that's where you'll get yours.

B. Verses 3-5, The Funerals
   1. Verse 3, Elimelech dies and is buried in Moab. Buried in a pagan land, possibly
Leaving the House of Bread

with a pagan ceremony.

a. He died away from the things of God.
b. He died in a worldly place.
c. This prodigal never got back to the house of bread. He left his wife and two sons in a pagan land.
d. Elimelech didn't plan it this way. Some of you won't plan it this way either. He just wanted an easier way of life, and he thought he would find it in Moab. Don't allow this to happen to you.

2. Verse 4, After the death of Elimelech his two sons married pagan girls from Moab. By doing this, they broke the Mosaic law.

a. By leaving Bethlehem-Judah, the house of bread and praise, they got out of fellowship with God in a far country.
b. When you get out of fellowship with God, you are in danger of apostasy. Some choose a church for youth activities, not the bread of life.
c. The girls that the boys married were Orpah and Ruth.

1- Orpah means "deer or fawn," indicating she was athletic.
2- Ruth means "beauty and personality."

a- Ruth is the girl who is destined
to be in the ancestral line of Christ.

b- This is a most unlikely thing, but it happened. It was very unlikely that I would be a joint-heir with Christ, but it happened.

3. Verse 5, Now Naomi is left in Moab with three graves and a broken heart. This is the price paid for staying in Moab.
   a. The prodigal family, like the prodigal son, got their whipping in a far country.
   b. This is a dark cloud without a silver lining. It is a dark night without a star.

CONCLUSION: In these few verses, we have come from Bethlehem's bread to the land of bitterness and emptiness. All of us are going to die. Do you want to die in Bethlehem-Judah or in Moab?
INTRODUCTION: The verses that we are going to look at today deal with three widows and their decisions. We have:

1. The Grieving widow- Naomi;
2. The Leaving widow - Orpah;
3. The Cleaving widow - Ruth.

Each one of these widows had an important decision to make.

1. Naomi, the prodigal, decided to return to Bethlehem, the house of bread.
2. Orpah decided to go back to her idolatrous gods and is never mentioned again.
3. Ruth made the right decision. She chose to accept the God of Naomi and was rewarded by becoming the bride of her kinsman redeemer, Boaz. Ruth chose the better part that can never be taken away from her. Ruth by her decision entered the line of the Redeemer and His people.

I. VERSES 6-7, THE REASON FOR NAOMI'S RESOLUTION

A. Verse 6, There is good news from Bethlehem; so good that Naomi hears about it down in Moab. What is that good news? The Lord has visited His people, and there
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is bread in Bethlehem-Judah, the house of bread and praise.

1. The Bible says: "She had heard in the land of Moab..." This means that God had a faithful messenger who brought this good news to Naomi. Today God has His faithful messengers who bring the good news of the Gospel to a lost and dying world. Three widows needed the message, and God burdened His messenger to bring it.

2. I want you to notice the phrase "in giving them bread..."
   a. He did not sell them bread. You cannot buy salvation (Isaiah 55:1).
   b. This phrase "in giving them bread ... " reminds us that salvation is not of works. It is the free gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9).
   c. We are also reminded of Jesus the true bread (John 6:48). Christ, the true bread of Heaven, was born in Bethlehem. Thirty-three years later, the Bread of Heaven was broken on the cross. The Bread of Heaven was broken to bring:
      1- Light to those in darkness,
      2- Food to those who hunger,
      3- Freedom to those in bondage.
      4- Riches to those in poverty,
5- Peace to the fearful,
6- Life to the spiritually dead.

3. Naomi wants to go home; she's tired of Moab.
   a. The prodigal will come to a place where he will long for the Father's house. He cannot be happy in the pigpen; he isn't a pig. He doesn't have a pig's nature; he has the divine nature of the Father.
   b. Eventually, the prodigal will say: "I will arise and go to my Father."
   c. Now, we do need to understand that pigs do love the pigpen. There are those who come to the father's house, but they do not get born again. And after a while their old nature, the only nature they have, takes over; and they return to the pigpen (II Peter 2:22).

B. Verse 7, "Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was...

1. Naomi is on the way home, on the way to the house of bread and praise.
2. Fourteen years, wasted years, Naomi had lived in worldly Moab. Now she's going home. It is better to stay home than to have to come back.
   a. On her journey to Moab, she had a family, health, happiness, youth and
hope.

b. On her return, she had widowhood, a broken heart, want and woe.

II. VERSES 8-14, THE SPLIT DECISION
A. Verse 8-10, Naomi lays the situation out clearly before Orpah and Ruth.
1. Verse 8, Naomi encourages them to return to their mother’s home. She does this because it will not be easy for them in Bethlehem.
   a. The Israelites and Moabites didn’t get along and had no dealings with each other.
   b. Because these girls are Moabites, it would be costly for them to go up to Bethlehem.
2. Verse 9, We have three widows standing in the crossroads.
   a. Notice the kind words Naomi has for these girls in verse 8-9. These girls had been good wives.
   b. Naomi encourages them to stay in Moab and remarry. Something that seemed impossible for them in Bethlehem.
3. Verse 10, Their first inclination is to go with Naomi to Bethlehem-Judah.
B. Verses 11-14, Naomi’s second explanation of the situation is also a picture of Naomi’s
spiritual condition for she encourages these girls to return to their gods--false gods.
1. Verse 11, The Mosaic law stated that when a man died the next of kin was to marry his wife. If there was a brother, he was the one to marry her.
   a. Naomi shoots straight with these girls. As far as she sees it, if they come with her they will never marry again because they are outcasts.
   b. I am glad that Jesus Christ, our kinsman Redeemer, loved us when we were unlovely (Romans 5:8). Boaz is a picture of Christ in redemption.
2. Verse 12-13a, Naomi makes the case plain. She has no husband; she is old. Even if she had a husband and bore sons would these girls wait for them to grow up. By the time the boys were grown, Orpah and Ruth would be old and robbing the cradle if they married.
3. Verse 13b, Naomi grieves over her situation for she says: "...it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me."
   a. God judged Naomi’s family because they left the house of bread and praise.
   b. Friend, if you are a child of God and
backslide, God will judge you.

c. "Would you rather be in the hallow of His hand or have His hand against you?.... the hand of the Lord may be upon man, with man, or against man" (Boone 46).

d. Grave markers said that there was no one to carry on the seed line or redeem the lost estate.

4. Vs 14, The widows who are at the cross-roads now have a parting of the ways.

a. Important decisions were made there at the crossroads.

b. Orpah kisses Naomi and turns back to Moab, her first decision was not real.

c. Ruth clings to Naomi. Her decision is to go to Bethlehem.

1- This decision says that Jesus Christ will be born in Bethlehem.

2- This decision says the journey of the wise men will not be in vain.

III. VERSES 15-18, RUTH'S TESTIMONY

A. Verse 15, Orpah decides to go back to idolatry, back to false religion. "When she goes back, she walks off the pages of Scripture into silence and into oblivion" (McGee 20). She had no real love for God, the God of Naomi.
1. Ruth also made a decision. Her decision was for God.
   b. Ruth is in the genealogy that led to Christ.
2. Naomi puts Ruth to the test; and as we shall see, she passes with flying colors.
3. You too have a decision to make: an eternal decision.
B. Verse 16, Ruth's decision was real, and her testimony is genuine. Her decision is a six-fold decision.
   1. First, she says: "Whither thou goest I will go." Ruth was saying to Naomi, "I am going with you." Her surrender was complete; she was willing to walk in the footsteps of another. This is a natural result of salvation, to walk with Jesus.
   2. Secondly, she says, "And where thou lodgest I will lodge." Ruth would identify herself with Naomi. We are to identify with Christ. Christians desire the presence, the fellowship of Jesus. One day, heaven will be home.
   3. Thirdly, she goes on: "thy people shall be my people." Ruth was forsaking her idolatrous people and identifying herself with God's people. You can't really know God if you don't identify with His people.
This is separation from the old ways and old friends (2:11).

4. Fourth, we see: "Thy God, my God." That's a great decision for an idolater as anyone else. The idols of Moab are left behind; she has turned to God (I Thessalonians 1:9).

C. Verse 17, Ruth's testimony continues.
   1. Fifthly, Ruth said: "Where thou diest, will I die." She wanted to die in God's country among God's people. She had put her hand to the plow and would not look back (Luke 9:62).
   2. Sixthly, "And there will I be buried." She didn't want to be buried in a heathen land. She wanted to be buried in a land among a people who believed in the resurrection.
   3. Ruth had experienced true repentance because there was a change of mind. Her choice was not because of human ties, but in faith that bread (Christ) was in Bethlehem.

D. Verse 18, Naomi knew that there was no need to say anything else to Ruth. Her mind was made up, she accepts Naomi's God and people. Her repentance was real, and it would stick. In life and death, she would trust in Jehovah God (I Thessalonians 1:9-10).