

Israel or Bust

(Ruth 1:1 - 22)

(preached 10/15/14; Pine Grove BC Wed PM)

Introduction

While we were in California, we lived in the city of Santa Clarita.

It is a nice community, and it is interestingly the site where many TV shows are filmed.

While we were there, we were able to see a number of sets where shows like CSI and NCIS were shot.

What is incredible about this filming is all the people who work behind the scenes just to make an hour long episode.

They shut our whole street down one day to shoot a scene for a show that was probably only 30 seconds long.

An entire day of filming one scene that was only a small part of the show.

There were numerous trucks, props, lights and many workers to shoot just one simple scene.

It was a real eye opener to me.

I just figures you needed a camera man and a few actors to make a show, but that is not the case at all.

The truth is that it takes hundreds of people working behind the scenes just to pull off a single show on TV.

Yet, we never see those people when the show comes on.

We simply see the finished product.

The same is true in our world too.

Often times we get caught up with only what we are seeing in the world, but never consider what God is accomplishing in the world behind the scenes.

And there is no better place to see this than the book of Ruth.

You can be finding your way there now.

Ruth is near the front of the OT, right after the book of Judges.

And the book of Ruth is a great reminder that God is always at work even in the darkest times.

His plans are accomplished when everything is falling apart.

Now, I just want to take a minute to set up the book of Ruth for you.

And this really begins in the last chapter of the book of Judges.

So flip back over on page to the last verse in the book of Judges.

Judges 21:25 reads...

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

That is the recipe for national disaster.

Societies collapse when that is practiced.

We people follow their own rules, sin abounds.

And nations and people suffer.

We are the citizens of a nation pretty much governed by that principle.

That's why public opinion polls are poison.

When a country chooses the way of how people want to be ruled and allow citizens to design their own laws...

The moral direction of the nations goes south.

Because the direction of the human heart is evil.

IF given a choice, the unredeemed heart will choose sin.

And Israel at this point in history was a dark place.

IF you read the book of Judges, you will find the moral decay of Israel.

You will find a people who are consistently disobedient to God.

Their land is under judgment and though the people do repent at times, they are quick to fall back into sin.

To catch you up to speed to the Bible at this point in the OT, I want to offer a short summary just to get your minds in gear.

In the book of Genesis, God called Abraham to be the father of a nation.

The nation was Israel, and the rest of the book of Genesis is simply a summary of this young nation.

And its early leaders, - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

Genesis ends with a small number of Israelites, around 70 preparing to enter Egypt.

As exodus begins, these 70 people explode in population while in slavery in Egypt to over 2 million people.

They have become the great nation that God had promised to Abraham.

And the story of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy is the story of this nation escaping Egypt through the leadership of Moses...

And being led to land that God has promised to give them, the land that somewhat resembles the nation that we now know as Israel.

And Joshua, the successor to Moses leads them into the promised land in the book of Joshua.

That is pretty much a summary of the Bible from Genesis 12 until the book of Judges.

If you want to read that yourself, read Joshua 24.

And you will see that up until the beginning of the book of Judges, the people of Israel were, for the most part an obedient people.

However, when Joshua dies in Judges chapter 2, Israel immediately begins to worship false gods.

And so the cycle of sin and disobedience began in Israel and it was a very dark time for the nation.

Rebellion and sin were very common in that day,
and there was not much good news.

The same is true in our day and even in our lives,
God is at work behind the scenes at all times.

On dark days like 9/11 or the Columbine school
shootings, God is at work.

How many souls came to know the Lord in the
aftermath of such tragedy?

The truth is we may never know, but I assure that
God was at work.

Even in the dark days of those tragedies, God's
plans were accomplished.

Even in the dark moral days of our world today,
where sin and rebellion are a way of life.

Where abortion is common.

Where murder is common.

Where theft is common.

Against that dark background of our world, God is
working to bring people to faith in Him.

Furthermore, the amazing and encouraging truth of
the book of Ruth is that God works through
ordinary people.

You may think that you are far removed from the plans of God in the middle of SC.

That God is working through presidents, kings and world rulers...

That your life is way down on the list, but that is certainly not God's pattern.

In many ways, that is the sadness of places like Hollywood and the corporate world,...

There is a race to make a name for yourself, but the truth is that God works through no-names.

He is not looking for famous people, he is looking for faithful people.

He is not looking for the high and mighty star, he is looking for the humble servant.

And that is certainly the case with Ruth.

If you look at the lineage of Jesus in Matthew chapter 1, you will see that Jesus' family tree is dominated by Jewish men.

Yet in the record of Jesus's ancestry, only 5 women are mentioned by name.

Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary, who was Jesus' mother.

Of those five, only two were of noble character.

One had an immoral relationship with her father, one was a prostitute and one was in an adulterous affair with David.

Only Mary in the NT, and Ruth in the OT were not marred by some scandal.

Yet, all these women contributed to the eventual birth of our Savior.

And each of their names survive to this day as a testimony to God's faithfulness to use ordinary people,...

Both men and women to bring forth the King of kings.

And so before us the next few weeks is the story of Ruth.

There are four chapters in this book that I plan to cover in the next four weeks...

And this a really an easy book to outline....

Chapter 1 is the story of Ruth's Ruin.

Chapter 2 is the story of Ruth's Reaping

Chapter 3 is the story of Ruth's Romance.

Chapter 4 is the story of Ruth's Redemption.

Tonight, we are going to look at Ruth's ruin in chapter 1 in 3 scenes.

We are going to examine these 22 verses through the eyes of Ruth tonight...

We will see her Family in verses 1-5...

Then we will see her Future in verses 6-13

Finally, we will see her Faith in verse 14-22....

So, let's begin in chapter 1...

Verses 1 and 2 as we meet....

I. Ruth's Family (v1-5)

I Now it came about in the days when the judges ^[a]governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab^[b] with his wife and his two sons. 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, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there.

This is the background for the story of Ruth, and you must notice a few features...

First, like we said this occurred during the time of the judges where Israel walked in disobedience.

And you can't help but notice that disobedience led to famine.

Food was short even in the town of Bethlehem, which means house of bread.

And Elimelech decided to leave Israel in search of food.

People are divided over Elimelech's actions.

Some see it as a noble act to uproot and move in search of food.

Others see it as a huge mistake.

First, you have to understand that Moab was a place that God had cursed...

In Deut. 23, listen to what the LORD said about Moab...

³No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord, ⁴because they did not meet you with ^[b]food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of ^[c]Mesopotamia, to curse you

Furthermore, Moab had been oppressing Israel for 18 years according to Judges chapter 3.

Moabites were also worshippers of the false god Chemosh and were known for their practice of sacrificing children to him.

In other words, this is not the best place to take your family on a summer vacation.

Yet, Elimelech whose name means God is King sought to live in a land where God wasn't king.

Which brings up an interesting question for all of us?

What price do we pay for comfort?

A famine was not necessarily a death sentence for his family.

Yes, a famine would have required sacrifice for the family but it doesn't always equal starvation.

But was it worth it to relocate to a godless country to provide a better lifestyle for your family?

Would you move to Las Vegas or New Orleans or New York City to give your family a better lifestyle?

Or would exposing your family to these sinful places be too high a price to pay?

Now, obviously, sin is everywhere, but the question is what do we value the most?

Is the new higher paying job worth it even it means more time away from home?

Elimelech counted the cost and took his wife and two sons to Moab.

Unfortunately, it came at a very high price.

Verse 3....

³ Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons.

Though we have no way of knowing if his death was the result of moving to Moab...

It is difficult to ignore the connection since the next verse after the move says that Elimelech died.

But Elimelech was not the only one who paid a high price for coming to Moab.

Verses 4 and 5...

⁴ They took for themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years. ⁵ Then ^[c]both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.

The land of Moab was very cruel to Naomi.

She came with her husband and two sons, but now had lost all of them.

In a strange twist of fate, Elimelech had come to Moab to save his family from the certain death of famine...

Yet, everyone died but his wife.

That is the price of comfort when one seeks comfort away from the presence of the Lord.

So, here we meet Ruth, whose name means “friendship” for the first time.

At this point, we also meet her family, which now consists of three widows.

And what have we learned in just 5 verse of meeting Ruth’s family...

1) Major family decisions must always honor the Lord first.

What is the reason behind most major moves for a family?

Better job.

Who would ever relocate a family in order to honor the Lord more?

Missionaries.

But I would even suggest that a solid local church is more important to your family’s well-being than a solid job.

We know a family who refused to take a job because they could not find a bible-believing church in that area.

2) Our choices have consequences.

The decision to relocate to Moab came at a price.

And so does every decision that we make every day.

God takes disobedience seriously, and so should we.

Now, let's look at....

II. Ruth's Future (6-14)

Verse 6..

⁶ Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the Lord had visited His people in giving them food. ⁷ So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. ⁸ And 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. ⁹ May the Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

Word reaches Naomi and in the spirit of the prodigal son of Jesus parable...

She comes to her senses and decides to return to Israel.

This is a good decision on Naomi's part.

But it is painful decision for these 3 women.

So painful that the daughters-in-law decide to return with Naomi in verse 7.

But Naomi puts a stop to that in verse 8 and urges the girls to stay in Moab.

She tells them to return to their mother's homes, who would provide care...

And the love between these women was evident as they embraced and wept over the thought of having to part company.

And in verse 10, they insist on going with Naomi...

¹⁰ And they said to her, "No, but we will surely return with you to your people."

However, Naomi refuses their request in verses 11 - 13....

¹¹ But Naomi said, "Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? ¹² Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, ¹³ would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is ^[d]harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me."

Naomi had no more sons to offer to Orpah and Ruth, so their future would be bleak in Israel.

One widow's mouth to feed would be hard, but to feed the mouths of 3 widows would be near impossible.

And beyond that, Naomi feels that she is under a curse from the Lord in verse 13.

And at this point Naomi's future is in question.

Before her lies two choices...

Head back to Moab and her family or go to Israel with Naomi.

What do we learn here?

First, don't be afraid to pack it up and head home.

Naomi had seen the horror that Moab had provided for her family.

Israel in famine would have been better than Moab with plenty.

But now that the famine was over, there is no question on whether she should return or not.

Second, there is a great attraction to a righteous woman.

Even though Naomi was in a foreign land with foreign gods, her love of the true God was evident to her daughters-in-law.

There was just something about her that drew Orpah and Ruth to her.

Ladies, a life that demonstrates your love for the Lord is a great testimony to the world.

Do you people say about you...

There is just something about her that makes me want to be around her.

So, now that we have seen Ruth's family and Ruth's future, lets close in verses 14-22 with....

III. Ruth's Faith (14-22)

One of the great questions in the world is who has true faith.

Pastors will use phrases like,...

“If you really believe, you are saved..”

“If you have truly repented, you are now a Christian.”

Well, what does that mean?

If you really, really believe are you more saved?

If you really, really repent are you more of a Christian?

It can get really confusing at times.

And people are often left with more questions than answers about true salvation when those things are said.

Personally, I think Ruth 1:14 is one of the best verses that shows true belief and repentance in the entire Bible.

¹⁴ And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

Have you ever seen a person walk the aisle, make a profession of faith in Christ, and even get baptized but never see them again?

What do we make of people like this?

Are they saved?

Were they ever saved?

Well, I think you find a perfect example of these people in the person of Orpah.

Notice this about her...

Her emotions were stirred, but not to the point where she wanted to leave Moab.

Two, she even walked a little way toward Israel, but not far enough to ever leave Moab.

Three, she even kissed Naomi but that was her last display of affection.

And there are folks who get emotional in church, but emotion alone doesn't mean they have repented.

There are folks who will even follow the church for a while but eventually they turn back.

They are people who will even display some love for the Lord but it will be short lived.

On the other hand, you see the true faith and repentance of Ruth.

And notice in the beginning that Ruth is just like Orpah.

She starts toward Israel.

She is emotional.

She is affectionate toward Naomi.

But there is one clear difference.

She continues in her faith and repentance, while Orpah goes back.

Look at verses 15-18...

¹⁵ Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law."¹⁶ But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back 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.¹⁷ Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me."¹⁸ When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she ^[e]said no more to her.

Bottom line....

True faith is shown to be true faith by its actions.

Orpah turned back to her old way of life.

Ruth continued to turn away from that old way of life in Moab.

True faith cannot be turned back.

Naomi tells Ruth to go back to Maob for the third time in verse 15.

But Ruth refuses to turn back.

That's why you can't talk someone out of their faith.

A person with true faith will continue on despite the worst opposition.

You can't beat off a true believer with a stick.

Like a moth to the flame, they can't help but demonstrate their true faith.

Which gets back to the point of not having to beg real Christians to act like Christians.

Someone with real faith can't help but be obedient.

On the other hand, a person without real faith leaves with just the slightest encouragement.

Let someone say the wrong thing to them at church and they are gone.

Let the slightest trial come their way and they have had enough.

True faith will press on.

False faith can be pushed over.

Ruth shows that her faith is real by her actions and her words...

Verses 16 -17 are some of the most beautiful verses in the Bible...

And demonstrate Ruth's commitment to Naomi and to Naomi's God.

16 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back 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. 17 Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me."

And with that, Naomi doesn't say another word, according to verse 18.

And with that, Orpah disappears from the pages of Scripture forever.

She is never mentioned in the Bible again, while Ruth eventually has a book of the Bible named after her.

Eventually, Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem..

Verse 19..

¹⁹ So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and ^[f]the women said, “Is this Naomi?”

The trip to Moab had lasted at least ten years, but Naomi had aged 40 years from it.

The grief of losing a husband and two sons was probably evident just from her physical appearance.

And Naomi felt the change too, by requesting a new name.

Verse 20...

²⁰ She said to them, “Do not call me ^[g]Naomi; call me ^[h]Mara, for ^[i]the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. ²¹ I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and ^[j]the Almighty has afflicted me?”

The name Naomi meant “pleasant” and that is how she had left Bethlehem,...

Yet her return was very bitter.

And I don't think this is a bitterness against God.

I actually believe that Naomi was that name as a reminder of the consequences of leaving Bethlehem.

It would seem most likely that many of Naomi's friends would have been jealous when she left little old Bethlehem...

You know how that works...

I'm sure some will filled with bitterness at their own husbands when she left...

There was a famine and here was Naomi's husband being that great entrepreneur and taking his family in search of food.

And I'm sure they thought, “There's goes Naomi, having a chance to see the world.”

“No more boring Bethlehem for her.”

And now that she has returned, they don't see jet-setting Naomi with lots of fun experiences to share.

They find a woman who has been aged by the cruelty of the world that she had experienced.

Every time the ladies in town called for her, they would be reminded that the grass on the other side of the fence can actually be poisonous.

Sometimes, the ones who leave come back the worse for it.

Naomi was a pleasant neighbor, but now she was made bitter by the world.

However, it was not as bad as it could have been.

Look at verse 22....

22 So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

These two ladies had just travelled 75 miles to Moab.

And God had brought them back at the perfect time, even though

Now, what can we say about this Bethlehem reunion?

1) Our choices affect us physically and mentally.

Naomi had left for Moab a happy pleasant lady.

She returned a changed woman, both physically and mentally.

2) Changing our scenery sometimes changes us for the worse.

We often think that a fresh start is just what the doctor ordered.

But sometimes that fresh start makes us rotten.

Naomi went to Moab hoping for food, but it cost her a husband and two sons.

3) Things are never as bad as we think.

Naomi is so blinded by her bitterness that she can't see the blessings that she now has.

However, he is surrounded by her friends in Bethelhem.

She has a faithful, kind daughter-in-law.

And the Lord has provided relief from the famine.

We see God's blessings by looking up and not down.

Conclusion

However, those are not the last blessings to come
Naomi and Ruth's way.

But we will have to wait to next week to see those
start to take place.

Let's pray.