

Sunday Night Message

February 10, 2018

Sojourning in a Bad Place - Ruth 1

Series – *Ruth*

Text – Ruth 1:1 - 5

Introduction

The following is from Max Lucado's introduction to the Book of Ruth:

Here is a play with four characters.

Character number one is a prostitute.

Character number two is her son. By the time we meet him he is wealthy, powerful, and single. (We wonder if his bachelorhood has anything to do with being the son of a prostitute.)

Character number three is a foreign widow in a clannish culture. Everything about her is different. Speaks with an accent. Wears a different name. Eats different food. Has a different way. Her only friend is her mother-in-law who happens also to be a widow and happens to be:

Character number four. She is older than the first widow. Too old to have kids. When her two sons died and her husband dies, she is left alone. With only a foreigner as a friend.

Four people. Each rejected. Each alone. Four frazzled strings in the bottom of the knitting basket. Left untouched, awaiting the toss of the master-weaver. But he doesn't discard them.

He picks them up and weaves them together.

The result? The unmarried son of the prostitute meets the foreign widow who left her homeland to accompany her mother-in-law. The mother-in-law recognizes the bachelor as a relative and urges her daughter-in-law to make herself available. She does, the two marry, and the single bachelor has a wife—the young widow has a husband, the older widow has a grandson, and we have a story of providential romance.

Such is the story of Ruth.

You'll recognize her as the younger widow. The older is named Naomi. Boaz is the son of the prostitute. And the prostitute? Well, she isn't mentioned in this book. But she is mentioned in, of all places, the Gospel of Matthew.

Read the words in the parentheses of chapter one verse five. Go ahead and flip over there, I'll wait for you.

Did you see it? Salmon was the father of Boaz. (Boaz's mother was Rahab.)

Who would've thought? A harlot on Jesus' family tree.

But these kinds of things happen in the Bible. Aren't we glad they do? Aren't we glad the master-weaver has a place in his plan for each of us?¹

This book is one of only two in the Bible that are named for women.

This book is considered a literary masterpiece.

It is a story about a Redeemer – Boaz is the kinsman redeemer that restored the family of Naomi and Ruth back to its place of blessing.

¹ Lucado, M. (1996). *Life lessons from the inspired word of God: books of Ruth and Esther* (pp. 7–9). Dallas, TX: Word Pub.

A kinsman redeemer had to be a blood relative. He also had to have the purchase price for the redemption, and he had to be willing to pay it. Boaz is a wonderful picture of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus is a blood relative:

"Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;" - (Romans 1:3)

Jesus had the purchase price: his sinless blood

Jesus was willing to pay it:

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." - (Romans 5:8)

It is a story about Restoration – this family that lost everything in Moab is restored everything and more in the land of Judah.

It is a story of Romance – The Book of Ruth demonstrates the love that God has for us. Ruth, a poor Gentile girl from Moab becomes the wife of a wealthy Jew in Bethlehem. This is a picture of Christ's loves for us.

It is a story about Relationships – Ruth has a strong loyalty to her mother-in-law.

The Writer

The Bible does not record the name of the author, but it has commonly been attributed to Samuel, which is certainly a good possibility.

The Date of the Writing

This book was most likely written during the time of David (around 1000 BC - see Ruth 4:18 – 22) If it had been written during the reign of Solomon, it would have mentioned Solomon. This is one of the reasons why some have attributed the writing to Samuel, as he was alive in the early years of David. Though the writing of the Book may have been during the time of David, the time of the events in the Book were earlier. In Ruth 4:6, the writing refers to a custom that was part of the story, explaining that it was a "manner in former time:"

"Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel."
(Ruth 4:7)

The Background of the Story

The story takes place during the time of the Judges (1380 – 1050 BC – when Saul became King – David becomes king in 1010 BC):

"In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." - (Judges 21:25)

It was a time of great apostasy. Judgment comes during times of apostasy and immorality. It is apparent that the land of Israel was under the judgment of God, as they were experiencing a famine.

The story begins in Moab – Moab is the land that is east of the Dead Sea (see map). It belonged to the grandson (and son) of Lot . (see Genesis 19:30 – 38) Later, the Jews encountered opposition from Balak, king of Moab, through the prophet Balaam (Num. 22–25). For 18 years Moab oppressed Israel during the judges (3:12–30).²

"Moab is my washpot..." (Psalm 60:8; Psalm 108:9)

Moab is a picture of "the far country" (The Prodigal Son – Luke 15:11 - 32)

² MacArthur, J., Jr. (Ed.). (1997). *The MacArthur Study Bible* (electronic ed., p. 366). Nashville, TN: Word Pub.

The story concludes in the city of Bethlehem in the land of Judah. Bethlehem means “house of bread”; and Judah means “praise”.

This family left the land of praise and bread and sojourned in the cauldron of Moab.

The Characters of the Story

Elimelech – God is King

Naomi – Pleasant – J. Vernon McGee calls her “Mary Sunshine” – she requested a name change to Mara, which means “bitter” in v 20.

Mahlon – puny and sickly

Chilion – wasting away

Orpah – gazelle

Ruth – friendship – she definitely demonstrated that she was a friend to Naomi. She is only mentioned one other time in the Bible (Matthew 1:5)

*“A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” -
(Proverbs 18:24)*

Boaz – means speed

Note – see Deuteronomy 23:3 – 6 regarding these sons marrying Moabites.

Transition

Tonight, I want us to think about this matter of sojourning in Moab.

Bethlehem was a picture of the will of God, and Moab was a picture of the far country.

Because the people of God in Judah had fallen into idolatry, apostasy, and immorality, God sent judgment on the land by way of a famine.

The family of Elimelech demonstrated that they could not trust God to take care of them in the “house of bread” and land of praise, so they decided to pack up and move the family to God’s garbage dump – Moab. There were good jobs in Moab you see.

Moab is a picture of “the far country” – tell the story from Luke 15.

The Far Country is the place that we go to when we deliberately leave the place of God’s blessing – the will of God.

Though this family only intended to leave the will of God for a short time, they end up staying there for ten years; and in the far country they lose everything.

Dr. McGee says that the far country is God’s woodshed – God’s judgment falls in the far country. You don’t see any judgment when Naomi returns to the house of bread – because when she returns to Bethlehem she is returning to the perfect will of God. (The prodigal son didn’t receive any judgment when he returned home either.)

I Sojourning in Moab Is A Decision

When you leave the will of God and follow any other path you are making a deliberate decision to ignore God’s Word and His will.

II Sojourning in Moab Is A Declaration

When you leave the will of God you are declaring your independence. You are telling God that you can do it all by yourself.

Illustrate – Jack Hyles letting his little girl drive the car.

III Sojourning in Moab Is A Disaster (Ruth 1:21)

This family went out full – they left with nothing.

Note – God can still use the mistakes you made for his glory, as He did here in this story. Though the family lost everything in Moab, God gave them Ruth, which turned out to be a source of great blessing; but notice also that the true character and blessing of Ruth was not revealed until Naomi turned back to the place of God's will.

Conclusion

Sojourning is not a good thing – The word is rarely used in a positive way in the Scriptures. Abraham sojourned in Egypt and picked up Hagar; Lot sojourned in Sodom and lost his family; The children of Israel went down to sojourn in Egypt, and they ended up as slaves for hundreds of years.

We never intend to leave the will of God permanently – we just want to sojourn for a short while, but the consequences of our sojourning into sin are often permanent.

Don't leave the will of God even for a moment. Stay in Bethlehem-Judah – the place of God's provision, the place of God's protection, and the place of God's purpose. And, if you are in Moab now out of God's will – don't continue there. Get back to Bethlehem Judah.

