



## river west church

The Darkest Hour is Just Before Dawn

Judges 21:25

Pastor Guy Gray

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*“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”*

### **Setting the Stage for Ruth**

Next Sunday we will begin a new sermon series in the Book of Ruth. The Book of Ruth has been called the most beautiful short story ever written. That's no exaggeration! It's only four chapters long, so it is indeed a very short story. And yes, it's incredibly beautiful. But more than that, it's powerful!

This story has the power to move your heart, build your faith, give you hope, shape your life, and most of all – point you to Jesus. But for this to happen, you will have to open your heart to the story.

This is the way it works. In order for you get the power of the story, you will have to truly enter into the story. That means you'll need to get to know the characters. You need to feel their pain, struggles, fears, and sorrows, as well as their faith, hope, love, and joy. You'll find all of this and more in the pages of Ruth.

But the point of Ruth isn't just to tell a beautiful story. The point is to reveal the truth about our lives in a broken world. The point is to open our eyes and our hearts to the reality of God and the promise of the Gospel. That's when we meet the true power of the Book of Ruth.

### **“In those days...”**

Our text this morning comes from the last verse of the Book of Judges. That's the verse just before the Book of Ruth. This verse sets the stage for our study giving us the historical setting for the Book of Ruth. That's really important. It reminds us that the Bible is about things that happened in history. Actually, it's not just about random things that happened in history, it's about God's perfect plan of salvation unfolding through the history of Israel.

There is a time and place for the events of the Book of Ruth. These things took place in the days of the Judges (Ruth 1:1). This was a period some 1300 years before the birth of Christ. This is the time after the Israelites came out of slavery in Egypt and before David was king of Israel. It was in “those days” that this story took place.

Behind every line in the Book of Ruth is the reality that God is at work in our world. He is at work in history – that's the big picture, the master story of salvation through Christ. But He's also at work in each of our lives – that's the personal picture, the individual stories of how God is working even in the toughest moments of our lives.

### **“There was no king. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”**

Dark days set the stage for the Book of Ruth. You'll find those days described in the Book of Judges. In fact, these were the darkest days in the history of Israel. The Book of Judges is filled with violence, apostate religion, unchecked lawlessness, and perversion. It was a complete mess. Behind it all stood one overriding value - the supremacy of individual choice: everyone did what was right in his own eyes. There was no higher guiding principle than individual outlook, individual

preference, or individual impulse. The result was a sort of hell on earth where the lowest instincts of human nature were on full display. These were the darkest of days.

So where was God in all this? What about His promises? What would become of Israel and the hope of salvation for the world? The answer comes in history as God intervenes to establish a king and a kingdom. This is the unfolding drama of redemption in the Old Testament. Soon to come is King David and the Kingdom of Israel. But David was an imperfect king and so was his kingdom. So God promised to provide another king – a perfect king – Jesus Christ his own son who would establish salvation and the perfect kingdom of God forever!

### **The Darkest Hour is Just Before Dawn**

The story of Ruth tells us about the line of David, king of Israel. Ruth gives us a key piece in the larger story of Jesus Christ and God's perfect plan of salvation. But the beauty of the Book of Ruth is how it does this by entering into the simple, hurting, yet faith filled lives of ordinary people – Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz.

At the point of greatest darkness – that's when we find God at work. Believe it. That is the message of Ruth. At the point of greatest chaos and upheaval in society, God is still at work. At the point of greatest personal pain and loss, God is still at work. Believe it. Let's believe it together. Let's live in this kind of faith, hope, and love. That's why God gave us the Book of Ruth!