

Ruth-baptism

Good morning and thank you for joining us. Would you please turn in your Bibles to the book of Ruth?

If you're not familiar with the book of Ruth, it's kinda like the Hebrew version of Cinderella.

Ruth is a young woman who escapes a life of hardship and poverty by meeting a wealthy prince named Boaz. Prince Boaz sweeps Ruth off her feet, and makes her his bride. It's an incredible love story.

Of course, the difference between Ruth and Cinderella is that the book of Ruth is no fairytale - no pumpkins turn into carriages.

This is a real-life story set among the hardships of daily circumstances. And the miraculous occurrences that unfold are orchestrated not by a fairy godmother, but by God our heavenly Father.

"Ruth" is unique as it is one of only two biblical books named after a woman. The other book is of course Esther.

The book of Esther is the story of a Hebrew woman living in a Gentile land, while Ruth is the story of a Gentile woman living in the land of the Hebrews. And both stories are prophetic of the times in which we live...

Until 1948, for 2000 years the Jews had been displaced from their homeland. Israel as a nation ceased to exist as the Hebrews had been scattered among the Gentiles. And the book of Esther foreshadows God's providential protection and preservation of Israel over the last two millenniums.

Ruth on the other hand foreshadows God's plan for the Gentiles. Though Ruth is an outsider, a non-Hebrew, she receives the blessings by God by marrying into an Israeli family.

The Bible tells us as Christians, we too have married into God's family. How? Because we've fallen in love with Jesus! He has swept us off our feet and now we're part of His family. In Christ we've gained an inheritance with God's people.

It's interesting that Ruth is the 8th book of the Hebrew canon of Scripture.

Let's recount the books we've covered so far...

SHOW PIC

#1 Genesis is the book of beginnings.

#2 Exodus speaks of redemption.

#3 Leviticus teaches us to worship.

#4 Numbers teaches us how to walk with God.

#5 Deuteronomy stresses the importance of obedience.

#6 Joshua is all about our victory over our enemies.

#7 Judges describes what happens when we fail to fully follow.

9 1ST Samuel, describes the establishment of the Kingdom.

Now think of these 9 books as an outline of Hebrew history –

#1 beginnings,

#2 redemption,

#3 worship,

#4 walk,

#5 obedience,

#6 victory,

#7 failure,

#9 ultimately God's kingdom.

But in between Israel's failure - and the coming of God's kingdom – God will call out a Gentile bride for His Son Jesus... thus, the book of Ruth. What a cool picture! **CLOSE PIC**

This is why I believe the Holy Spirit not only inspired the contents of the books of the Bible, but also their arrangement and preservation.

Ruth is also part of the Hebrew "Meggilah" - a collection of 5 books that were read at the different Hebrew feasts. The book of Ruth was always read at the feast of Pentecost.

Later, in Acts chapter 2 we see that Pentecost becomes the birthday of the Church. How amazing is that!

Now as we go through this short book, 85 verses in total, we'll see numerous ways the story of Ruth parallels our relationship with Jesus.

The book of Ruth takes place during the dark days of the Judges, where for several hundred years the Israelites were not ruled by kings, but by periodic deliverers whom God raised up when the nation sought Him again.

Most scholars believe that Samuel is the author of Ruth, although some Jewish Rabbi's believe the author is Naomi.

The title of this mornings message is RETURNING HOME

Let's pray

1 Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. 2 The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there. The book of Ruth is a

romance – a real story about real people - but it's also a deeper revelation of spiritual truth. It's also an allegory, a symbol.

In fact, the Holy Spirit goes as far as to even arrange the names of the people to make His point.

SHOW PIC

“Elimelech” means “my God is king”

“Naomi” means “pleasant”

“Bethlehem” means “house of bread”

“Judah” means “praise”

“Ephratha” means “fruitful”

Now check this out... You've got a man named God is king with a pleasant wife living in prosperity, in the house of bread. He's praising God and bearing fruit. Things are going great! **CLOSE**

PIC

That is until a famine puts Elimelech's faith to the test - and rather than stay put in Bethlehem, in the promised land, he decides to leave the promised land and goes to country of Moab.

Let's read verse 2 again.

2 The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there.

Bethlehem means, “House of Bread,” and it's the city where Jesus, the Bread of Life would be born centuries later. **John 6:35**
And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to

Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

Notice also that Elimelech's family not only resided in the city of Bethlehem, but in the tribe of Judah. Judah means, "Praise."

This connection between Bethlehem and Judah is not without meaning, for there is an unbreakable connection between the House of Bread—which is the Word of God—and Praise—which ascends toward God.

David, declared this in **Psalm 119:71 My lips shall utter praise, For You teach me Your statutes.**

See when we are learning about the ways of God and the character of God through the Word of God, our natural response will be to give praise to God.

If you're having a difficult time yourself praising and worshiping, if you feel far removed from Judah, the Place of Praise—it could be because you're not dwelling in Bethlehem, the House of Bread, the Word of God. Once you're dwelling in the Word, you can't help but become a worshiper.

Now we can't miss the last part of verse 2, which says...

And they went to the country of Moab and remained there.

To leave Bethlehem and go to Moab, the family had to hike through the desolate Jericho pass, through the Judean wilderness near the Dead Sea, going across the Jordan River, into the land of Moab. This was a definite departure from the Promised Land of Israel, and a return towards the wilderness from which God had delivered Israel hundreds of years before. These were clearly steps in the wrong direction.

So, when famine came, Elimelech decided that instead of remaining in the promised land that God miraculously gave, they would make a move to the land of Moab, where they heard there was plenty of food and an abundance of water. It seemed to be the chance of a lifetime. In reality, however, it was a death march toward the grave.

In Psalm 108, God refers to Moab as His washpot. A literal translation would be, “Moab is My toilet bowl.” So, in taking a trip to Moab, Elimelech and Naomi were saying, “It’s getting tough here in the House of Bread, the Place of Praise. Let’s go swim in the toilet for awhile.”

We laugh but we’ve all faced this temptation haven’t we? Sometimes we wonder “Where’s the Lord? Times are tough!” And the temptation for us can be to not be so focused on God anymore, and head to our own Moab’s because Satan is whispering to us it’ll be easier if we let our foot off the gas a little when it comes to God. And we can think “Don’t worry, Lord, I’m not moving out permanently. I’m just taking a little break from the intensity of the House of Bread and the Place of Praise. I’ll be back.”

Moab is like a black hole—easy to get sucked in, but extremely difficult to get back out, as we see with this family...

3-5

3 Then Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons.

4 Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years. 5 Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband. “Mahlon”

means “sickness”, and “Chilion” means “wasting”. It’s likely both of Naomi’s sons had physical problems from birth.

So not only did this family leave the promised land, we see Naomi’s 2 Hebrew sons marry Moabite women which was also a violation of God’s command. God instructed the Israelites to not marry among the pagan nations surrounding them.

So now there are three childless widows — Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth.

To be a childless widow was to be among the lowest, most disadvantaged classes in the ancient world. There was no one to support you, and you had to live on the generosity of strangers. Naomi had no family in Moab, and no one else to help her.

A portrait is being painted for us in these 5 verses that describes an utterly desperate situation.

6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread. While Naomi was in Moab, in misery and in rebellion, she heard reports of how God was blessing Bethlehem.

Those who endured the hardships in Bethlehem were blessed.

And it’s a reminder to us **Isaiah 40:31 But those who wait on the LORD**

Shall renew their strength;

They shall mount up with wings like eagles,

They shall run and not be weary,

They shall walk and not faint.

7 Therefore she went out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return

to the land of Judah. Notice Naomi was a woman of action-she decided to go back to Bethlehem and actually did it.

Lots of folks hear of the wonderful things God is doing in the lives of others, and wish they could experience the same, but refuse to set out in faith and receive it.

Naomi could have stayed in Moab all her life, wishing things were different, but she stepped out in faith, made the hard choices, and returned to where God had called her.

Wondering 'what if I had stepped out in faith' can be a torturous place to be. I would encourage you to obey God and leave all the consequences to Him.

Now verse 7 tells us Naomi's 2 daughters in law from Moab go with her on her trek back to Bethlehem...

8 And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. Naomi reasons with Orpah and Ruth not to go to Bethlehem because they had stronger family ties in Moab than they did with Naomi, so it made sense for them to stay in Moab instead of going to Israel with her. She was just their mother in law, they had closer family nearby.

9 The LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." Pause here...Naomi described marriage as a place of rest: God intends that each marriage be a place and source, of rest, peace, and refreshment in life.

...9 So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. Both daughters-in-law had become so fond of Naomi they cried over the thought of their separation. They didn't want her to leave.

Ladies I'm betting you don't have this close a bond with your mom-in law! Clearly this was special.

10-13

10 And they said to her, “Surely we will return with you to your people.”

11 But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?”

12 Turn back, my daughters, go—for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, 13 would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me!”

Naomi tells Orpah and Ruth to stay behind, because they will have a much better opportunity to remarry if they stay in Moab where they are from.

Now notice the last part of verse 13 where Naomi declares

the hand of the LORD has gone out against me:

Despite this feeling, Naomi is going back to the land of Israel — and going back to where God called her. Though she felt that the hand of the LORD had gone against her because of her horrific circumstances, she willingly went back to where God had called her.

Folks when we’re struggling in life, the answer is always to draw closer to God, not go further from Him.

14 Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

15 And she said, “Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” Both Orpah and Ruth loved Naomi, and both of these widows were

surely anxious about the future. But a choice had to be made, and Orpah chose to stay in Moab, while Ruth clung to Naomi.

There comes a place in our walk with God where it comes down to doing. Ruth and Orpah both felt the same feelings, but Ruth did differently than Orpah.

16 But Ruth said:

“Entreat me not to leave you,

Or to turn back from following after you;

For wherever you go, I will go;

And wherever you lodge, I will lodge;

Your people shall be my people,

And your God, my God. For Ruth, this was more than just a change of address. Ruth was willing to forsake the Moabite gods she grew up with and embrace the God of Israel.

Ruth was deciding to follow the LORD. This Gentile woman, once far from God, had drawn near to Him.

And your God, [will be] my God meant that Naomi’s relationship with God made an impact on Ruth. This is important for us to consider because Naomi did not have an easy life. She had been widowed, had lost both her sons. Yet she still honored and loved the LORD and clearly it impacted Ruth.

In times of utmost difficulty and hardship, our trust in God, and turning towards Him in tough times, will often be the thing that draws others to the LORD.

Ruth continues...

17 Where you die, I will die,

And there will I be buried.

The LORD do so to me, and more also,

If anything but death parts you and me.” Ruth seals her covenant with God, and Naomi, and says the only thing that will separate me from you is death.

And how does Naomi respond??

18 When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her. We get the definite sense of frustration here from Naomi with Ruth don't we?

19 Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them; and the women said, “Is this Naomi?” Evidently, Naomi's 10 years in Moab – away from God – had taken its toll on her appearance. She'd aged. She was wrinkled and weathered. Her former friends barely recognize her. “Is this Naomi?”

Have you ever noticed thirty-year-old's that looked 50? Sin takes a heavy toll. We all wrinkle, but the life we live positions our wrinkles into a smile or a scowl.

20-21

20 But she said to them, “Do not call me Naomi;[fn] call me Mara,[fn] for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

21 I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?”

The name Naomi means “pleasant,” the name Mara means “bitter.” Naomi used this to tell the people of Bethlehem that her time away from Israel, her time away from the God of Israel, had not been pleasant — it was bitter.

This is the reason to backslide away from the Lord is so ridiculous. When we leave Bethlehem-Judah—the House of Bread, the Place of Praise—and wander off to sojourn in Moab, we will always leave full, but come back empty. Sin always brings sorrow and sadness. **Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.**

22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. Now they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest. Because Naomi returned, God is going to use her and bless her in ways she could never imagine.

But it first starts off with Naomi coming back to God where God called her.

This morning we're seeing something similar, as we have some folks who desire to be baptized, to rededicate their lives to God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The idea of a baptized believer is that they've gone public in declaring that they are committed to Jesus Christ as their Lord and savior.

To be clear Baptism isn't a requirement of salvation, but being baptized demonstrates obedience, it shows allegiance, baptism shows our love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Baptism is an outward sign of inward faith, signifying that you've buried all the guilt, all the sin, all the shame of the old life prior to Christ.

What do you do with a dead body—you bury it. And that's why we immerse the body during a baptism. The immersion under water symbolizes the death of our old sinful nature.

And then coming up out of the water, you rise in the newness of life in Jesus as you identify with His resurrection.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Do you need to be made new in Christ this morning?