

“The Book of Ruth”
A Virtual Bible Study Series on Facebook Live
Thursday Nights @ 7:00 PM

Session 2: “Patterns of the Lord’s Kindness”
(Ruth 1:6-22)

Introduction and Session 1 Recap

The Book of Ruth is a short, 85-verse narrative found in the tumultuous time of the Judges. Believed to be set towards the end of the book of Judges as the yearning for a central leader, a king for the nation of Israel, is growing strong, the story of an Israelite family takes shape. Elimilech and Naomi, from the tribe of Judah, travel from the town of Bethlehem with their two sons Mahlon and Chilion into Moab to escape a time of famine. Moab, a location outside the “Promised Land”, was a place of disturbing history with the Israelite people – a location that this family would definitely not be “called” to travel to by their God.

In the opening verses of Ruth, we see how the book of Ruth fits into the larger context of the Old Testament – nestled in the time period of the Judges, in the midst of a desire for a monarch for the nation, and pointing towards the arrival of Israel’s greatest king, David, and our Heavenly King, Jesus. An overarching theme we see woven through the pages of Ruth is *hesed*, a loyal love that is demonstrated by Ruth to Naomi, Boaz to Ruth and Naomi, from Jesus to the world, and what Christians are called to share with everyone they encounter.

The story of Ruth reminds us that God is in control of all the circumstances. There are no coincidences, like Ruth eventually landing in the field of Boaz. God also has the flair of using what may seem as insignificant people to do incredible things. God chose two destitute widows, Ruth and Naomi, to change the course of history for the nation of Israel. Redemption plays an important role in the story of Ruth as well, starting with Boaz as the kinsman-redeemer for Naomi and Ruth, but stretching on towards Christ as our ultimate redeemer.

Ruth is a story of transformation. God’s transforming kindness is found in every character, every plot twist, and every underlying motive that God is revealing. Even in the opening verses as Naomi’s family seems to be falling apart around her as her husband and two sons die, God’s transforming kindness starts to take hold in the form of one of her two daughter in laws, Ruth.

Last week, we opened the pages of Ruth seeing that the Promised Land was in famine, a result of the people forsaking the Lord and the punishment that it brought with it. Even a land, Bethlehem, that is translated “house of bread”, was shook by this famine, causing Elimilech, Naomi, and their two sons to travel to Moab to hopefully find food and allow their family to survive. The move to Moab to survive only brought more pain, as first Elimilech dies, then ten years later, both Mahlon and Chilion die, after marrying two women from the land of Moab, Orpah and Ruth. Now, three widows, alone in a foreign land, Moab, Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth, have to make a decision of how to survive. Naomi is facing the bitterness of the Lord’s punishment, but even in the midst, she knows that He is in control.

Session 2: “Patterns of the Lord’s Kindness” (Ruth 1:6-22)

Bitterness is the emotion we left Naomi with last week as she remained in Moab with her two daughter in laws, Orpah and Ruth, after her husband and two sons have died. This is the same emotion that will be mentioned multiple times – three times to be exact – as she travels back to Bethlehem. First, in verse 13, describing her situation in comparison to her daughter in laws situation, “more bitter”. Then two times in verse 20, “Call me Mara (which means “bitter”) for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.” One can understand why this word would be used multiple times by Naomi to describe her situation. Just ten years before, she had everything one could want – a husband, two healthy sons, a home in a fertile land, and dreams for the future. Now, her family was gone, the only connection to the past was two daughter in laws from a foreign land, and her future looked bleak. Yet, in the midst of these bitter circumstances, God was preparing the way for his transforming kindness.

In our focal passage this evening, we will see three patterns of the Lord’s kind dealings with His people...

1. News of the Lord’s aid prompts a return to the Lord. (Ruth 1:6-7)

Naomi “heard” that the Lord had brought aid to His people in the Promised Land. In modern times, this verse may pass over us without a second thought. Email, text, phone call, radio or television message – in today’s society, we can get the good news. Yet, back in the time of Ruth, getting the news that a famine had

ended was a different story. However, “good news” always finds a way to spread. The news was not that the weather had changed, the farming conditions were better, or that crops had started to grow. All may have been true. The message was that the famine had ended! In the midst of God’s punishment, the Lord remembered and showed mercy. The Lord, who commits himself to his undeserving people, now came to their aid.

This news prompted Naomi to return home from Moab. Moab was never her “home”. The land of Judah in the Promised Land was where her heart was – always had been, always would be. Elimilech’s decision to leave their “home” had not been a good one. However, Naomi’s decision to return “home” was just as God intended. It was God’s plan for her to return to Judah, her people, as part of His grander plan to coming to aid to His people – more so than just providing food for the famine. He was putting into place the family line that would birth the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord still comes to aid to his people today. Natural disasters, economic crises, pandemics – the Lord is there for His people. He does not just provide temporary aid. He provides permanent aid in His Son, Jesus Christ. The message of the cross is that there is a way back to God. Just as Naomi returned “home”, we can return “home” to Him.

2. Faith in the Lord promotes faith in the Lord on the part of others.

(Ruth 1:8-18)

Naomi did not return to her “home” alone. Her two daughter-in-laws, Orpah and Ruth, also traveled with her towards Judah. Yet, Naomi realizes that their future (as she sees it) rests in their homeland of Moab. The words “wept”, “kissed”, and “clung to” express the emotional scene as Naomi tries to encourage Orpah and Ruth to return to Moab. The eventual result is that Orpah returns to Moab and her family, while Ruth pledges to stay with Naomi wherever she goes. One might judge each woman for these differing decisions. Instead, let us turn our attention to Naomi and how she handles this situation and the results that come from it.

Naomi was a woman of prayer. In verses 8 and 9, we see that she prays twice, “May the Lord...” as she attempts to persuade her two daughters-in-law to return to Moab. She is putting her faith in the Lord. Naomi firmly believed that the Lord was in control of everything. If not so, what was the point in praying?

Naomi believed that any good thing is a gift of the Lord's kindness. The contents of the prayers in verses 8 and 9 recognized that if they were to have new husbands, that they would be a gift from God. A gift of the Lord's kindness.

Naomi acted unselfishly towards others. In verses 11 through 13, we see the truth character of Naomi. She did not want Orpah and Ruth to sacrifice their future for her. This is what she believed they would be doing if they followed her to Judah. Her thoughts were on their welfare, not hers. Especially since her life would be exceedingly harder being alone.

Naomi had a balanced view of the Lord. Naomi understood that God was in control of all things, and that even the bitterness she felt was from Him. We see this in verse 13. Underlying these words seems to be a recognition that their move to Moab was a mistake, and that the Lord disciplines His people.

Naomi had an attractive faith. If Naomi's faith had not been so attractive, Ruth probably would not have clung to her in verse 14, nor expressed her desire that Naomi's God be her God in verse 16. Her faith promoted Ruth's faith in the Lord. We might think her bitterness might have had the opposite effect, but faith that clings in the face of bitterness is powerful!

1. Ruth's faith was a determined faith! – Three times she was urged to go back, until finally Naomi realized she would not return to Moab.
2. Ruth's faith was a wholehearted faith! – She "clung" to Naomi! This Hebrew word could also be translated "united" or "cleaved" – she become one with her. "Your" became "my" (journey, home, people, God, future)! Orpah return to her people and her gods. Ruth embraced Naomi's GOD!
3. Ruth's faith was serious! – Ruth saw her accountable to Naomi's God. She learned this from Naomi and this was echoed in verse 17. Faith in the Lord often shines at its brightest and most attractive in the reality of bitter trials. This is what Ruth observed and experienced with Naomi, and testified to God. Their fellowship together could provide great stimulus of confidence for future trials.

3. Emptiness from the Lord prepares the way for fullness from the Lord. (Ruth 1:19-22)

Naomi's return to Bethlehem caused a stir. The exclamation of the women indicates the great change and trials that Naomi had faced over the last ten years. Naomi had gone away prosperous and full and come back empty. Yet, Naomi recognized that God was in control of this entire situation. Notice her words, "Call me "Mara", for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me." The Lord had brought her back empty.

Did she say these words bitterly? Some biblical scholars would argue that she did. However, her faith character might speak otherwise. There is a difference between "experiencing bitterness" and "being bitter". Hebrews 12 reminds us that God, in his love for his children, uses hardships to discipline them. He does it for our own good. The discipline is not pleasant, even painful. Nevertheless, later it produces righteousness and peace for those trained in it. This passage also warns against any bitter root that might grow and cause trouble. The key is recognizing the Lord's loving discipline is always an act of grace.

Naomi's uses of the title "Almighty" reveals this state of grace. Often used in Genesis when talking about blessings, little did Naomi realize was that God was preparing her (and the nation of Israel), despite the emptiness that she now felt, for the fullness of His blessing. A small indication of this blessing was the hint that they returned just at the right time – the time of the "barley harvest". Not only was the famine ending, but the "famine" for Naomi's family and the "famine" for the nation of Israel was ending as well. Emptiness was about to be replaced with fullness.

Just think about Naomi's journey back to Bethlehem and the patterns that God used for a second...

- News of God's aid prompts a return "home" to the Lord.
- Placing faith in the Lord promoted faith in the Lord for Ruth (others).
- Emptiness from the Lord prepared the way for fullness from Him.

How many of our "journeys" could reflect these same patterns?

Follow Up Questions...

- 1. How does the description of God coming to aid of His people help us to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ? Our role in this world?**
- 2. What are we tempted to think about God in difficult times? How can we train our minds to think as Naomi thought in the midst of her bitter trials?**
- 3. Naomi experienced some benefits from her times of trial. What are some of the benefits that you have experienced during times of trial?**
- 4. How can we see a feeling of “emptiness” as an opportunity for “fullness” in Christ?**

Session 3: “An Example of Conversion” (Ruth 1:14-18)

Thursday, September 23 7:00 PM

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