

## **FGBC: God in the Dark: How far will you go in the Dark?**

Ruth 4

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Go ahead and grab your Bibles. We are in Ruth 4 today, and the conclusion of this series. Ruth has been a story about God in the dark. He is at work in our lives even when things aren't going right and we have no idea what He could possibly be up to.

And honestly I believe this is one of the fundamental truths of Christianity – if you miss this, you miss a lot. And that's because we never know what tomorrow is going to bring, or even how things today are going to work out. We can make our plans, but it is God who determines where our feet hit the ground.

And so what this means is that if we are going to be Father exalting, Spirit filled, Jesus worshipping women and men we need to develop eyes of faith like Ruth and Naomi.

Now this doesn't mean these women could see the future. It means they followed God in the dark, He took care of the rest, and we get to see how it worked out.

So when famine struck Israel, Naomi and her husband and two sons fled the country and ended up in Moab. And while they were there Naomi's husband died, and then her two sons died. And she was left a widow with two daughters-in-law. Naomi's story is one of setback after setback. And her heart started out hard.

But then "coincidences" start happening. So after hearing the famine had subsided Naomi and Ruth travel back home and arrive just in time for the barley harvest. And Ruth just happens to end up gleaning grain in Boaz' field – and he turns out to be a relative of Naomi's husband. And Boaz just happens to take an interest in Ruth.

And as Naomi reflects on coincidence after coincidence her heart softens and she realizes God hadn't stopped showing His kindness to the living and the dead.<sup>1</sup> God is at work in the dark. So the point of the first half of the book is to keep your eyes open for where God is at work.

And then, as the hope in Naomi's heart increases we get a shift. Naomi, Ruth and Boaz begin living out their faith in the dark by strategically acting out godly plans. So Naomi sets plans in motion to make sure her husband's inheritance stays in the family. Ruth assertively lets it be known she is willing to become Boaz' wife. And we find out Boaz has been working towards this all along.

Now, none of these people know what God is up to. There are no dreams in this book; God gives no visions and sends no prophets. All they have is a desire to honour God, their human ingenuity, and the faith to believe God is at work.

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth 2:20

And this means there is real risk in this story. There is a chance Boaz isn't going to get the girl of his dreams. There is a chance Ruth isn't going to be taken care of. And there is a chance Naomi's family line is going to end, all because there is another guardian-redeemer in the picture who is unknown and could mess everything up.

So let's pick the story up in Ruth 4 verse 1.

[Read Ruth 4:1-10]

There is a lot tied up in this pretty strange exchange. There is land, there is money, there is a pretty girl, and there is an inheritance. And none of this is a slam dunk. Everything's up in the air because it's dark. Just like your life.

Aren't there things you want to do but you aren't sure how they are going to work out? You want to honour God, but this has the potential of getting in the way of some other things you want. And the temptation is always to bend the honouring God part in order to get what you want – right? Or is this just me? And so the question is: How far are you willing to go to honour God in the dark?

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So Boaz has complications: First, there is this other guardian-redeemer who, if Boaz is honourable, gets first dibs on everything Boaz wants. And the way the text reads he's totally clueless about this situation so all Boaz would have to do is just "forget" that this other guy was a closer relation. It could be a simple mistake. Boaz marries the girl and buys the land and then shoot, he finds out about this other guy and genuinely apologizes, but there is nothing that can be done.

Can you feel the tension? Have you ever known what the right thing to do was but been concerned that something else wasn't going to work out if you did it God's way?

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But Boaz won't give in. He is going to honour God in the dark. He's going to risk not getting what he wants in order to put God first. And it looks like it's going to go bad.

In verse 4 the other guy is stoked to get the deal. Land falls in his lap. But Boaz is no dummy. And he's not going to sit down and passively let what he wants slip away.

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In Buddhism desire is the enemy. You gain happiness when you don't want anything. So you're not happy because you don't have that special relationship. Well just stop wanting to not be lonely and you will be fine. You're not happy because your finances are in disarray. Well, just stop wanting stuff you don't have. Kill your desire.

Christianity does not agree. Now the Bible does talk about the secret of being content with what you have, but it holds this in tension by also saying desire is a God given gift. It can fuel our motivation to pursue the blessing God has for us. And this is what we get in Ruth.

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Now I'm not saying God promises you health and wealth. But chapter 4 is saying that if we will make God God in our life – if we will put Him first by choosing obedience in the dark, then we are allowed to pursue our other desires second.

The health and wealth gospel goes wrong when it says honour God in order to get stuff – that's making stuff God in your life and using God to get there. But we are free to pursue our desires under the umbrella of putting God first. Watch how Boaz does this.

So in verses 3 and 4 Boaz lays out what is available, and the other guy wants it. But then he says:

“Look dude, that's great, but you need to know this isn't just a land deal. It comes with responsibility. There's this Moabite woman you've got to take as a wife. And you actually have the responsibility to raise up an heir through her for her dead husband.”

Boaz doesn't lie. Boaz doesn't neglect to give the opportunity to this guy. But he doesn't try to convince him to take it either. He doesn't say Ruth's an incredible woman that anyone would be lucky to have. He doesn't say God's blessing is all over this woman, and anyone who takes her in is going to enjoy that. He emphasizes the liability he knows will be difficult to swallow.

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So here is what we know is going on. The way this is written we know this other guardian-redeemer already has children at this point and so while it is true that the land he would get from Naomi would be his, it is going to complicate his estate. It won't pass to his children; it would go to the children he would have with Ruth. That was the whole point of the guardian-redeemer thing. This was God's way of protecting the gift of land He had given His children – it wasn't supposed to be given away. And that's what Boaz emphasizes. He isn't being deceptive he's playing his cards wisely because he wants in on the blessing that is all over Ruth. He has no idea what God is up to, but he wants to participate.

And so this other guardian redeemer weighs the responsibility and decides he doesn't want it. And boom, Boaz signs on the line.

Friends, Jesus doesn't want us to be passive. Don't do nothing and hope stuff works out. Commit yourself to righteousness, and work towards participating with the good God has made possible even when you don't know the future. This is following God in the dark.

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But how do we live this way?

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Probably the most repeated conversation I have with people surrounds the idea of God's will for their life. Young people want to know this, old people want to know this. People want to know what God wants them to do.

But that question is built on the faulty premise that God wants you to do something specific. So should I study to be an engineer or a missionary? Should I pursue this girl or that girl? Is it time for me to quit my job, or should I persevere?

And people come at these questions as though God were up in heaven saying “I wonder if Dan is going to figure out what I’ve got in mind? I know how this is going to end, and if he takes this job instead of that one it’s going to go bad, but I’m not going to tell him. I’m just going to have someone drop their McDonald’s straw on the ground in the shape of an arrow pointing in the right direction and see if he notices.

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Nope, he just totally walked by. Well I’ll try tweaking the sediment at the bottom of his coffee cup into a picture of his new boss – maybe he’ll get this one... Nope, he’s getting a refill.”

Friends, that’s not how God’s will works. If God has something specific for you He will make it obvious. God’s a perfect communicator; He’s not going to leave you deciphering obscure signs.

So when God tells Noah to build a boat Noah doesn’t question whether he heard from God. He knows what God wants, the only question is “Am I going to obey.”

When God told Elijah to pray for rain Elijah didn’t have to look for McDonald’s straws on the ground, he knew what he was supposed to do, the only question was “Am I going to trust God in front of King Ahab or not?”

So if your name is Noah or Elijah, and God has a specific will for your life, He is going to make it clear. But until that happens our job is to follow His general will in the dark. Our job is to obey the general commands of scripture – love your neighbour, don’t steal, don’t commit adultery, save your sexuality for marriage, don’t marry someone who doesn’t love Jesus. We know all these things are not God’s will for us. So our job is to risk obedience even when it means we might not get what we want.

So Boaz doesn’t have sex with Ruth before they are married. And he does extend the offer to the other guardian-redeemer. This is following God in the dark.

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Okay fine. Sin isn’t God’s will for me, but what about when both options are neutral or good? How do I know what to do then? Is this where Gideon comes in?

You remember that story right? Doesn’t Gideon ask for a sign and God tells him exactly what His will is? Yes, He does. But it is a huge mistake to model your life after Gideon. The point of Gideon’s story is not godliness but the fact that God uses weak and faithless people to accomplish His means.

Here's the story people don't remember when they talk about Gideon's fleece. The story starts with God sending an angel to Gideon – actually it's the angel of the LORD so it's God Himself. And He tells Gideon what he is supposed to do. Gideon gets the Noah and Elijah blessing of actually knowing God's secret will: "Go attack Midian and rescue Israel."<sup>2</sup>

But instead of obeying like Noah or Elijah Gideon says "I'm not the right guy for the job." And so God confirms "Hey, don't worry I'm going to give you the strength to pull this off." But Gideon objects again and asks for a sign – he will not take God at His word.

And so, remarkably, God gives him a sign – He touches the sacrifice Gideon had prepared and it spontaneously ignites in front of his eyes. So Gideon knows God has spoken. But this still isn't enough and so he asks for another sign. And this is where we get the whole fleece thing.

"I'm going to put this fleece out on the ground overnight and if it's dry in the morning, but the ground is wet, then I'll know You've spoken to me God." God, I'm going to walk down 15<sup>th</sup> Ave, and if you want me to get a job then put a sign on the sidewalk pointing to where I should apply. But if You think I should just live in my mom's basement playing video games then don't bother. Really? Well in Gideon's case God obliges. The fleece is just like he asks.

But Gideon's still not happy. He's scared. He's faithless. And so again the next night he puts the fleece out and this time asks "If tonight the fleece is wet but the ground is dry then I will really know You've spoken."

And at this point in the story you are supposed to be slapping your forehead and saying "how faithless can this guy get? How is God going to use an idiot like this to rescue His people." But instead we've turned Gideon into a model for godly living. Just this last week a 50-year-old godly woman told me about how she was putting out her fleece.

Friends, when you don't know what the future holds but you want to honour God don't follow Gideon's example and beg to know the future – Gideon's story doesn't promise God is going to tell you that, it just says God did tell faithless Gideon what to do.

So don't throw a fleece out there. Don't use Gideon as your example. Follow Ruth; follow Boaz; follow Naomi. Their story is about how you live your life for God's glory in the dark.

You see God doesn't usually tell us what He wants us to do, but He still requires that we live in a God honouring way.

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<sup>2</sup> Judges 6-8

And so what this means is that God's will for you isn't that you somehow figure out the future and choose the right path when nothing is obvious. God's will for your life, and our life as a church, is that we choose to honour Him by staying under the umbrella of obedience, while taking action to pursue the good that is available. So Paul says:

Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

This is how you live out God's will in the dark. When you've got a choice between two God honouring options – say becoming an engineer and becoming a missionary. You say “Jesus, I don't know what is going to happen if I choose this or that. Both seem like great options. I know I can live for Your glory as an engineer, and I know I can live for your glory as a missionary. And so I'm going to choose engineer because that's the one that feels like it fits me best.”

God's not up in heaven saying “Ahh man! You missed the McDonald's straw I dropped for you. You were My answer for how George over in Zimbabwe was going to hear about Me. Now he's not going to hear. And he was the guy who was going to reach all of Africa. You've wrecked everything!”

No. God's will for your life is not this job or that one. God's will for our church is not that we run this program or that one. It is that we live our lives striving to bring glory to His name with everything we've got. That's God's will for us.

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There is one more side to this. You see just because we act without knowing the future doesn't mean God has no plan. And this is where Ruth ends. Look at verse 13:

[Read Ruth 4:13-17]

Friends, it's dark, but God is in control. He is doing something incredible in the world and in our city. He's increasing His glory, and He's using our fallible, faltering lives to play into this. Naomi and Ruth and Boaz stumbling along in the dark, doing the best they can. Seeking to live God honouring lives and it results in King David's line! And King David's line extends to Jesus.

And here's the crazy thing: nobody knew this until long after these people were dead. It was 120 years before David took the throne and a 1000 more before Jesus showed up.

But that's the kind of God we serve. He saw fit to set this story in motion 3000 years ago in order that we might have our hope stirred and our faith built to live out our lives for His glory in the dark. So how far will you go?

When your children and grandchildren are telling the story of your life what is the legacy they are going to speak of? Did you play it safe and miss out on what God was up to? Or were you wise and brave as you took risks to get in the game and live a God honouring life even when you didn't know how the cards were going to fall? Did you follow God in the dark?