

## Ruth 1:1-5: The Redemptive Romance Begins with the Need for Redemption

Intro: I would argue that there is no book quite as beautiful as the book of Ruth. One of only two books in the canon named after women, this wonderful little story gives us an incredibly Gospel-centered look into the plan and working of God during tumultuous times of a leaderless Israel. In the midst of immensely difficult times, when all hope seems to be lost, we see that God is always there working out His plan of redemption and blessing for His people.

There are many themes that come across broadly in this short narrative. There is the issue of God's Providence, faithfully watching over and providing for His people even when they have been unfaithful to Him. There is the faithful love of Ruth for Naomi, pressed into service and sacrifice on behalf of her mother-in-law. There is the theme of the Gentile woman being brought into the covenant people of Israel, showing God's desire and purpose in making for Himself a people of many nations (Ruth is even an ancestor of the Christ, along with Rahab!). But ultimately, this book gives a picture of the Kinsman-Redeemer who saves Ruth and Naomi from sure destruction. It is a book with solid typology of Jesus, the great Kinsman-Redeemer who purchased for Himself a people foreign to Him, from a land and family of other gods, enemies to Him. It is the story of grace, the amazing grace of Jesus in bringing us into the family of God.

Our story begins, like most great stories, with tragedy and loss. The Lord is setting the stage in the darkest of times, and like a diamond shines the brightest when against the black velvet background, so does the illuminating story of God's gracious provision shine the most glorious when set against the blackness of despair and loss. But we must always trust, that even in the most difficult times, that God is in the shadows working out our good (Jer 29:11; Rom 8:28) and His glory. In the book of Ruth, without this loss of husband and of sons, the Messiah is never born. Without this loss of family and land, the Redeemer doesn't redeem. You see, in all of this loss and unfaithfulness of the family of Naomi, God is still working out His great redemption for all to see: He is our Greatest Redeemer. IN the words of the women of the Bethlehem at the end of the book, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel!" (4:14)

### 1. Where Do We Run in the Difficult Times?

- a. "in the days of the Judges"
  - i. cycle of idolatry, oppression, repentance, salvation
  - ii. bring to light idolatry, possibly preach on the idolatry of the heart
  - iii. this story must have taken place fairly early in the period of the judges for Boaz was the son of Rahab, who helped Joshua defeat Jericho (Matt 1:5)
- b. famine - oppression by nature, brought on by the Lord for discipline
  1. gives the reason for "sojourning" in Moab
- c. people: Elimelech (My God is King) "a certain man", Naomi (Pleasant), Machlon (Sickly),
  1. Chilion (Puny), Orpah (possibly Neck, or "to turn the neck"), Ruth (friend,
  2. companion)
- d. Bethlehem = "house of bread" drawn a complete relief against the famine
- e. Moab = descendents of Lot through an incestuous relationship of his daughter (Gen 19:31-38), oppressors of Israel, unfriendly after the Exodus (Judg. ), called the "people of Chemosh" an idol that required human sacrifice (see 1 Kgs 11:7,33;
- f. Trusting in anything other than God only brings disappointment and trouble
  - i. INTENDED to "sojourn"
  - ii. why "sojourning" is important, not "settling" in the land of Moab
    1. why did he need to sojourn in Moab and not somewhere in Canaan?
    2. Judg 1:29, Canaanites remained

3. Judg 3:12-30 -Eglon, king of Moab, was fat, indicating abundance of food and provisions.
- iii. When we run away from the Lord, because we don't trust His provision or His promise, we are bound for His discipline
  1. Where do you run when things get tough, money gets tight, food gets scarce, love seems distant, life seems hopeless?
  2. What are we trusting in to bring us satisfaction and joy in this life?
    - a. Money?
    - b. Food?
    - c. Job?
    - d. Reputation?
  3. These "idols" are all about us controlling our life, about power over our own future, and ultimately about NOT trusting the Lord
    - a. It's about trust: what are you and I trusting to make things OK?
    - b. Are we trying to control our future, our life, by making the appropriate "sacrifices" to these idols?
      - i. Career sacrifices of time, money, worry?
      - ii. Family sacrifices of perfectionism, education elitism, physical "advances", or buying stuff to make kids happy
      - iii. Sexually idolatrous sacrifices of pornography, shame, self-hatred
    - c. All these idols end up enslaving you!
      - i. You don't sin...sin does you
      - ii. In the end, sin oppresses and enslaves
        1. Oppressed by despair, misery, and hopelessness
        2. Though believers, trusting in the Lord, suffer, it doesn't go to despair, misery, or hopelessness because GOD is their hope, not whatever they lost
- iv. Elimelech and Naomi are in for some oppressive discipline, but God is near in it and working through it for His glory and Israel's good.

## 2. Running Goes from Bad to Worse: Naomi's husband dies

- a. Running to Idols Always Brings Suffering
  - i. Elimelech died before his time (note that his boys had not married, yet)
    1. That land of Moab, which had promised life in the midst of famine, did not deliver on its promise
    2. Idols never ultimately deliver on their promise
  - ii. One of the staple lessons from the period of the judges is that running away to idolatrous people for help always brings oppression and suffering
  - iii. God gives us what we want, our idols, and they oppress us, strangle our joy, demand our sacrifices, and never deliver on their promises
- b. Suffering and sorrow are the Lord's way of bringing us to complete dependence upon Him
  - i. Even when it's not due to sin
  - ii. Hebrews 5:8 – Jesus learned obedience through His suffering, though He never sinned (Heb 4:15)
- c. Died in a land that was not his inheritance
  - i. Elimelech died in a land that was not his, among a people who were not his people, and gods who were not his God
  - ii. The first blow struck to Naomi

### 3. From Worse to Sin: Naomi's sons SETTLE in Moab

- a. "dwelt" as opposed to "sojourn"
  - i. Sin has deceived them and grown into greater sin. The dabblers have been debilitated.
  - ii. The 2<sup>nd</sup> generation of those who wander is almost always deeper into sin
    - 1. Parenting, influence, instruction
    - 2. It is important, even imperative, that we cling to the LORD in the midst of the famines of our lives and do not trust in other things to bring us joy or satisfaction
- b. The Israelites, during the period of the Judges, never threw YHWH out. They merely included other gods alongside of Him
  - i. God redeemed them so that they would serve Him alone (Exodus 20; Deut 6:13-14)
  - ii. So, too, we don't usually *completely* reject the Lord, we just look to other things to bring us satisfaction, joy, and functional salvation
    - 1. "functional salvation" – the immediate deliverance of the moment
    - 2. Economic salvation (more stuff, better job, bigger savings, government)
    - 3. Reputational salvation ("she doesn't notice my effort" or "he never appreciates me")
    - 4. Familial salvation (divorce, affairs, schools?)
- c. Marry idolatrous women (who haven't claimed exclusive worship of YHWH)
  - i. Marriage to Moabites was not expressly forbidden (Deut 7:3)
  - ii. Moabite men, however, were not allowed into the worshipping congregation (Deut 23:3) for 10 generations

### 4. From Sin to Despair: Naomi's sons die

- a. Naomi's idol of family has been torn down by the LORD
  - i. she is left "empty" (v21) and bitter (v20) towards the LORD
    - 1. You see that her relationship with the LORD was contingent upon the idols of her family
    - 2. She loses faith in His goodness, grace, promise, and provision because her joy was ultimately in her family, not in the Lord
  - ii. But God has greater plans for her and Ruth that she doesn't see, yet
- b. No husband
- c. No sons
  - i. A parent losing a child is one of the most grievous losses imaginable
- d. No inheritance
  - i. "As the biography of Cain shows, when humanity fails at the altar, it fails in the field."  
~Bruce Waltke

Conclusion: Maybe you're here today and you are MAD at God. You may not have lost your family to death, but you've lost them to a lack of love, an insipid living death of agonizing rejection. You're mad because He hasn't given you a loving husband. He took your children away, or you no longer have a job. You're thinking, "God, I've trusted you and this is what I get? I've followed you and this is how you treat me?" Maybe it's not that obvious, but look beneath the surface faith that you express to others: is this how you really feel? My friends, the Lord is saying to us, "What do you expect from a sin-broke world? People will fail you. Money will fail you. These things don't have the power or the presence to keep their promises ultimately. Only I can do that. Only I am faithful ultimately and only I am ultimately good. Put your trust in me. I don't operate like an

idol, demanding that you perform before I save you. Humble yourself and trust in me. Every idol in your life, even the good things like your family, can never bring you ultimate joy or complete rest. Only I can do that, and it's completely by my grace and kindness. I have sent my Son to redeem you. I have given my own Son that you would know me and find your rest and your joy in my love. Trust in Him. I am your Savior. I am your redeemer. I have chosen you by grace and YOU ARE MINE! Trust me." The LADDER analogy (Gen 28; Jn 1:51)

### Jesus and the Gospel – the Bad News Precedes the Good News

Luke 5:32, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"

1 Tim 1:15, "It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance, 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.'"

Now, while we look at the devastation and despair that Naomi sits in at this moment of the story, let's not lose sight of the working of the LORD behind the scene. He has not forgotten her, though she cannot see His goodness right now. He has not forgotten His people. Though Ruth and Orpah were married by her boys foolishly and with great impatience (having "settled" in a land that the Lord had not given to them), God has intended great redemption through it. For, in the end, it will be a Moabite woman who marries a Judean half-Jew, who give birth to King David's grandfather. And in the lineage of King David, lies the greatest Hero of the story of all time: Jesus, the Messiah. You can trust the Lord so as NOT to run to anything or anyone else for your surety. Rest in His provision for you in Christ. You need nothing more than Jesus, no provision that He has not given to you. And the in midst of your suffering and your struggle, God is there.

And remember this: there is no sin so great that God cannot redeem it! You are not so far gone that Christ cannot reach you and bring you to joyous dancing in His loving salvation of you! God can even transform your sinful, selfish, foolish mistakes into His glorious, joyful, praiseworthy works of power and salvation!

Are you running from the Lord because He "hasn't held up His end of the bargain"? Are you trusting other things for your joy because God "hasn't done much for you"? Are you the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation believer who disregards the Lord because you don't have the things that you think you need to have in order to truly be happy? Are you feeling like Naomi, in a foreign land, having lost so much, but are now ready to return home? The beauty of this story is that God is not far away. He is near and working out His providential care for His people. It's time to turn around and come home. Jesus is more than enough for you. He is glorious behind that cloud of frowning providence, with all intentions to hold you securely in His loving embrace. Listen to this poem by William Cowper, written in 1774:

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs  
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense.  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own Interpreter,  
And He will make it plain

**Isaiah 49:7**

Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."