

Ruth's Story Begins

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Date: 03 July 2016

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[0 : 0 0] In Jesus' name, amen. I would like to read from the book of Ruth and we're going to look over this summer morning series at the story of Ruth and we're going to introduce it today and we're going to look at the first 14 verses of Ruth chapter 1.

It's on the screens or it's on page 222 of the Pew Bible. In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to Sojourn in the country of Moab.

He and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife, Naomi. And the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion.

They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there but Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died. And she was left with her two sons.

These two Moabite wives, these two Moabite wives, the name of one was Orpa and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about 10 years. And both Mahlon and Chilion died so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

[1 : 1 9] Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return to the country of Moab. She had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food.

So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each of you to your mother's house.

May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find rest each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them and they lifted up their voices and wept.

And they said to her, No, we will return with you to your people. And Naomi said, Turn back my daughters. Why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands?

Turn back my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown?

[2 : 2 2] Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me. Then they lifted up their voices and wept again.

And Orpa kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. So I'm going to introduce the story of Ruth today and we'll be looking at that for the next few Lord's days we hope together.

Hannibal Smith from the A team always liked it when a plan came together. He would take out his cigar and he would say it's grey when a plan comes together.

It gave him focus and it gave him confidence. And a plan always gives us a sense of purpose and assurance. And those of us from the United Kingdom over this last week and if you've been visiting from the States or elsewhere you've come into a time of absolute turmoil in the UK where we have recognised that our leaders have no plans whatsoever.

They had no plans for staying in and no plans for going out. And if you're keen on football and you're an English fan you'll also be sad because it's come to pass that the manager had no plans either and no strategy and so he's been given a hard time.

[3 : 45] It's been a real week when the focus has been on a lack of plans and people going to ground and people hiding and not being willing to stand up and be counted and say, yeah we've got a plan apart from Nicola of course.

Sorry, sorry, that was only a joke. But it's easy for her because she's Scottish. But we've seen that and it's real.

But at a more personal level and a more serious level in our lives we don't like plans, you know. It's good to have plans and it's good to have direction and it's good to have meaning in our lives and a purpose.

And we don't like being purposeless. We don't like drifting. We don't like not having a plan, some kind of focus for our lives and very much more so spiritually when we think we think that it's important to think that our lives have a spiritual purpose and God is an interest in us.

And of course that's a hugely significant thing. What is my place in God's plan as a Christian and maybe there's people who are now at this time of year, this time of life, looking, thinking about, searching for what is God's plan in their lives and wondering what he has in store for them.

[5 : 03] And the great thing about the Bible and the great thing about God's word is we're reminded of who God is, that he is perfect and because he's perfect, he's the perfect strategist.

Absolutely. He will never be surprised. There will be nothing that will take him unguarded. He will never go to ground because he knows absolutely and completely and perfectly what his purpose is and what his plan is.

He's not, God will never be winging it. He will never just be going along and a-winging a prayer. God knows exactly with his perfect and glorious divine mind what he has purposed and what he is doing.

And we see that in the Bible. And that's one of the great things about the Bible and one of the remarkable realities as we plunge into the Bible and learn more and more about it.

We find it's not just random stories. It's not just a little bit here and a little bit there. But we have God who is revealing to us what he wants us to know. It's absolutely clearly threaded together because he wants us to know exactly what we need to know.

[6 : 16] There's a divine thread that goes from the very beginning to the very end of the Bible through these wonderful 66 books which are so different in so many ways but are fantastically unified.

So what we don't have is we don't have a history of the world. We don't have the history of everything here in the Bible. What we do have is God telling us what we need to hear and what he wants us to hear and what his purpose and plan is for us as we learn about him.

And there's really two major themes. There's only two major themes, two major threads that are woven throughout Scripture. One is love and the other is rescue.

That's what the Scripture is about. It's about the love of God being outworked and revealed in our rescue, in our redemption. He's speaking and he's revealing and he's showing us his plan from the beginning of his nature and of his character, which is love, God is love.

And it's a record. It's a record of his purpose and of his plan to secure and to keep and to win a people to himself that have been estranged and that have been divorced from him by the rebellion and by their desire for independence and from their listening to the deceit of the evil one.

[7 : 50] So we have that basic now. That's obviously very basic and that's a skimmed version of what the Bible is about. But I'm saying that so that we understand that Ruth, the book of Ruth comes into that whole plan and purpose of God.

It's not just a random love story in the middle of the Old Testament to just ground us and to keep us going while we read through Judges and Deuteronomy and all these difficult books. Although it might be that as well in God's perfect plan.

But Ruth is very much integral, as we want to see, to God's purpose and plan.

God's purpose and plan. I want to say one or two things about this by way of introduction and then look at briefly the first few words of the book.

God's purpose and plan as we see in the Bible encompasses both nations and individuals. It's both global and personal. He's winning a people to himself.

[8 : 57] A nation, a community, a family, but also it's about individual people being brought to him in faith and in love. So you've got say a book like Ruth, which is sandwiched between Judges and Samuel, which are really momentous books in terms of God's purpose and plan and the outworking of that.

And then you've got little Ruth in between them. This personal story of one more bite woman. In the middle of this great sovereign purposes of God working through the nation of Israel and the troubles and the battles that they had.

Ruth, little woman, little moat bite woman right at the centre of God's purposes and plans. There's only two books in the Bible named after women. The other is Esther of course.

And both of them very different, but both of them are tremendously significant in the outworking of God's purposes and plans. They are. It's wonderful when you think about how different they are.

Ruth was just a poor, a poverty stricken, moat bite girl. Esther was a queen. Ruth was a Gentile who married a Jewish prince, as it were.

[10 : 12] And Esther was a princess who married a Jewish princess who married a Gentile king. Ruth begins with a famine. Esther begins with a feast.

Ruth ends with a birth. Esther ends with a hanging. So they're very different. They're hugely different. People's personal circumstances, God's outworking of that.

It's hugely different. But it's clearly all been revealed as part of God's purpose and plan. And here, in Ruth and throughout, with Esther also, obviously, we're working in the Old Testament context.

The Old Testament being before Christ. You all know, of course, in the New Testament, really revealing after Christ. And so it's spiritually, and it's for us culturally also, very different.

The outworking of faith for believers in the Old Testament was quite different in many ways to how it is for us, both culturally and spiritually. There was a sense before the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost in his fullness.

[11 : 27] In the Old Testament, believers had a much more sensual faith, that is to deal with the senses. It was more physical. They understood sacrifice or atonement through the sacrifice of animals.

There was a lot of smearles and a lot of noise and a lot of physical, tangible realities. God's presence was in a physical temple as the Old Testament progressed.

And there was many promises related, and outworkings of faith related to the land, to the actual physical land that had been promised, and that had been given, that they stood on, that they lived in, that they'd conquered.

And so all of these things made it a different outworking. But there's tremendous faith parallels for us still. We can learn a great deal from believers in the Old Testament, which I hope we will do so, and I hope the Holy Spirit will open up lessons to us.

But within all of this plan that we've briefly outworked here, Christ is at the core. Christ is at the core.

[12 : 41] He's at the core of the New Testament, and he's at the core of the Old Testament. Because this is the Bible as God's plan of love and rescue, or redemption for us.

Therefore Christ will always be at the centre of it. And so you go to Matthew, for example, where we read, and the genealogy, which we only read part of, because I don't think Corrie could read all the difficult names.

I only gave him half. We go to a passage like that, and the genealogy is the kind of binding glue that keeps us fixed on God's purposes. And a reminder that through the genealogy, we have the centrality of Christ being outworked.

It binds it all together. And the genealogy is a great link to all that's happened in the Old Testament, because it reminds us of God's purposes and plans, his redemptive line.

So what you don't have, again, is random people in the history that is recorded in Scripture. You have his redemptive line. If you go to the New Testament and go back, you see all his descendants, Jesus' forebears, the kind of people that made up the physical nature of Jesus, as it were, in his genealogy, through covenants and families and nations, Gentiles and prostitutes, many different people brought into his line, all speaking about the kind of redeemer he would be.

[14 : 11] All kind of many, with many redemptive stories themselves of his grace and his goodness. So that in his genealogy, there is the outworking of his salvation also, as he redeems his own forebears, and they become his flesh and blood.

It's each story, each nation, each working, is an explanation and a description of his grace, of his determination, of his plan, of his purpose for his people.

Right, from Adam, the seed of the woman would come, and from that moment on, that promise on, we have the outworking of covenant and promise leading to Jesus Christ.

So we come to a book like Ruth with, I hope, great confidence, whatever turmoil might be in your own life today, whatever unseen or unspoken fears you have about your future, about what is happening, what might happen, what will happen, then you can have great confidence as you are grounded in Jesus.

Remember we've looked recently at him being the way, not just that we follow him, that he shows us how to live, that we are disciples, that we are obedient, but actually in relationship with him, we know that we are in the hand and in the life of one who loves us and who has our very best at heart, because he has a redemptive, gracious, redeeming plan for our lives.

[15 : 52] In whom today are you trusting practically? We can be very myopic, and we can be very self-focused, and we can talk a good game about our faith, but when the rubber hits the road, as we will see in this story, we can revert to self and we can revert to trusting in our own wisdom rather than in the wisdom of God, in difficulties and trials.

So let's go on to the story, and we'll just introduce it briefly. God is speaking, this is a living word, and he's speaking through Ruth. So keep these two themes in mind, love and rescue, they're very important.

And this is a beautiful, in many ways, what we should have done was read the whole story. You can go home and read the whole story if you haven't read it for a while. But I didn't want to get to the end before we've dealt with the beginning.

So we're going to look at the beginning first, and remember how important each aspect that's recorded for us is in God's purpose and plan, nothing has said that's wasted.

He's economical with his inspired word of God. So we start just understanding the spiritual context. This is very important, it's the Old Testament context. It's not Edinburgh, it's not Los Angeles, it's not Taipei, it's Old Testament, and it's particular days.

[17:15] And the first verse reminds us of the kind of days. It was in the days of the judges, and there was a famine in the land. These are the two things that God wants us to note at the beginning of the story.

So it was the day of the judges. And if you flick back, well you don't need to flick back, I've written it out, but if you were to flick back to the last chapter of judges, you'll have a summary of what a spiritual condition of the day was in judges.

We're told there in those days Israel had no king, everyone did what was right in his own eyes. So spiritually that's the context that Ruth is born into and lives in with Naomi and Elimelech.

It was the days of the judges when there was a real spiritual inconsistency and an independent spirit. You know how you get graphs sometimes like that?

Well you get graphs, and sometimes they go like that. And that was very much what it was like in the days of the judges, depending on who was judge, who was leader, if it was a godly leader, the spirituality of the nation went up.

[18:17] If it was an ungodly leader it just plummeted. And it was hugely inconsistent days spiritually. And it finished up with being almost spiritually anarchic.

Everyone was just doing what was right in their own eyes. They had no king, but they did. They had their redeemer.

They had God as their king in their head. Yet they thought in this, the physicality of their life and their being, we wanted someone on a throne that we could see and touch.

And so they struggled with the idea of faith and of an invisible god. And so they kind of followed the judges, some of whom were good, some were bad. Days of the judges. Chaos.

There can be, is there not, a degree of parallel with the culture in the society in which we live today. A similar philosophy, I know that generally this was written primarily speaking of the believers.

[19:19] But in the society in which we live, and maybe even in the church, maybe even in our own minds we have the same kind of philosophy. We have a king, Christians, but sometimes we act like we don't have a king.

And we act as if we are unbelievers. And we can be governed by external circumstances in the way that these Old Testament believers have. And we have far more, we have far more privilege than they ever had.

We have seen and we have tasted of what Christ has done on the cross. It can easily be for us that we live our Christian lives based on our circumstances, rather than on our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And there may be in you today, and there may be in me a dis-peace that is stemming from this inconsistency of our Christian lives and this independent spirit that ultimately I really just want to do what's right myself.

And God's a kind of added extra. And a real inconsistency so that we're up and down. It depends on how good things are in church, how good the sermon or how bad the sermon was, how nice Christians are to me, or how bad Christians are to me.

[20 : 32] And it's all external circumstances. If I get a pay rise, if everything goes well, my health. And it's all external, we're up and down and we're inconsistent because we're basically living as if we have no King, as if God isn't in control, as if he's miserable and wretched, and he isn't living as one who loves us and who's rescued us.

It was the day of the judges. It was also a day when there was a famine in the land. Now, we need to look at this and look through the glasses, as it were, the spectacles of the covenant and of the relationship which God had with his people and the physicality of the nature of much of the Old Testament spirituality.

The Israelites were in covenant with God's people, with God. He had rescued them from slavery. He had brought them into the Promised Land. They were to inhabit and inherit, and they were to conquer the Promised Land.

And he said to them, if you obey me as I am your saviour, your redeemer, if you obey me, you will know great blessings. It will be a land flowing with milk and honey. You will have wonderful times here.

But if you disobey me, in that great chapter in Deuteronomy, blessings and cursings, if you disobey me, you will not know that. You will know trouble in your life.

[21 : 51] You will know fruitlessness, and you will know famine. Because I want you to see these physical realities and for them to remind me, remind you of me, and if famine comes to introduce repentance, so that you will come back.

So they were in the land, and when there was famine in the land, it was a spiritual message. It was a really clear spiritual message. And I'm going to read from Deuteronomy chapter 28 and from verse 47, where God kind of explains this, and he says to them, Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger and thirst and nakedness and lacking everything.

And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you. And the Lord will bring a nation from you, and so on. There was this warning to them that famine would bring to them a lack of joy, and that they needed to repent from that, and then they would know blessing again.

Now later on, Amos linked that to a famine of the word of God, and very rightly so, not a famine of food and water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.

But it was the result of their disobedience. So there's a spiritual lesson here for them. Now that is not always the case. It's not the case in countries of famine today, but the particular country that is suffering famine is under God's judgment as a nation, because we've moved on to spiritual realities, but there's still a reality that the world is broken.

[23 : 37] There's still a reality that it's our greed often in the West that stops the provision being shared with those in need, and that we can cope with famine when it comes. So there is broader spiritual lessons within it.

In the Old Testament, it was very much a spiritual lesson for the people of God. And now for us. What would, is there a parallel?

Well surely it would be the parallel that Amos speaks of, as a famine of hearing the word of God, that we're dry spiritually and dusty and disinterested, and we just want to go our own way.

We read the Bible and they're like, well it's worse than a dictionary. It's as dry as dull as anything, and it's not something that we go to because there's a famine in our hearts.

We're not hungering and thirsting for the right things, and we're not longing for God, and it's as if God is far from us and we're poverty stricken spiritually.

[24 : 37] When that's the case for us spiritually, what's he doing? He's calling you back. He loves you. His message is love and repentance, and he's calling you back and he's saying, if I'm as dry as dull to you, if I'm distant from you, then I want you to return to me.

I want you to fall on your knees and confess all the independence that you might have, and all the self-centredness and all the prayer, and just come back and recognise the blessing and the grace that's there.

So there's a famine in the land, and there's the time of the judges. I want you secondly and lastly to talk about the significance of spiritual choices. Because this introductory section is about...

Some people just don't like my question....is about spiritual choices of two individuals, okay? Elimelech and Naomi. Elimelech, more so than Naomi followed on.

But the importance of spiritual, significance of spiritual choices. And for this there's so many spiritual parallels for ourselves, even though it's in the Old Testament and it's a difficult, different kind of situation.

[25 : 50] Elimelech, there was a famine in the land, in the land of Judah, and he would have known what that meant spiritually. He would have known what God was saying through that. He was part of the covenant people.

And at that point with his wife and two sons, he chose to leave Bethlehem. He chose to leave that part of Judah and go down to Moab to find food for his family.

Now, we all might think that's a great thing to do. He's been a responsible dad, a responsible husband. He's looking after his family. And on the face of it, that would be a wise and responsible thing to do.

Yet in the context of what we have here, let's think of what he's doing. He's leaving the promised land. He's leaving this land that had been gifted to the people.

And he was leaving it in a time of famine when God was saying to him, look, it's not a change of circumstances that you need. It's a change of heart. Elimelech, I want you to turn back to me with all the people to turn back to me.

[26 : 54] And I will provide food. Please, he says, don't go down to Moab. He was leaving the community of faith in the promised land.

And he was choosing to take things into his own hands. God's obviously failed in his promise here. God's obviously not giving us what we want. I'm just going to work it out myself. God is hopeless. He's far away. He's distant.

People keep talking about his promises. I'm a man, and I'm going to sort it out myself. I'm going to look after my family, and I'm going to feed them. And God's just a waste of space. He's going down to Moab himself, leaving God behind.

It's ironic. He's leaving the house of bread. That's what Bethlehem means, the house of bread. The promises that go with that. Interestingly, the place where Jesus was born, wasn't it?

The bread of life, himself. The great saviour, the great redeemer. So there's little hints towards the future in the genealogy of Jesus here, even.

[27 : 52] And in his name, Elimelech means, and names are much more significant than they are now. They have much more importance and relevance in a sense of what they are.

My God is king. That was what his name was. That's what he brought up to understand about his God. My God is king. And yet he was acting as if he was his own king.

And he would sort out his own life, and he didn't need God in his life to do that. So he takes his family, and he goes to, where does he go? He goes to Moab. Moab. Do you know what Moab did? When the people were going through the desert, and they were going through the wilderness, and they were looking for food, they came to Moab.

And Moab wouldn't give them any food. Wouldn't give them bread and water. So in Deuteronomy 23.4, God speaks into that and says, Look, no ammonite or moabite or any of his descendants may enter into the assembly of the Lord, even down to the 10th generation.

For they did not come to meet you with bread or water on your way when you came out of Egypt. Elimelech knew this story. He knew where he was going when he went to Moab. Moab were turncoats.

[28 : 59] They didn't help the Israelite people. They didn't give them food and water. Yet he was going down to Moab for food and water, because he didn't believe God anymore, and he would rather trust himself.

There should have been for dear Elimelech, all kinds of alarm bells ringing about what he was doing. All kinds of alarm bells. This isn't just an innocent guy heading down to look after his wife and family.

He was going into enemy territory. He wasn't doing what was right. He wasn't being protective of his people. Now, there's millions of applications for that, aren't there? In our spiritual lives.

When we are in a spiritual famine, maybe we're husbands or wives or we're fathers or we're bosses or we're teachers or whatever it might be and we have responsibility and we feel a spiritual famine.

And we decide, well, we're just going to turn our backs on God here. And we'll sort it out ourselves. And we'll look for our satisfaction elsewhere, because God's given up.

[30 : 03] And I'm going to give up on God. I'm going to take control of my life. There's no sense in which we're humbled by experiences and by what's going on to come back to Him. We look elsewhere for that.

And we go to all the places of danger. The places where we will maybe slake our sinful thirst, but will be no good for us spiritually.

And we deny His Lordship and we are focused on our circumstances rather than what He wants to do with our hearts and we're unwilling to wait. Now, it wouldn't have been easy for a little bit to stay.

I'm not saying that. I'm not saying He was to have a naive sort of expectation of God dropping down loaves of bread from heaven. It would have been tough. It was tough later on. We'll see. But Boaz didn't leave.

He stayed, as others would have stayed, and fought on and repented and sought God's hand. And so, I'm not saying it was going to be easy for Him to stay, but to go was in the short term easy, but in the long term, we'll see spiritually disastrous.

[31 : 11] And that might seem right for you today. But, to drift, to have a spiritual, with that spiritual famine to say, well, God isn't interested in me anymore.

That early passion that I have for Christ is gone. And I'm just going to sort things out on my own because He's abandoned me. But He asks us to stay in the promised land.

He asks us to stay with the people of God with all our failings and faults. He asks us to wait on Him. He says, I've made promises. I have a plan, and I am perfect.

It's not that it's gone wrong, but I am teaching, I'm leading, and I'm guiding you in a particular way. So we have a limolech and a choice He made. The choices you make, and I make are significant for us spiritually.

And then lastly, briefly, we see Naomi. And who can but feel huge pain and sympathy for Naomi, whose life, from that moment on, in many ways was plunged into darkness.

[32 : 15] She also acquiesced with Him and left the promised land with her two sons. And in Moab, she knows some good times.

She knows some desperate times. She loses her husband. She has two sons. They get married. That must have been good times for her, even though they married Moabite women that wasn't permissible under the covenant.

Was there a sense of kind of duality at that time? Joy, but a sense of, well, am I really doing what's right? Desperate grief and sadness.

And of course, she loses her two sons. Their names, I believe, although there's some doubt to be, their names reflect a kind of weakness of physical being.

And it seems that whatever happened, they weren't able to survive the famine, and they didn't live long. And they both died. What desperate sadness. And then she's left in Moab.

[33 : 19] She's left with two girls who don't have the same covenantal background or knowledge. She's left in a country that isn't interested in a Jewish widow and who would not provide for her.

There's no provision made for them. She was probably in poverty-stricken and in danger of being enslaved. Desperate sadness.

But she chooses to return. She chooses to go back. That's great. It's great. It's amazing. It's amazing in the purpose of God and God's plan that we see this happening.

Naomi chooses to go back. God isn't finished with her. You'll be glad to know this isn't the end of the story. God's working on her and working with her, because he loves her. But there is clearly the sense in which she returns.

Again, there's wording in these early verses where different forms of the word return are used. And that is all pointing to the theme of Ruth, is it's a return to God.

[34 : 24] It's a return back towards Him. Four times in the section that she's significant. And she recognised in verse 6 that God, the Lord had visited His people and given them food.

As He promised they, He would, as they turned. He was faithful to His promises and there was food provided. And so she says, well, I've got to go back here. God's providing food for the people.

Now, we can't ultimately look into our motives. But we can unpack some things from the passage that we have. It does seem to be that she can't yet understand the love bit.

She sees the rescue. She knows that if she goes back, she'll get the food that she needs. And there's a sense in which she'll be rescued. But I'm not sure if she understands the love of God and the desire that God has to bring her back.

There is a little bit of grudging within her. You know, God has dealt bitterly with me. He's not a loving God. He's a harsh God. And He's dealt bitterly with me. But I'm going to go back here.

[35 : 24] But she doesn't actually want her daughters-in-law to come with her now. And that's the case. But obviously, if she fully understood the love of God here, she would say, come with me into this covenant as well.

Come and meet my God. But she says, no, you go home to your God's. It's like she doesn't really think God's big enough and great enough for them. And if she goes back with them, it may accentuate her guilt as she comes back with these two moabite daughters-in-law.

And she may not be accepted by the covenant community. There's all these things potentially in it for Naomi. But for her, it's survival.

I'm not sure how much good news is in it for her yet, as she turns her face back to the living God. And yet the choice she made was great.

I think often we think that in order to come back to God, we need to have everything sorted out. We need to understand His character. We need to feel His love and His acceptance.

[36 : 32] And yet that often isn't the way He simply asks us to return. He simply asks us to trust His promises. I say, you will understand. It will unfold.

It will blossom in your life as you return to me. And that is so significant for us. It's tremendously important for us to know.

And we have far more on which to base our return than Naomi had, really, in that Old Testament, temporary pre-Christ day, although they are much too recognisable as grace and goodness.

We have God incarnate. We have Jesus in the flesh. We have Christ on the cross. We have a triumphant resurrection and a glorious ascension.

And we have 2,000 years of a people who are being brought into the kingdom. And we have far more. And yet for us, we are often blighted by a grudging faith as well.

[37 : 33] Our understanding of God is mean and He's small, so that we're not that sure about sharing Him with our daughters-in-law, or with our family members, or with our neighbours or our friends, because we feel it's good enough for us, good enough for St. Colombs in this nice warm fellowship.

But He'll never have an interest in my friends, and it will be difficult for me to share that, because I don't truly see Him as a God of love and a God of rescue, but a God who may bring harshness and bitterness in my life because He's a sovereign, but who isn't a prodigal father, whose arms are extravagantly opened out and embarrassing over expression of love for us, no matter what the world may think, and so we struggle.

So as the story unfolds, we want to be a people that learn the good news more and more, the good news of His love and of His rescue in our own lives. You may be in a season of waiting, you may be in a season of famine where you're tempted to give up and walk away.

This is a great redemptive story that will bring you back if you will allow Him to bring you back. It's a wonderful story of love and of rescue, and of the overwhelming plan of God, which is beyond our understanding, and which yet was brilliantly planned through the different stages of redemptive history so that we can trust and know and believe and understand who God is.

It's like what we've been looking at in John, where Jesus says in the upper room, I've told you this now so that when it does happen, you will believe. So we see this here now so that you and I must believe and turn to this living God more and more and experience His unparalleled love for us because it will change everything in your life and in your experience.

[39 : 37] Let's bow our heads and pray. Father God, we ask that you help us to understand your great love and your great grace and that we would learn from this old story of amazing personal interaction and purpose and plan of love and rescue, of your own purposes for us, love and rescue.

And remind us Lord that any time we drift from you, it is not your work, it is the work of the evil one to deceive and to break our relationship and to take us to that place of famine.

Remind us of that we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.