

The Call to Discipleship in Ruth

Alex Gailey / 12.10.23

- Last week we talked about how God's providence is the hope of the book of Ruth. It is pervasive, it maybe hidden at times, but it is continuous through all the highs and lows of our lives.
 - We ended with this idea of trusting in Him more than we are comfortable with.
 - The question we arrive at today with our study through Ruth is "What does it *look* like to trust God then? If we have answered the question, "Can I trust God in the bitterness of Life" then "***How can I trust Him?***"
 - And for this question we actually turn to Ruth instead of Naomi.
 - The book of Ruth is interesting, because though the story begins and ends with Naomi, it is still called Ruth.
 - The beginning of the book really focuses, as I have said, on Naomi and all that she faces as the story begins. BUT, it is equally important to locate Ruth in this as well.
 - Think about Ruth:
 - Ruth lost her husband.
 - Ruth was barren for 10 years. Would have been frowned upon and unfortunate.
 - Toeing a line between two cultures. And now that her husband had died, Mahlon, where is she to go?
 - Customary for her to return to her family of origin. That would have been acceptable.
 - But Ruth chooses to stay with Naomi.
 - Why does she choose to stay?
 - There is no doubt that friendship plays a huge role in this story. Friendship is not trivial. God chose to weave the Messiah into a family lineage held together by the friendship of two widows.
 - There is a whole other sermon here about how Friendship is in the very redemptive plans of God in the world.
 - But the narrative seems to suggest that there is more to this than just friendship and loyalty.
 - V .15 shows us that there is a greater decision that Ruth is making about her life than just following her mother in law back to her people. Ruth is making a spiritual decision.
 - In v. 15, The writer of Ruth is clearly wanting to demonstrate the contrast between Orpah and Ruth. Naomi calls her daughters-in-law back to live with their people, the Moabites, and the god that the Moabites worship. Naomi's last appeal to leave works as Orpah returns, and the author contrasts Orpah's response with Ruth.
 - Ruth stays and does not *just* say that I will worship your 'god.'" If she were to say something to this effect it would be clear that her point is "I will embrace your cultural traditions because I want to live with you. Instead, in v 18, she references Naomi's God and her God now, as "YHWH." This is significant. She is claiming to believe and to commit to Yahweh, who revealed himself in the OT as the one true God and has demonstrated loyal, faithful love to His people.
 - She is saying that she is leaving Moab for Bethlehem and clinging to Yahweh who will lead us into the promised land one day, who will provide for us, who will help us in our need, who loves us with an everlasting love. Who delivered His people from the Egyptians, from slavery. Who parted the Red Sea and led them out with a mighty hand and outstretched arm.
 - In Ruth's hopelessness, she believed in God and committed her life to follow Him.
 - Matter of Fact, Boaz in Chapter 2 acknowledges this decision that Ruth had made and the spiritual nature of it.
 - [Ruth 2:11-12](#) "But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. ***The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!***"
 - Boaz is identifying and calling attention to how Ruth is coming to God. Ruth is in faith saying "I want to follow Yahweh." coming to take refuge in His wings. This very language tells us all that we need to know about Ruth's decision. Ruth was believing and embracing the covenant that God made with his people for herself. In her eyes, the Kindness of God is big enough for a moabite.
 - I think that even her perspective here when she says what she says in [Ruth 1](#), catches Naomi off guard, because the implications of her words are very significant. If Ruth can do this, then Naomi's conflating Ethnic Identity and Religion is wrong. You see it in v. 15 where Naomi puts ethnicity and religion together. But Ruth breaks through this barrier.
 - You see this today as well. If you go across the world, ethnicity and religion run hand in hand. Even here in the US, I was talking to a beautiful sweet woman who was Jehovah's witness not long ago. And when I asked her why she was a JW she simply said that it was what her family had always been and done. To be in her family was to be JW. That is what Naomi is saying when she is referencing Orpah.
 - But Ruth was converting to be a worshipper and follower of Yahweh not because of her ethnicity(Not because of her life experience, cultural heritage, etc.), but because of her heart. This shows us that even here, before Jesus

came and welcomed every nation into fellowship/reconciliation through His sacrifice, that the nations were welcomed. Here God is using a Moabite Woman just like he used Rahab, for his purposes because they believe God and had somewhat of a heart circumcision, where they were set apart for Him on a spiritual heart level.

- Ruth was a Moabite. By v 16 she has clearly already accepted Yahweh as her God.
 - This shows us that gentiles non-Jews were always able to participate in the people of God. It is through Ruth's faith and loyalty that the line of faith thru Abraham is carried on through the Messiah Jesus and to us today. Gods people are a people of faith that cling to God above every other way in the world
- SO, Ruth **is** a child of Abraham in the spiritual sense, because she, by faith, took hold of the promises of God and **that** was credited to her as righteousness. Just as we become children of Abraham as we look to Christ, put on his coat of Righteousness, and journey through our lives following, treasuring, loving, walking with our God.
- At this point, I am sure you can see how correlated Ruth's decision in [Ruth 1](#) is to our call to follow Jesus in the world. I want to look now at (1) The Costs, (2) The Terms, and (3) The Hope that Ruth had as a way to understand what God calls us to.

The Costs: What does Ruth Consciously give up to follow God?

1. Cultural Familiarity :

- She was going to a new people. It was going to be hard. She did not know anybody. She did not understand their customs. She did not have a home and safe relationships outside of Naomi. She did not speak the language. She did not understand the customs and the people. She inevitable would not have been received by everyone there.

2. Material and Social Prosperity:

It would have been more prosperous for her to stay in Moab.

- Naomi attributes following Yehweh as leaving her "empty." To follow Yahweh was to lose the prosperity that marked the Moabites. That is why Naomi's family came to Moab.
- Ruth sees that it is still worth it to follow the Lord into Bethlehem. Even in the midst of the Lord dealing a bitter hand in life. To know Him is better than to have all the treasures in the world.
- This is what it ultimately looks like to know God through the revelation of Christ. This is what it means to be a Christian. To see that what we have just in knowing God is greater than anything this world offers.

3. Comfort

- There is even certain danger that a foreigner woman would have had. And she is a widow with no one to protect and care for her. She was going to have to make a way for herself because she did not have any family.

The Terms: What does discipleship look like for Ruth? Following Him with His People for Eternity

What I want to do as we look at the terms of Ruth's discipleship, is to look at a corresponding statement from Jesus about the call of discipleship on our lives, and, considering Ruth's Example, apply these statements to our lives and our call to follow Jesus.

1. Holding Fast: "Where you Go I will Go"

[Luke 14:33](#) "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

- In this statement, Ruth is saying that there is no greater priority for me than my proximity to you, Naomi. There is a sense here that we should understand Ruth's seeming commitment to Naomi as correlated to Ruth's commitment to the Lord.
- What Ruth is saying here is incredible. Proximity is more important than stability or anything else in her life.

2. Joining a New Family : "Your People will be my People"

[Mark 10:29-30](#)

- "Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life."
- Just like Ruth, as we follow Jesus, we are placed in a new family. Ruth was quite literally starting over with family. (1) because her husband had died. but (2) she was leaving her closest familial relationships and assuming a new family identity with God's people.
- There is a sense in which to follow Jesus is to be with His people. You cannot follow Jesus and reject his people. When you get God you get His church. You get a new family that you belong to, have value in, are commissioned to love and be loved.
- The idea of "I just want to love Jesus and do my own thing" is foreign to NT biblical christianity.
- I would actually say this: the work and toil and struggle that relationships in the local church can often be and feel like is a large percentage of what it looks like for you to continue to follow Him.
 - Ruth's claim here of "You people will be my people" is objective. it is not subjective in nature. What I mean is that her commitment to Naomi's people is not based upon how she feels about it.
 - What Ruth is saying is that for me to faithfully follow Jesus, i will be faithful to these people.
- What this means:

- Church relationships are important
- Your spiritual life will be hindered if you do not participate in this community because, in a sense, it is such a large part of what discipleship looks like in your life
- It is to be treated as family.
 - Think about your familial relationships. They are messy. They make you the maddest. They have a special place in your heart.

3. For Eternity :“Where you die I will die”

- Ruth knew that this commitment to Yahweh her God was bigger than her life. She was committing to something beyond the grave. She was willing to follow Naomi and her God to the grave and beyond
[John 12:25](#) “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”
- This is at the heartbeat behind Ruth’s devotion to God.

Which brings me to this question. Why would Ruth want to make this kind of commitment to the Lord?

Why would Ruth want to do this:

There was Hope for a Eternal Life.

This is the immigrant story. Hope for a better life. Our country is built off of the immigrant spirit.

Ruth was an immigrant. What she was doing in going to Bethlehem is very similar to what many people do when they come to America, and specifically, Gainesville. Why do Immigrants come? They come in hopes of a better life. This should fill us with compassion for those who come here illegally because they come seeking answers to some of life biggest questions and to experience flourishing, prosperity, etc.

- Some of the Promises that people seek out when immigrating to America:
 - Economic Opportunities: jobs and the chance to improve their standard of living, escape poverty, or pursue entrepreneurial ventures.
 - Political and Religious Freedom: refuge in the United States to escape political persecution or religious discrimination in their home countries.
 - Social Mobility: The idea of the "American Dream" has attracted countless immigrants who believe in the possibility of upward social mobility. They hope to provide better opportunities and a higher quality of life for themselves and their families.
 - Education, Violence, Family, Quality of Life
- Ruth devoted her life to God not because of the prosperity she would experience now - the better life that was ahead for her. If anything, we see her come to grips with the fact that she would not experience such things in this life. Instead, she devotes her life to God because of the hope of eternal life.
- Ruth sees God as a refuge, sees his sovereign power working for her good and his glory. She is willing to entrust her *NOW* and her *THEN* to God because of who He is.

Conclusion: How Then Shall We Live?

1. Live Boldly

- Just as Ruth did, there is a confidence that knowing YHWH should give us and should lead us to a life of boldness. To live boldly.
 - [Ephesians 3:12](#) “in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.”
 - [Hebrews 4:15–16](#) “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”
- Ruth confidently journeyed to Bethlehem because she was so convinced at who God was.
- What do I mean when I say “Live Boldly?”
 - **That YHWH has given us precious promises that we can build our lives on.**
 - There is a boldness that says, “I know who I am because I know what He has done, and I am going to live all of my days out of this confidence.”

2. Risk Much

- Ruth risked a lot, which we will see next week, by coming and doing some of the things that she does when she arrives in Bethlehem. She put herself in position to be sexually assaulted, to live destitute, to be ostracized.
- But she was confident in her God. She risked much for the sake of following Him in the world.

3. Hope Expectantly

- And she did all this because she hoped expectantly in Him.
- God wants us to fix our eyes on the eternal hope we have in Him.

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Alex Gailey / General

Ruth

[Ruth 1:15–18](#) “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.”

- [Ruth 2:11–12](#) “But Boaz answered her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. *The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!*””

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