

“Ruth: Hope in the Dark” // *The Whole Story* #15

Introduction

One of my **least favorite parts of the job here** is that a lot of the sports games that I want to watch take place on Saturday night while I’m doing the 4 and 5:30 services. **And I set them to record** at home, but I **never seem to be able** to make it home without finding out who won—something will come on the radio; or someone will tweet about it; some overzealous fan at church will say, “Too bad, pastor.”

But **here’s the thing**: If I find out my team wins, then I still enjoy watching. In fact, it kind of **makes it more fun** because when bad things happen, I’m like, “**Doesn’t matter, we still win.**”

But **if I find out my team did not win**, then I have no desire at all to watch, because then, even when good things happen, I think, “*Well, who cares about that? They still lose anyway.*” If anything, it makes their good plays **depressing!**

- Like the NCAA national championship this year: If UNC had won, I’d want to watch Marcus Paige’s wild, out of control 3-pointer continually. (I did get to watch that game live: when he made it, we were laughing, crying, hugging.) Now, I don’t want to see it. Because I think, “*Yep, awesome. But in 4 seconds they still lose.*”
- (I know that **for some of you Duke fans** it is the exact opposite. You watch those last 30 seconds over and over and when Paige makes that crazy 3 you’re like, “Who cares??? You still lose!!!” But

that’s because you have sin in your heart.¹) I cheered just as hard for Duke last year when they were in it.

The book of Ruth is a hopeful glimpse of the end, in the midst of a **depressingly dark** chapter in Israel’s history.

The book **declares to Israel**, “you win,” and here’s how.

Incidentally, in the book of Ruth is the **first time the word “hope”** is used in the Bible.

- **Now, I’ve taught you this before**: In English, the word “hope” often implies something we *want* to happen that we are not sure *will* happen. “I sure **hope that the Carolina Panthers win** the Super Bowl next year... and that they don’t choke again and break our hearts.”
- **Biblical hope**, by contrast, **is not something you are unsure about**; but **something you are very sure about that just hasn’t happened yet—that you look forward to with expectation and that reshapes your entire outlook on life.**

Ruth is about **that kind of hope**.

The **setting**, as I mentioned, is an **incredibly dark time**. If you remember from last week, at the **end of the book of Joshua**, Joshua **had told** the people that they would never be able to stay faithful to God.

And **sure enough**, just like he said, **they don’t**. So the book of JUDGES (which directly follows Joshua), traces this continual cycle of **disobedience and idolatry/ enslavement/ repentance/ deliverance**. Every cycle seems to get worse, however (*like a downward spiral*),

¹ Prov. 24:17, “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the LORD see it and be displeased, and turn away his anger from him (and onto you).”

and the book ends in total moral chaos, with Israel as bad, if not worse, than the Canaanites they had driven out.

- (You **might remember** this; we went through the whole book this summer!)

The **story of Ruth takes place in the last of those dark cycles**, right after the story of **Samson**, when things **seem as bad** as they could be.

Ruth

1:1 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. **Now, catch that.** The Promised Land—the land **that God had promised to bless them in** and from which he'd make them a **blessing to the world**—is under such **severe famine because of their sin** that the people of God are fleeing it! See how far they've fallen?

- Supposed to flow w/ milk and honey

2 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. (In Hebrew, **"sickly" and "spent."** Most likely, these were nicknames, but still... that's tough.)

³But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with "sickly" and "spent" ~~her two sons~~. ⁴These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah (she was kind of a mouthy talk show host) and the name of the other Ruth. (And, catch that, too: they are **marrying foreign**, pagan women, who **worshipped other gods**—this was directly forbidden by God.) They lived there about ten years, ⁵and "sickly" and "spent" ~~both Mahlon and Chilion~~ died. No surprise there.

⁶Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard... that the LORD had visited his people and given them food.

⁸But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

¹⁴...And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law (to leave), but Ruth clung to her. ¹⁵But Naomi said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return with her. ¹⁶But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God." (That's a great summary of conversion)¹⁸ And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

¹⁹So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" ²⁰She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi [which, in Hebrew, sounds like "sweet"]; call me Mara instead, [which means "bitter"], for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. ²¹I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty.²

Ruth 2 They are widows. *They got no food; they got no jobs...* so Ruth does what poor people did in those days... ³ So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, (God had **commanded in Leviticus**³ that reapers should **only pass through their fields once**, harvesting the grain; **anything they dropped or couldn't carry out their first time through**, they were not to go back and clean-up. This was a **simple way of providing for poor people**. *God has always had a plan to care for the poor—and that plan was the generosity of his people!*).

² Wait, she went away full? Didn't she leave because of a famine? It shows you she recognizes that there were things more important than food and riches—God, and family, and when she had them, she was full, even when she had no food!

³ Lev 23:22

So Ruth **goes out to pick up** what the reapers have left behind **and she** (just so) **happened** to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech. (who was, of course, Naomi's deceased husband)

2 things you see there:

- **First:** saying that Boaz is a **relative of theirs** is a really good thing for them because it means there may be **someone around to help** them.
 - **Plus, it is a signal for a Jewish audience** that a romance is afoot. (I realize that in today's culture when you say that "so and so is your cousin" that doesn't immediately set up a romance... unless, of course, again, **you're from where Hank Murphy is from in Georgia**, but in Jewish literature it was.
- Second, that phrase "**it just so happened**" is going to be repeated a couple of times in the book, with **intended irony**.
 - **She "just so happened" to stumble** into THIS particular field? This is the kind of coincidence that is too random to **just happen**.
 - **You know, guys, it's kind of like when it's your wife's turn** to pick out the movie; so you're watching one of those chic-flicks and there is this major plot turn that hinges on some totally random, lucky coincidence and you're like, "*Come on! That would never 'just happen' in real life! This is so absurd! Who writes this garbage?*" And you turn to your wife and are about to point out **said absurdity** when you notice she's... (sniff, sniff) blinking her eyes... And **in one of those few, shining moments** in your relationship, you think, "You know, maybe now is not the *best time to point this out.*" So **instead you just kind of shake your head** and say, "*Wow, baby. Isn't God good? Jehovah Jireh.*"

- **That's what's** happening here—a totally random coincidence, but it's all being woven together by a sovereign God.
- There's **no dramatic miracles throughout the book of Ruth**; just sovereignly controlled circumstances, because **both are ways** God works supernaturally in the world.
 - **Maybe you've** heard it said that coincidence is often just God's way of remaining anonymous.

Vs. ⁴ **And behold, Boaz** More dramatic language... "And behold Boaz;" at this point you are supposed to **cue the dramatic music** in your mind (think, the Rocky Balboa song) "Behold Boaz! **came from Bethlehem...**

- "**Boaz**" in Hebrew means "**strength.**" He's a **man's man**; he comes in **riding on a horse**, with his cape flapping in the wind, he throws his hair out of his face. (**Nicolas Cage meme**).
- He's not wearing a sweatervest or drinking a wine spritzer or listening to Celine Dion. He's **a dude**.

And he's **rich**. I mean, he **owns all these fields**. And **everybody loves him!** See—**And he said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered, "The LORD bless you."** and they all respond in unison, "No, the Lord bless you!"

- How many of you... Your boss walks in and says, "the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all," and you all **pop up out of your cubicles** like little moles and say, "No sir, the grace of the Lord be with YOU..."? POINT IS: this guy is great. Everyone loves him.

⁵ **Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers** (the nerd with the clipboard who actually graduated from college), **"Whose young woman is this?"** If you **underline stuff** in your Bible, underline that question, BECAUSE that question is THE fundamental question of the whole book: **Whose woman is this?** Who is she, fundamentally? Is she mainly a Moabite to be despised? A stranger? Is she **damaged goods**—which is how that culture would have seen her?

You see, to a Jewish audience, **Ruth had 3 strikes** against her.

- **First, she's a Moabite**, which the Jews regarded as a cursed people.⁴ The Moabites were the **offspring of an incestuous relationship** between Lot and his daughters and they were cursed.⁵
- **Second, she's widowed**, which meant they would have regarded her as used goods.
- **Third, she's poor**, which they saw as a sign of God's judgment.
- And plus, by the way, there's no way Ruth looks that good in this chapter: **she's rummaging through the weeds** looking for food: her face is all **oily and grimy**; her **one dress** is all dirty and torn.
 - This is not **how a girl wants to meet a guy**. Right? Most girls, if they know they are going to be meeting a significant guy, they **disappear for like 4 hours** upstairs in their bathroom and there is sandblasting and spray-painting and things utterly unknown to the male gender going on.
 - **When you meet Mr. Perfect**, you don't want to be all **slimy and grimy** and **dumpster-diving** for food.

The point is, she's **not a picture** of attractiveness and beauty. But **Boaz represents a different kind of man** in Israel. He's giving us a picture of **God's love**.

So, Boaz tells her **...do not go to glean in another field or leave this one. That's like on OT pick up line. "Hey baby, I'll leave some extra grain out for you." Seems strange to me**, but it worked better than any pick-up line I've ever used...¹⁰ **Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground...** Guys, maybe you want to try it.

- I mean, in my day, I had some great Christian pick-up lines, like:

⁴ Numbers 21:29, 24:17

⁵ And then in **Numbers 25** a big group of Moabite women seduced the Israelite men to marry them and convinced them to worship other gods, which brought a terrible judgment onto Israel, where 24,000 of them died. So, in other words, you don't mess with Moabite women. Bad luck.

- "Girl, I heard Jesus called you. He told me he wanted me to call you too. That cool?"
 - Or, "Girl, you are breaking OT law, because you're 'working it' on the Sabbath."
- So, I had some good ones, but they *never* got that reaction.

He goes on...⁹ **Have I not charged the young men not to touch you?**

He was like: "Hey fellas... **you know that new girl** down gleaning in the field... **don't touch her. I mean it. I own a lot of fields** and they would never find your body."

And then he says to her... **And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn."**

- As a Moabite woman, **if she was tolerated** in Israel at all, she would have been **expected to serve any Jewish men** present, like she was a slave. **To get them water.**
- But Boaz says, "**You don't have to be our servant.** We'll treat you like **family. We'll serve you.**"

¹⁴ **And at mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine."** Like an OT version of going out for appetizers at Applebee's. Nothing serious, just a casual date. Coffee with a friend. **And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over.**¹⁵ When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not stop or criticize her."¹⁶ **And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean... throw some extra on the ground for her...**¹⁷ So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.¹⁸ **And she took it up and went into the city.** Now, scholars say an "**ephah**" would have been a big **thick** pile of wheat. Really **heavy**. Ruth just hoists it up on her shoulder and carried it all the way back to the city! Evidently she was pretty jacked.

Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned...¹⁹ **And said to her, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked?"** Naomi is

so excited she is **stumbling over her words**; she asks the same thing twice: “Where did you...” “How did...?” “What the...?” **Blessed be the man who took notice of you.**”

So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, (and **here again, the drama**; because **Ruth doesn't know the connection** of Boaz to her relatives, but Naomi does...) “The man's name with whom I worked today is ... in Hebrew, the name Boaz is left until the **last word in the sentence**: The **audience anticipation** is building because **you, the reader, know this guy is a relative** and a **good romantic match** so you're **watching Naomi's eyes** as Ruth **builds up to the last word** in the sentence and she says... “His name is... **BOAZ!**” (Nicolas Cage meme)

- Cue the soaring classical music and the flock of doves taking off in the background!

²⁰ And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!” Mara (bitter) just got Naomi (sweet) again, because she realized God had not forgotten her after all. And Naomi also said to her, “The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.”

- Now, let's talk about that word “**REDEEMER**” for a minute.
- **In those days**, if you were in debt, your **property was deeded** out to someone else in order to pay off those debts.
- But **here was the deal**: You had the **right to buy** it back at any **time**; you just had had to have the money.
- If you couldn't do it, a **family member** could do it for you.
 - It was called a “**kinsman redeemer.**” A **kinsman redeemer had to have** 3 things:
 - **FIRST**, the **right**: they had to be the closest, living relative willing to do this.
 - **SECOND**, the **resources**: they had to have the money to pay off the debt.
 - **THIRD**, the **resolve**: they had to want to do it.⁶

Well, Boaz is a **relative**, and he's **wealthy**. He's got the right and the resources. **Does he have the resolve? Let's see.**

Naomi says to Ruth: 3:3 Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. [4] But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do.”

[7] And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. [8] At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet!

- Now, all I can say to this is, “**What?**”
- Girls, let me just say, the **Bible has a lot of great examples** for you to follow, but I would not suggest you imitate what Ruth did here. **Guys, if you try this** with a girl, you will go to jail. I promise.

But this was interpreted to be an official request for marriage, and it worked. **Boaz wants to marry her**, and he can reclaim the family inheritance.

But there is **one small complication**. They discover there is a closer relative, and he's got first dibs.

So, Boaz, chapter 4, finds out who this guy is and goes to the city gate to wait for him. ~~4:1 Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there.~~ And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. (He's **never given a name**, btw, because his lack of generosity is going to make him be forgotten on the pages of history.) But **when Boaz sees him**, he explains the situation to him.

4 And he said, “I will redeem it.” This guy is thinking, “Hey, get some land. This is great: they ain't making no more land.”

⁶ David Platt, “Ruth: A Story of Adoption”

But then Boaz **very deftly** says (vs. 5), **“Well, here’s the deal. If you take the land, you also got to take this Moabite woman, AND her mother-in-law, and she’s kind of ornery. I MEAN, she named herself bitter.**

- (Kind of like saying, “Hey, do you want to buy this house? It’s a great deal but there’s this cranky old woman who lives on the 2nd floor and she goes with the house.”)
- **Plus, this guy thinks,** “She’s a Moabite? What if she’s got some crazy Moabite cousin and they all want to start moving here? And so he says, “Uhh... you know, I **just prayed about it** and ‘no.’ No thanks.”

So **Boaz marries her** and they all live **happily ever after**. But that is **not even the climax** of the story!

The most important part of the book is the last 4 verses: ¹³So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son... ¹⁶Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. ¹⁷And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed.

We get this really sweet picture of Naomi holding Obed and saying, “God is **alive!** He’s let me hold my **grandson!** God has **redeemed me and my family** and given us back our **inheritance**. He turned my **bitterness back into sweetness.**”

But **that’s not even the really good part:** vs. 17 again, **He** (Obed) **was the father of Jesse,** (who was) **the father of David.** Obed grew up and had a son named Jesse.

And Jesse has a whole bunch of sons.

And **one day God speaks** to the prophet Samuel and says, “*I am about to begin a brand new era; that is going to have ramifications for thousands of years. People in **RDU in 2016** will be affected by this.*

So go find me a king.” Samuel says, “Where?” Go to the house of Jesse, the son of Obed, grandson of Naomi, mother in law of Ruth the Moabite.” I have **chosen one of his sons** to be king.”

Now, **men, when someone shows up at your house** and says, “*Your son will be king.*” You do not even care which one. **So Samuel brings them all** out but it’s ‘no.’ ‘No.’ ‘No.’ And Samuel says, “**Jesse? Do you have any more sons? I know I am at the right house.**” And Jesse says “*Well yea. The youngest. He is out in the fields, but, he’s no king.*”

Samuel says, “**I will not sit down until you bring him in.**” And onto the pages of history walks David.

Well, years go by and another prophet, Nathan, comes to King David and says, **2 Samuel 7:16,** “**Your house and kingdom will endure forever. And your throne will be established forever.**”

And so the Israelites waited. They knew **if there were going to be a Messiah,** it would be from **David.**

And so **David has a son who has a son** who has a son and about 25 pregnancies later—or to use **the biblical term, “25 begots later”**—we have Jesus. Jesus, the son of David, the son of Ruth. Who was born in Bethlehem, the city of Naomi.⁷

Jesus had the right, the resources, and the resolve to be **our kinsman redeemer.**

- He had the **right:** he was our relative, born of a woman. He had the **resources**—he was without sin, with power over death. And he had the **resolve**—he said, “I’ll undergo the curse of death itself for them to buy them back.”

In Ruth, **we see the whole gospel** displayed before our eyes!

- Do you see how beautifully this gives us a picture of Christ...

⁷ Andy Stanley, “Ruthie and Bo Save Christmas”

- This convinces me this is the word of God more than anything else.

1. In the gospel, God is about the business of redemption.

- The word “**redemption**” is used 23 times in Ruth’s 4 short chapters.
 - The unloved are loved.
 - The poor are restored.
 - The inheritance that has been lost because of sin is reclaimed through the generosity of another.
 - **Bitterness becomes sweet.**
- The **book of Ruth starts with death**—Naomi losing her husband and sons—and **ends with a genealogy** recounting a list of births. *Ruth ends in a genealogy because the Bible ends in a resurrection.*
 - **For the world, life starts with birth** and ends in death.
 - **For the Christian**, we realize we are born in death but God ends our story in life.
- **Naomi goes from baroness to blessedness.** She starts the book as a **forsaken, son-less, husband-less beggar**, and she ends as the **grandmother** of the Son of God.
- This is the **theme of Ruth**, and the theme of the Bible. It is the **heart of the gospel**, and God’s message *to you*.
 - **The gospel is not, “God rewards the successful”** or “**God grants heaven** to the righteous and the **victorious!**”
 - The gospel is, “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”⁸
- We were **created to be children** of God; to be **constantly in his presence**. To have a **blessed eternity in heaven** that was joy upon joy and blessing upon blessing,
 - but we **sold it away** through sin.

- Yet **Jesus, our kinsman redeemer**, loved us—unlovely and pagan as we were—and redeemed our inheritance back for us.

- **God sees us like Boaz saw Ruth.** He loved us just as we were.
 - *It wasn’t even that **God loved some future version of us he could see in the future.*** He loves us *now*, even in our sin and defilement.
- **I’ve always loved the old hymn, *Just As I Am*...**

The **song was written by a woman named Charlotte Elliott** in 1834. Her brother, a pastor, was trying to launch a new school for girls who couldn’t afford to go to school. So to fund it, they held a huge bazaar to raise money. **Everyone was busy cooking, sewing, building things...except Charlotte. Her health was really bad, and she was bedridden.** As she watched everyone else use their bodies for God, she wondered if she had anything to offer him at all. She didn’t sleep the whole night... but then she remembered her salvation. God didn’t accept her because she had something to offer; he took her in her sin, just as she was. And if he took her from sin that way—just as she was, then he’d use her that way too—poor health and all.

And so the next day she wrote the text to *Just as I Am*, the song that arguably has been used to bring more people to Christ than any other history, because it was the hymn they played at just about every invitation Billy Graham ever gave:

“Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me, and that Thou bidst me come to Thee – O Lamb of God, I come!”

“Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind; Sight, riches, healing of the mind, Yea, all I need, in Thee I find – O Lamb of God, I come!”

“Just as I am, Thou wilt receive, Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve; Because Thy promise I believe – O Lamb of God, I come!”

⁸ Isaiah 55:1–2

For you: you can be redeemed—sin has brought famine into your life, you’ve got destroyed relationships, messed up career... God is not telling you to fix it and he’ll reward you, but to come to him in all your mess and he’ll redeem you!

And, you can be used! Some of you, to this point in your life have caused more pain than good. God can change that, he can rewrite this story when you come to him!

2. *In Ruth, we see that...*

2. God uses the least likely as his instruments of redemption

- **Ruth has everything stacked against her.** A poor, childless widow from a hated race.
 - While Samson—an Israelite hero strong enough to knock down the walls of a huge temple—is off **messing around with Delilah** and **swapping his country’s safety** for some cheap thrills, we have a **little Moabite girl who forsook everything** to follow God and saved the nation.
- She, not he, brought Jesus into the world.
- Naomi says of Ruth, **“You are better to me than 7 sons.” (Ruth 4:15)**
 - **Sons in those days** would have been considered ultimate.
 - And **7 was the number** of completion, like saying infinity.
 - So, in other words, through Naomi’s mouth God was saying, *“Ruth, because of your faithfulness, you are more valuable to me than an infinity of the strongest heroes.”*
- **Summit, when will we learn that God works through availability, not ability?**
 - He doesn’t need your ability, your money, or your talents. He **calls only for your complete** and total obedience.
 - The **point is not how much** money you give, but whether you give what he tells you to give. The **point is not how eloquent** your words, but whether you speak when he tells you to speak.

- **So, listen:** Have the **conversation**. Make the **decision**. Write the **check**.
- You can **scarcely overestimate what God will accomplish** through simple obedience!
- And, of course, **this all points to the fact** that the one who would save us would come **not as a mighty conquering warrior** riding on a horse—like a **Samson**. He would come as a meek, obedient, servant—like **Ruth** and the runt kid, David.
 - And **a lot of people missed him** for that reason. Just **like they overlooked Ruth and David**.
- Y’all listen... **The Bible turns prejudice** on its head, because those who are considered weak, poor, or lower-class by society are **those into whom God chooses to put** the riches of his grace and the powers of his salvation.

3. Those who experience the gospel become like the gospel

- **This whole book gives a picture of how Israel** was supposed to love others in response to God’s love for them.
- That’s why that central question is in 2:5, **“Whose young woman is she?”** That is the **question we have to ask** about people in our lives.
 - The **refugee, the immigrant?** Who really are they? Are they mainly a problem to be dealt with, or people made in the **image of God**—that Jesus died to save and has put in our lives to love?
 - I realize the government has its own questions about refugees—they have to keep us safe—and we **pray for them** to make wise decisions. But when they show up down the street from us, I know what our job is, as the church—regardless of how they got there. It is to love them.
 - **The divorcee; the girl who has had an abortion**—who is she really? An example we hold up of what not to be? Or **someone Jesus has never stopped loving** and that he gave his blood to redeem? And whom we need to tell that to!

- The **orphan—whose son** really is that? Are they just to be cast aside? Statistic?
- **Those who have been redeemed by Jesus ought to become** redeemers of others.
- Most powerful **adoption testimony** I've heard... *"I'll take this one."*
 - Couple were greatly troubled... didn't know what to do. The next morning the woman woke up and told her husband that that night she'd had a dream... And she said in her dream she was observing a stadium full of thousands of people... and they were bringing out children one by one... beautiful children, and they would say, "Who wants this one? And people would volunteer to come forward and take the child..." She said, "Then, they brought a child that was ugly, deformed, and scarred... looked like it would never have a hope of a good life, at all. And the question was asked to the stadium, "And who wants this one?" and, she said, the whole crowd grew very silent. No one wanted the deformed child. And she said, then, standing up from the front row, Jesus walked forward and said, "I want this one. I'll take her." And the woman said, "Then, in my dream, I was taken closer to the child and I saw that that deformed child... the child that no one seemed to want, was me." And then she said to her husband, "I knew instantly that that is the question being asked of us here... 'Who wants this one?'" And then she said to her husband: *"Jesus wants this one. And I want this one, too."* And they took the baby and raised and loved it... so, for however long it breathed on earth, it could sense the love and compassion of the Heavenly Father.
- Those who have **been redeemed become redeemers of others.**
- A life of gospel generosity is not easy. Adoption, caring for foster kids, getting involved in student ministry... or any kind of real ministry.... is tough.
 - *But as one person engaged in adoption said: Taking a child with fetal alcohol syndrome is probably not nearly as glamorous as some make it look like on TV... it's tough and*

may inconvenience your life, but that's not really anything compared to what it was like for Jesus to take us, who had the corruption and poison of sin flowing through our bodies, and bring us into his family.

We sing about Jesus' love: *"I stand amazed... and wonder how he could love me..."*

He took my sin and my sorrow, and he made them his very own...

How Marvelous! How wonderful! ... Is my Savior's love for me."

- **Jesus' love for us was marvelous;** wonderful—made people wonder, why?
- Our love for others should be marvelous and cause wonder, too.

Russ Moore: *"Think of how revolutionary it is for a Christian to adopt a young boy with a cleft palate from a region of India where most people see him as "defective." Think of how odd it must seem to American secularists to see Christians adopting a baby whose body trembles with an addiction to the cocaine her mother sent through her bloodstream before birth. Think of the kind of credibility such action lends to the proclamation of our gospel... "What if we as Christians were known, once again, as the people who take in orphan, and make of them beloved sons and daughters?" Russ Moore⁹*

- There are over 100 kids in Durham awaiting foster care... about 200 in Wake County... We need about 100 families in Durham and 200 in Wake...
- Why can't the evangelical churches in Durham and Raleigh take care of these kids?
- Meeting this week

You have a chance to act on it: Next week: Compassion!

⁹ *Adopted for Life*, Russ Moore, pp. 79, 20.

Prayer

Been redeemed? Jesus has the right, resources and resolve. You can come just as you are.

Offered yourself to be used?