

Show Me Your Glory: Compassionate
Exodus 33-34/Ruth

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In December of 1999, right before the turn of the calendar, where a new millennium would be upon us, Gallop took a poll of people throughout America to see who ranked as the most admired person of the 20th century. Of the billions of people alive, who did we appreciate and respect the most? 4th on the list—Albert Einstein, one of the smartest men to ever live. Third, JFK, a president killed in the prime of his life. Second, Martin Luther King Jr, a man who had a dream to overcome our differences and unite a nation. But by far and away, blowing everyone else out of the water statistically, was a petite, soft spoken woman who lived her entire life in poverty, Mother Teresa. When you look throughout the entire list, almost everyone had positions of power and influence—presidents and popes and people with disproportionate gifts and platforms. But the person most admired had one thing: compassion beyond comparison. She lived her entire life in poverty, taking care of lepers and the impoverished, those who were dying who had no one to be by their side. There is a shared trait throughout almost all humanity—we find genuine compassion to be beautiful and inspirational.

We are in week four of a series called Show Me Your Glory. This is all based around a passage in the Old Testament where Moses comes to God with the boldest and best requests anyone could ever make: Exodus 33:18 Now show me your glory—God, I want to see you, I want to know you, I want to be close to you. God says, no one can see my face and live, but I'll show you as much of my glory and splendor as you can possibly bear. God hides Moses in the cleft of a rock and passes by him and declares his name:

Exodus 34:5-5 “Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. 6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.”

In this series we are looking at each of the descriptions God used to describe himself, and today we dive into God's description of himself as compassionate. And take note of this, of all the admirable words God uses to describe himself, compassionate is the first. Think about what that means.

The Hebrew word used in this passage is Rahum, it is used 13 times in the Bible, every time to describe God's merciful and compassionate heart toward his people. Rahum is closely connected to the Hebrew word Rahem, which means womb. Think of the way a mother clings to her child, holds her child close, comforts her child when they are in pain. When my son falls down on his bike and gets a scrape what do I as a dad say to him? Get up, get back on your bike, you'll be fine, don't cry, it's no big deal. What does his mom do? She runs to him and holds him in her arms. She is moved with maternal instinct, deep compassion. In the same way that a mother runs to her child and wraps them up with comfort when they are in pain, that is the heart of God to his people. He is compassionate. So often when people conceptualize God, they see him as either distant and disengaged, like the watchmaker who created the universe and then steps back to watch it run. Or they view him as harsh and punitive, like a police-officer just waiting to catch someone going too fast and eagerly giving them a ticket. But that is not the heart of God! He is not disengaged, he is not harsh, he is filled with compassion that draws him near to us with warmth and kindness, specifically when we are hurting and in need.

We see the compassion of God throughout Scripture, but one of the places God's compassion is on greatest display is found in the book of Ruth. If you have your Bibles, turn there. Ruth comes early on in the Bible, after Joshua and Judges, but before 1 and 2 Samuel. Listen to how the book of Ruth begins.

Ruth 1:1-5 “In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. 2 The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there. 3 Now

Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband."

Just try to imagine all that this woman Naomi has gone through.

- **1:1 She lived when the judges ruled**, which was a time of political anarchy and disarray. Judges 21:25 literally tells us that when the judges ruled, everyone did what they saw right in their own eyes. There was a spiritual and moral darkness. People were vulnerable, powerless, and impoverished.
- **1:1 She experienced a great famine**. She was from the town of Bethlehem, which means house of bread. Even in one of the most fertile areas in all the land, there was no food. The house of bread had no bread. She experienced starvation. Starvation to the point where...
- **1:1 She became a refugee**. A refugee needing a new home, not based upon war or religious persecution, but life-threatening hunger. Her body would have been emaciated.
- **1:3 She lost her husband**. She became a widow at far too young of an age and had to grieve the love of her life.
- **1:5 She buried both of her children**. Her two sons each suffered an untimely death. No parent should ever have to endure this pain, she had to go to the graveside of her child not once, but twice.

Physically, emotionally, and relationally, she is at her absolute breaking point. It would be hard to imagine enduring more hardship than this woman went through. And she is also in the darkest moment of her life spiritually. When she decides to return to her hometown, all the people start talking... "Isn't that Naomi, isn't that the woman who left here 10 years ago. Yes, that's her, she's back. That's Naomi!" And what does she say?

20 "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. 21 I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."

She wants her new name to be Mara, which means bitter, and she says it wasn't just misfortune, she believes God is the one who caused all of her pain:

The Lord brought me back empty.

The Lord has afflicted me.

The Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.

None of us have been in the exact place that Ruth has been in, but we've all known suffering. Pain is a universal language. And what we see is that God, out of his deep compassion, meets Naomi in her emptiness and brokenness. And he meets her in numerous ways:

(1) God compassionately cared for Naomi through Ruth. Ruth had married one of Naomi's sons. Ruth is Naomi's daughter in law. After Ruth buried her husband and her sons, she looked at both of her daughters in law and said, there is no reason for you to stay with me. My life is cursed. And you have families of your own. Go home. Go back to your parents. You can marry again. One of her daughters in law, Orpah, agreed and they said goodbye. But not Ruth. Look at what Ruth said to her, some of the most well-known words of the entire Old Testament: 1:16-17:

But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me."

This young lady looks at her mother in law and says, no matter what happens in this life, I am sticking with you. Not just for a few weeks or months to get you back on your feet, I'm not just going to help you get an apartment and some furniture and then get on with my own life, I'm here for the rest of my life. Where you die and are buried, that's where I'm going to die and be buried. Ruth looked at Naomi and said: You may feel like everyone else has abandoned you, but with God as my witness, I will never abandon you. And that is why later on in Ruth 4:15, the community looks at Naomi and says, "Your daughter in law loves you and is better to you than seven sons." God provided for her through a faithful companion. A family member who loved her deeply and refused to give up on her.

(2) God compassionately cared for Naomi through Boaz. Boaz was a distant relative to Naomi, he was a landowner near Bethlehem and had a farm where his employees worked, planting and harvesting grain. One day, Ruth went to Boaz's farm and, as other impoverished people did, went behind those who were working and she started picking up all the leftover grain. It wasn't much. Maybe just enough for a small snack. But when you are starving, anything helps. Boaz saw what Ruth was doing and had compassion on her, he knew that she had lost her husband and was caring for an elderly widow. So he looked at Ruth and said: 2:12 "May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge." This is such a beautiful picture of faith. That when we are in trouble, when we are weary and exhausted and life has been hard on us, we can run to God, who is our refuge. We can hide in the shelter of his wing. Such a profound blessing he offered.

But it was more than just words! We read in 2:14-15 At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar." When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over." He basically brings her into the lunch room and provides a meal for her. And then he looked at his men who were working in his field and said, "she doesn't have to pick up the leftovers. You help her harvest as much as she needs. In 2:17, we read, "Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah." Anyone here know how much an Ephah weighs? 30 lbs. That's a lot of fresh food to bring home from the farmers market. With Boaz, these women would never starve again.

But it was more than just a blessing and food Boaz provided. Because Boaz was a relative, he was able to fulfill the role of a kinsman-redeemer. In other words, if he chose to, he could purchase the ancestral lands of Naomi and take responsibility for the family name of his deceased relative. Basically no one wanted to do this, because instead of building their own name and building their own estate and household, they divided their assets for someone else. Even though it may not have made economic sense, after Ruth and Naomi expressed their desire for it, Boaz stepped up to the plate and we read in 4:9-10:

"Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelek, Kilion and Mahlon. 10 I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses!"

Back then there was no social security, no life insurance companies, no welfare system. In that society, without a man to provide for you, a woman would be destitute. And Boaz put his name, his reputation, and his bank account on the line and said, "I will care for these women." God extended compassion to these women through Boaz.

(3) God compassionately cared for Naomi through Obed. After Boaz married Ruth, the Bible tells us that God allowed them to conceive, and they gave birth to a baby boy. 4:16 "Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. 17 The women living there said, "Naomi has a son!" And they named him Obed." Naomi was the happiest grandmother in all the land. Her grandson was the light of her life. And he was not only a source of joy and hope for his family, the rest of 4:17 tells us, "Obed was the father of Jesse, the father of King David." God not only gives this family a child, he gives them a child who will be

the grandfather of the King of Israel. And it will be David's off-spring through whom Jesus is sent into the world. God not only provided a son, he provided THE Son, he provided His Son. The shadow of the cross is cast both ways, saving us as we look back on the finished work of Christ. But saving those who came before him as they looked ahead to the sacrifice of Christ. Out of his great compassion, God not only provided temporal salvation for this family, he provided eternal salvation for their family, and for every family!

If you want to see the glory of God, look at his incomparable compassion, it's on full display in the life of Naomi. And the same compassion he directed toward the people in this book, he directs toward us, too. I want to highlight four ways:

God's compassion meets us in our brokenness. We all go through seasons of life where we feel like Naomi, "I went out full, but now I am empty." The loss of family members, the loss of a marriage, the loss of health, the loss of employment, the loss of friends...When we go through the most difficult and tumultuous seasons of life, God meets us there in the valley of the shadow of death, and he surrounds us with his compassion.

Psalm 34:18, "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

Psalm 40:1-3 says, "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God."

I don't know if you are in a season of loss, heartache, or pain right now, but I do know this, if you are there, God is with you, his compassion and love is extended to you.

God's compassion meets us in our loneliness. Sometimes the difficulty we face isn't external hardship, it's that we are alone. We feel abandoned by family and friends, we feel like no one really sees us, understands us, or cares for us. God is there in those moments, surrounding you with his compassion.

Isaiah 41:10: "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." No matter how difficult of a road we walk, God is always with us.

Psalm 73:23-24 says, "You hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory." You might feel alone, but because of God's compassion, you are never alone.

God's compassion meets us in our confusion. Sometimes our difficulty isn't loss or loneliness, it's uncertainty. We don't know what we are supposed to do next. And we feel disoriented. It's trying to figure out which college to go to, what to do after a breakup, why we can't find the right spouse, why we can't conceive, why we can't get out of debt, what to do as empty-nesters or as new retirees. There are so many times in life we need guidance. God graciously extends his compassion to us in those moments.

Matthew 9:36 tells us, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

In Jeremiah 6:16 we read: "This is what the Lord says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls." When we don't know which road to take, God, in his great compassion, points out the way.

God's compassion meets us in our sin. The reality is, many of us find ourselves in a mess of our own making. We've rejected God, his Word and his ways. Even so, God's compassion meets us in our moments of rebellion.

In Psalm 51:1, after committing some of the worst sins anyone could ever imagine, David prayed: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions."

In Lamentations 3:22, we read, "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail." When spiritually speaking we are at our absolute low. When our head is sunk down and we are covered in shame and regret, even then, God's heart is full of compassion toward us. Our English word compassion is actually a compound Latin word. It comes from *passion* which means "suffer," and *com* means "with." God's great compassion compelled him not only to suffer with us, but to actually come and suffer for us. To die in our place on the cross. He could have made us pay the price for our sins. He is so loving, so kind, so good, so compassionate, that he chose to suffer in our place so we could be set free.

God's compassion not only comes to us, but through us. Yes, God's compassion comes to us in our moments of greatest need. And having been encouraged and transformed by his compassion, God uses us to meet others in their moments of vulnerability: 2 Corinthians 1:3 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."