

The Rock: 12-05-2021**Advent: The Road to Bethlehem**

First reading: Isaiah 9:1-7

INTRODUCE THE VIDEO: This week we are looking at Ruth, lets listen to her response to a question that was asked to her.

Title: The road of faith

Scripture: Ruth 1:16-22 (black bible Pg. 208)

Theme:

The undying love of God is seen in His sovereign and providential care of his people.

Introduction:

Last week we began our journey with Abram and Sarai. Two people who became strangers in a strange land -leaving all that they knew for what was promised to them by God.

In much the same way, Ruth made a decision based upon what she saw in her mother-in-law, that just drew her to Naomi's God.

Naomi's life with her also drew her to make a confession of faith in Yahweh. Something we will look at, but it is worth knowing that she is only one of two women recorded in all of the Old Testament to come to genuine saving faith in Him.

This story of Ruth is such a beautiful one. Yes, it is a story of famine, fear, loss, life, death, return, restoration, provision and ultimately, salvation.

Honestly, Ruth is one of my favorite books in the entire Old Testament, not just because she and Naomi stand out as some of the faithful, but because it points so clearly to the sovereignty and providential care that God has for His people.

We see His protection and provision. We see, in Ruth His desire that all nations be brought to salvation, and in this man Boaz, we see a picture of our King: Jesus, that great kinsman redeemer.

The Story:

Ruth's story begins actually before we even are introduced to her, and I think it's important enough for us to visit.

-Ruth 1:1-2 (ESV)

"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. 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. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there."

We are given the time period when these events took place; "in the days when the judges ruled."

It was not a good time for Israel, as they struggled with their neighbors, Moab being one of those neighbors, and often times were seen as the enemy.

Sometime between 1200-1020 BC during the time of the judges, names Ehud and Jephthah would be when we could place this story.

We're told there's a famine in the land, and that they are from of all places, Bethlehem: The city of Bread. Known for its abundance of wheat and barley and other grains.

Ironic that in the city of bread, there was no bread to eat, and it seems there was no hope of relief. At least that's how Elimelech saw it.

So he packed up and headed to Moab, a place of foreign gods, pagan rituals, and bad people. Enemies of God and His people. This whole little book is shaping up to be a great story.

But then again, maybe not. Because questions of obedience or perhaps disobedience come up. Should Elimelech - whose name means "God is my king" - trust his king through this famine.

Was it right for him to take his family and live amongst a people God had said at one point, stay away from them and their practices?

It's easy to ask these questions and then talk about God's judgement, because after an unidentified amount of time in Moab, Elimelech dies. Leaving Naomi, a widow.

Now under the care of her two sons, they make a fateful decision which will tie them to Moab when they take wives for themselves.

-Ruth 1:3-5 (ESV)

"But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that

the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.”

It seems that if it wasn't for bad luck, Naomi would have no luck at all. A bad country song, I know, but it fits.

I think it's important to see all these things before we get to the question of Ruth and why she decided as she did.

Because on the outside looking in, this family, Elimelech specifically, have made one bad decision after another. Leading to the very real question of: “Did this man trust God to care for his family?”

Because we can learn a lot ourselves, as well as a lot about ourselves this Christmas season, if we ask that question about ourselves.

It is easy and good at times to look at these things in the life choices of others, and pass judgement. It is much harder for us to reflect on them ourselves, for ourselves.

How am I doing in my faith walk? Am I trusting God to lead, guide, and provide for me and my family? Am I doing all I am called to as an active member in that plan, and for my family?

Men especially, as you are called to lead, are you trusting Him? Because on

the surface, these first five verses are a lesson on how to go wrong in just about every way.

Yet, here is the beauty of this book and this woman Ruth, we find that this is not the end of the story at all. It never is when God is involved.

His sovereign care ALWAYS takes the messes we make and uses them for His glory and good:

-Romans 8:27-28 (ESV)

"And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

Remember, nothing happens outside of God's will, but not everything that does happen is God's will.

So, we see what is left of this family being called according to His purposes. They would be carried along, in part by the belief of a foreigner who saw the face and faith of God in her mother-in-law.

Never think that when we blow it, and just make a mess of everything that

somehow God washes His hands of us in irritation. He does not!

We are the ones who do that. Quick to pass judgement, quick to place blame, quick to condemn even ourselves and then become very slow to forgive and restore.

God however, is perfect in His judgement and His mercy. He always seeks to restore and does so as quickly as we let Him.

He always leaves the door open and the porch light on for the prodigals to find their way home. That is never in doubt.

The question always for us is: When are we going to realize that we are wrong to be living outside of God's will, and come home to Him?

Naomi does just that after at least a decade in Moab, and gives her daughters-in-law an out. It's here that the power of Ruth's decision and her faith is seen, it's in what Naomi says to Orpah and Ruth:

-Ruth 1:8-13 (ESV)

"But 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. The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of

her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me."

"If I should say I have hope..."

Naomi is saying: "I am a woman with no husband, and no sons to care for me. No heir to pass things onto." -Very similar to Abram and Sarai, isn't it?

They had no children in their old age, and Naomi has lost both of her sons, in a foreign land, and now she wants to go back home to Bethlehem to salvage what little she can.

Robert Hubbard says this:

"If women are saved through child-birth (1 Tim. 2:15), Naomi is lost. With Sarah,

Hannah, and Elizabeth, she suffers the painful shame of childlessness...So the narrator has sketched the gloomy, hopeless setting for his tale. Driven from her homeland by famine, cruelly robbed of loved ones by death, a lonely old widow sits abandoned in a foreign land. How reminiscent is that sad figure of poor Job. Worse yet, one of Israel's family unit's totters on the verge of extinction."

-NICOT. Pg. 97

Right on the edge of our seats, to me anyway, we wonder: Where is God in all of this? I'll tell you where -right in the middle of it.

God is the God of hope. His providential care has come to her in the most unexpected of packages, and her name is Ruth, and she has decided that she will not leave her Mother-in-law.

-Ruth 1:14 (ESV)

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

Why? Well as she said in the video, LOVE. In the life, the caring, the suffering even, and in the face of Naomi, Ruth saw God in action.

A woman whose life has been one of loss and trial and struggle. One where she could have lost faith in God, given up on it all, and simply stopped believing.

Afterall, if we were to ask the question that is often asked today: "Look at your life -what has your God done for you? You've lost everything, your life is a wreck, why keep believing in a God that allows that to happen?"

-Romans 9:20 (ESV)

"But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?"

Much as with the handling of Pharaoh's heart to accomplish His purposes - although one does need to read and remember that Pharaoh was given no less than ten chances by God to repent and receive mercy instead of judgement.

Naomi understood some things, I suspect, one of them was repentance and mercy -she knew she would find help in her God through her people.

She would be returning from this exile with the greatest gift of God, found in her daughter-in-law, Ruth. But she doesn't quite see it all just yet, as she pushes one more time to get Ruth to stay in Moab:

-Ruth 1:15 (ESV)

"And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

Look at Orpah, she has done the right thing! Peer pressure is a wonderful thing sometimes, but it isn't going to work here.

Ruth's response is one of the most beautiful in all the Bible -and while she knows Orpah did the safe and sensible thing, the smart thing, it also wasn't the right thing!

Ruth did the extraordinary and unexpected. She took the risk of stepping out in faith to go where there was even less hope, less potential and to a place where she would be seen as an outsider.

-Ruth 1:16-19a (ESV)

"But 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. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no

more. So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem..."

Thus, another journey of faith on the road to Bethlehem, where neither of these ladies knew what the next day would hold. But God did, and they trusted Him.

Here we are some x-thousands of years later, looking at these women of faith, especially Ruth.

A woman, a widow, a Moabite, an immigrant and foreigner, through whom the hand of God and His sovereign plan would move forward. Jumping forward to the end of the book, where Ruth gives birth to Naomi's heir and redeemer:

-Ruth 4:17-22 (ESV)

"And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David."

Another list of names, a marker of God's plan and goodness that once again pulls forward on history's timeline all the way

to that man, Matthew once again, and his list.

For good and various reasons, Matthew included five women in this genealogy. It's essential for us that we don't miss this! Why? Because women were not ever included, say nothing of five!

A quick look at Luke's genealogy and you will find this to be true. Luke 3:23-38, and I leave that for you to look and see for yourself.

But Matthew in verse 5-6 includes 2! Rahab, Boaz's mom, is a story all in itself. One I suspect framed out Boaz's worldview and perspective on women. Rahab, a foreigner herself of questionable character.

And Ruth, Boaz's wife, whose son's name was Obed, whose sons name was Jesse, a shepherd from the town of Bethlehem. Whose youngest son's name was David, the shepherd king we will learn about in a couple weeks.

You see, the great-grandmother of the greatest King in Israel, through whom the true and greatest King: Jesus would be born. The King of Kings, come into the world to fulfill the calling of all the people of Israel. Our first / advent

reading this morning speaks of that promise:

-Isaiah 9:1-2 (ESV)

"But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone..."

Why?

-Isaiah 9:6-7 (ESV)

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this."

Ruth helps us to move one step closer on that road to Bethlehem, by faith she

leaves her people, her country, all she knew, for a place of promise.

In this we see the big promise of God that He is calling people from every nation, tribe and language. Making a people all His own.

Pointing us, as Ruth's story does to Jesus -the King, the savior, and God with us.