

## NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- Sunday 11th August 2024 am

TITLE: "Trusting God in the dark place" TEXT: Ruth 1

SERIES: "There is a redeemer Pt 1

Scripture references from the ESV

**Ruth 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup> These took Moabite wives; the name of one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, <sup>5</sup> and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. <sup>6</sup> Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food. <sup>7</sup> So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." <sup>11</sup> 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? <sup>12</sup> 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, <sup>13</sup> 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." <sup>14</sup> Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. <sup>15</sup> And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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." <sup>18</sup> And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more. <sup>19</sup> So 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?" <sup>20</sup> She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi;<sup>[a]</sup> call me Mara,<sup>[b]</sup> for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. <sup>21</sup> I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back

empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

<sup>22</sup> So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

The book of Ruth records a narrative of Naomi's family seeking asylum in Moab, and then Ruth, in turn, seeking asylum in Israel. The Bible is always relevant! However, the main theme of the story is how God is at work to bring order out of chaos, even when that chaos is of our own making, because of stupid decisions we have taken.

Ruth's story is set in the time of the judges (v1 above) – a dark and chaotic time in Israel's history. **In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.** (Judges 21:25). With no king to lead the people in following God's commands, the people turned away from the Lord and in response the Lord sent calamity into their lives, usually in the form of enemies attacking them. Then the people would cry out to God to save them, and God would raise up a judge to deliver them. It was an ongoing cycle that continued for 400 years.

Yet the book ends with a promise of the coming of King David, great grandson to Boaz (who plays a central part in this narrative). **Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed,** <sup>22</sup> **Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.** (4:21-2). Ruth serves to show us how God was raising up a man who would bring order to the nation, after such troubled times.

We also see that God brings order into the life of one family who had gone in search of something they thought was better, but who actually landed up in a place of chaos and darkness.

- Despite the unwise decision to go into Moab, God graciously intervened to bring about his good for them as a family, his good for the nation of Israel, his good for an outsider to God's people and his good for us today.

**It is through God's sovereign actions at this time that we have a Saviour.**

**Through this family, God brought the Lord Jesus Christ into the world  
and he reversed the ultimate chaos and darkness of our sin.**

When we are in our own land of Moab (a place where we find everything crumbling around us), we can look in faith to God and know that: **for those who love God all**

things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.  
(Romans 8:28).

### **The book of Ruth is relevant to us because of Jesus**

How does this unwise decision work out for Naomi, and what prompts her to return?

1) **An unwise decision (v1).** The Moabites worshipped a false God who demanded human sacrifices, and they had often been bitter enemies of the people of God. At this time, however, they were not enemies, and in order to escape potential death because of the famine, Elimelech makes the decision to temporarily sojourn in Moab.

No comment is made about whether this was the right thing to do. Often, when things go wrong, we are quick to conclude that we have made a wrong decision and God is punishing us for it. Scripture does not allow us to make such simplistic judgements.

- Job was a righteous man who experienced far worse than Elimelech and his family.
- Jesus' disciples found themselves in the middle of a violent storm because they obeyed Jesus

### **Sometimes we can faithfully follow God and end up in a storm.**

However, our decisions always have consequences, and we can, and often do, make unwise ones, as it would appear Elimelech did. There is no indication that he sought the Lord, and his decision looks questionable because:

- He took his family away from the place where God was worshipped, and into a pagan land
- He seemed more concerned for his family's physical welfare than for their spiritual welfare
- He put his sons in a place where they had to marry wives from outside God's covenant people
- He sought to evade death but discovered he could not, and thus left Naomi widowed and childless in a foreign land with no support from God's people.

Though his name means God is my King, he seems to be like the rest of the nation, doing what was right in his own eyes.

We are to seek to make wise decisions, though that does not mean we will always escape trouble. Jesus is the ultimate example of this – the wisdom of God resulted in Jesus suffering death on the cross. We are to pray and seek God’s wisdom in the decisions we make. **If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.** (James 1:5)

**We need God’s wisdom to make wise decisions and this he gives us gladly**

If Elimelech had sought God, then God would have shown him the truth about the Moabites through his word, and perhaps he would have stayed where he was, as others in Bethlehem did.

- We need to seek God’s wisdom in his word and be willing to obey him

In addition, we ought to seek the wisdom of godly people around us. Proverbs 13:20 tells us: **Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.** This is so relevant for us today. The people we spend time with (whether online or in person) will either lead us to make wise decisions that draw us to the Lord and his will or unwise decisions that take us further from him and lead us to our own Moab.

The story of Ruth shows us that God is still able to accomplish his purposes even when we make unwise decisions, but that does not mean we should not seek to avoid them. We may also suffer from the unwise decisions of others, or just as a result of living in a fallen world but:

**There is hope when we find ourselves in a place of chaos and darkness**

**2) An obvious return (v6).** Naomi’s situation was very serious. With the death of her husband and sons, she faced extreme poverty and possibly being enslaved. To stay in Moab was too dangerous, and returning was the obvious decision to make.

However, the primary reason for returning was that she had heard that God had acted on behalf of this people, and her return was a response to that. The word return is used 12 times in **vv6-22**. It not only means a return to a physical place, but, more significantly, in the Bible it is also used to describe a person repenting of their sin and turning back to God. In heading back to the Promised Land, Naomi is not just heading back to her people.

**She is heading back to her God.**

**She wanted to return to where God was at work.**

There is a way back to the Lord. Naomi did not have to stay in Moab and we do not need to stay in whatever Moab we find ourselves in, whether we are there through our own stupid choices or for other reasons. We CAN return to the Lord and God works by his grace to restore us.

**God is a God who welcomes us back when we turn to him in repentance and faith**

How does Naomi help us to see the way to cope in the chaos and darkness while we wait for God to bring order?

**3. With anguished faith, Naomi trusts God.** Naomi speaks of her anguish but also demonstrates her trust in God. We can demonstrate the same reasons to trust God in our chaos and darkness.

**a) We can trust in God's presence.** Naomi had spent 10 years away from God's people and God's land, but it is clear

**She was never away from God's presence**

Although this is apparently just the narrative of family life – moving somewhere new, children getting married and then the human misery of poverty and death- yet we see that

**Behind the scenes of ordinary human life is the living God**

God may appear to have been absent, but he has been there all along, as Naomi recognises (v13, 20-21). These anguished statements are full of hurt and anger but Naomi sees God's hand in her tragedy and therefore knows that God must have been with her all the time, even though she was away from his land and his people.

When we are in our own chaotic and dark places, we may feel abandoned by God, but we can trust God's word to us:

**I will never leave you nor forsake you. (Hebrews 13:5)**

**b) We can trust in God's care (vv8-18).** The concept of levirate marriage meant that, if a man died without children, his brother would marry the widow and raise a child for his dead brother. It was God's way of protecting a widow, ensuring she would have a child who would care for her and that the man's inheritance remained within the

family. Naomi is showing her daughters-in-law that it is impossible for this to happen in their case. Yet she is not helpless.

Although she is seeking to send the two women back to Moab, (vv8-9), she is praying for them.

**Despite her own anguish at God's hand,  
she still trusts God to care for Ruth and Orpah and she is still praying.**

**Even in the chaos and darkness, faith trusts in God to care and asks God to care.**

You may ask how you can know that God cares but we have an even greater reason to trust the truth of that than Naomi had. We can look back to the cross where Jesus died in agony to secure our salvation from sin.

- **In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10)**
- **He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things (Romans 8:32).**

**If we are struggling to trust that God loves and cares for us, then we need to look again at the cross of Christ.**

c) **We can trust in God's sovereignty (v13,20-21).** In all Naomi's hurt and anger, she acknowledges that God is the one who is ultimately ruling over her life. She does not understand the reason for her suffering and does not know that it will ultimately turn out for her good, and lead to rejoicing. However

**She can trace God's hand in her suffering, while she is still in the midst of it.**

**She met her bitter experience with trust in a sovereign God.**

You might want to question what kind of God would act in this way, but look at the alternative:

- **Would you want to trust in a God who was not watching over you or perhaps was unable, or too busy, to act in your life, and did not care or know what was happening.**

That is not the kind of God we would want when life is bitter. Though we may not understand what he is doing:

- It is better to trust in a God who rules over our decisions, our sorrows and our experiences.

**He rules over them all for your eternal good and his eternal glory**

**d) We can trust in God's power.** (vv20-21) Naomi uses the name for God that speaks of his great power. She calls him **The Almighty – El Shaddai**

When we come to the end of ourselves, when we have made a mess and everything seems to be going wrong, then El Shaddai comes in. Naomi is trusting God to break through. He has afflicted her, but the God who afflicts is also:

**The God who breaks through with the grace needed at just the right time.**

We live in a world that is chaotic and dark, as it was in the days of Ruth. We also have our own personal chaos and darkness. Perhaps decisions we have made, though we sought the Lord over them, have plunged us into bitter circumstances. Perhaps we have taken unwise decisions, driven by our own fleshly desires rather than by God's wisdom, and we are now reaping the consequences. Our world, though it is punctuated by good things, is under a curse and is looking for a redeemer.

The message of this first chapter of Ruth is that we can turn to the Lord in faith:

**Trusting in his presence with us in the darkness**

**Trusting in his loving care for us**

**Trusting in his sovereignty over our lives**

**Trusting in his power to break through in his own perfect time**

- Which aspect of God do you most need to trust in at the moment? Take time to consider this in the light of what is going on in your life.