

Ruth

Week 1 Ruth, Chapter 1

Title: The Hidden Work of God

Introduction:

I have another bad dad joke this week.

"Today, my son asked "Can I have a book mark?" and I burst into tears. 15 years old and he still doesn't know my name is Mike."

The truth is knowing who you are and where you are from is really important.

The book of Ruth opens up during the time of the Judges. A lost people who don't know who they are or are to be. This takes place after the Exodus and Joshua but before Israel had their first king. After Joshua dies the people of God fall into the hands of military political leaders.

It's really important to note. Not everything the Bible reports does the Bible endorse. It's also important to note. God will use even sinful, flawed people and systems to accomplish His will. This is a really bloody season in Hebrew history. It's full of repeated failure, it's disturbing and very violent. As the Hebrew people abandon their God-given mission to bring the ways of God into the surrounding communities, they abandon the ways of God and adopt the ways and values of the surrounding people into them, especially the Canaanites.

Naomi is a victim of all kinds of horrible situations. She leaves her own country with her husband because there is no food. Oppression, violence and famine drive them out. Naomi and her husband try to make a new life in a new land. Her two sons end up marrying two Moabite women. It didn't take long and the suffering followed them again. Before long all the men die in their family. Three widows and Naomi has literally lost all of her biological family. In total desperation for life Naomi decides to return home alone. We pick up the text as Naomi makes a plea to her daughters-in-law to remain in their home country and try to start over. She knows it will be nearly impossible for two poor widowed immigrants to survive in Israel. In all actuality Naomi is most likely trying to save their lives by committing herself to death by starvation.

With this in mind let's go to the text.

Scripture:

Ruth 1:13b-18 ESV

"No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me." Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." 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. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. 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?"

Observation:

- As Naomi returns home "the whole town was stirred."
 - Have you ever felt like all eyes were on you, but not in a good way? You are not alone. The people of the city may have looked on her with pity or even contempt. God saw her too, yet his heart was so different.
- In her greatest time of struggle she asks to change her name to "bitter." She even says it's God's fault that all this has happened. (vs.21)
 - If you have ever felt like God has stripped you of everything, you are not alone. Little does she know, God has already begun the process of rescue even as she feels like rubbish.
 - Even in her bitterness and sorrow and hopelessness, Naomi was still putting her trust in God and pursuing him by returning to her homeland and God's people. While it may seem small, it was enough faith for God to do a great work.
- Ruth, her daughter-in-law that stayed with her, makes an incredible statement.
 - Ruth to Naomi: *"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."*
 - Ruth has cast away her former life and identity. She has committed not only to Naomi but Naomi's God, the very God Naomi feels abandoned by. Sometimes it's the faith of others that help carry us through.
 - It's ironic – as Naomi declares she has come back empty Ruth is standing next to her. What she has is incredible charitable love and faithfulness. She can't see the seeds of God's work already beginning to grow and what He has already given her.

Final Thoughts:

Illustration: A number of years ago one of my best friends went through a terrible divorce. His wife was unfaithful. Her unfaithfulness broke so many things. From their direct family and friends to even their quality of life. It is so painful to feel cast aside or rejected. One night while

on the phone with him I felt led by God to simply say, “She has taken so much from you and destroyed it. However, she can’t take or destroy my love for you. I’m with you.” We both cried as we both could see the places that stood stronger than sin. Covenant friendship.

I want to pause and make a few statements.

- Even when God isn’t working flashy incredible miracles, He is still working.
- Even when you truly are the victim, He is still working.
- Even when you are mad at Him, He is still working.
- Even when you can’t see it yet, He is still working.
- God isn’t done telling your story. He is still working.
- I want you to say this with me out loud. My story isn’t done. God is still working.

Next Steps Cards:

Everyone pull out the next steps cards.

- If you need to make a decision to follow Jesus or rededicate your life, mark it.
- If you need to be baptized mark it.
- If you need to be in a discipleship group mark it.
- If you have a prayer request mark it.

However, Naomi had to open her eyes to see the gift of Ruth. I want to pray that God would open your eyes to what He is beginning to do.

“Father, by your grace help me to be a covenant friend like Ruth and help open my eyes like Naomi needed.”

On your next steps card finish these two prayer sentences.

Father, I commit to be a covenant friend to _____.

Father, open my eyes to see that you have blessed me with _____.

Resources:

The Bible Project: Judges; www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOYy8iCfIJ4

Mara The name Mara means “bitter.” Given her circumstances, Naomi thinks “bitter” is a more fitting name than “pleasant” (see note on v. 2). However, she is never referred to as Mara because—despite her claim—Yahweh did not deal bitterly with her (see 4:14–15)

Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). Faithlife Study Bible (Ru 1:20). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

1:19 The whole town was stirred perhaps with excitement (cf. 1 Sam. 4:5, “resounded”) because of Ruth, but probably in agitation (cf. Isa. 22:2, “tumultuous”) because of Naomi’s arrival without her husband and sons (Ruth 1:1).

Crossway Bibles. (2008). The ESV Study Bible (p. 479). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.